

**Thursday  
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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Thursday 17 January 2019**

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# House of Commons

*Thursday 17 January 2019*

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

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### **Leaving the EU: No Deal**

1. **Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): How much his Department has spent on preparations for the UK leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement. [908618]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley):** I bring apologies from the Secretary of State this morning. He will not be attending these proceedings because he is attending vital cross-party meetings in Downing Street—[*Interruption.*] I am sure that Members across the House will understand that those meetings are vitally important at this stage.

In answer to Question 1, in the 2017 autumn Budget, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs was allocated an additional £310 million to support its work on EU exit preparations in this financial year, 2018-19, with a further £10 million being repurposed from existing budgets. DEFRA is using that additional funding to prepare for and deliver its ambitious programme of EU exit activities in readiness for all scenarios, including preparations for the UK leaving the EU without a withdrawal agreement, as is the duty of a responsible Government.

**Mr Speaker:** Further to what the Minister has just said, I advise the House that the Secretary of State, in keeping with his usual courtesy, informed me last night of his intended absence. I shall greatly miss him, but we look forward to seeing the fellow again before too long.

**Mr Hollobone:** Well, I am not sure that the House does understand the Secretary of State's absence, Mr Speaker. DEFRA questions are only half an hour long; surely those meetings could have been delayed for 30 minutes. My question to the Minister is: will DEFRA be 100% ready in the event of us having to leave with no deal?

**David Rutley:** The Department is working flat out to prepare for no deal. As the House knows, we are bringing on the onshoring of environment, agriculture and fisheries policies, involving 55 major projects and

120 statutory instruments. We will be recruiting around 2,700 officials to ensure that we are well prepared in a no-deal scenario.

**Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): We know that householders are stockpiling food and that businesses are spending money that they can ill afford, as is the Minister's Department, on a no-deal Brexit that would harm the food industry, the farming industry and of course the chemicals industry, which his Department regulates. In a phone call on Tuesday night, the Chancellor said that a no-deal Brexit would be ruled out and off the table by the end of next week. Does the Minister agree?

**David Rutley:** The best way to avoid no deal is by agreeing a deal, and that is why we are working constructively—[*Interruption.*] The House made its views clear on the Government's proposed deal and we are now working constructively with major parties across the House to get a deal in place. I am just disappointed that the Leader of the Opposition did not turn up to do that, and that he has not even agreed with the advice of the former Prime Minister, Tony Blair.

**Dame Caroline Spelman** (Meriden) (Con): The Secretary of State is sorely missed this morning. I wanted to commend him for his barnstorming speech last night. Hon. Members and others like myself who represent farming constituencies all received letters before Tuesday's vote from the farming organisations—the National Farmers Union, the Country Land and Business Association and the Tenant Farmers Association—saying that “above all” they wanted to see a no-deal Brexit ruled out. Given the overwhelming majority in Parliament for that, will the Minister give us some reassurance that the Government will support the view of the majority?

**David Rutley:** Well, I will do my very best to make up for the absence of our esteemed Secretary of State, who did indeed put in a fantastic performance yesterday. I can assure my right hon. Friend that we are working closely with the NFU and the farming sector in seeking to find that deal. We know that many farmers voted to leave, but few wanted to leave with no deal. That is why we are working incredibly hard to ensure that we get that deal into place.

15. [908635] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): Of the six parties in the House, the Prime Minister met three last night. Labour Front Benchers are not meeting her, so I suppose we can work out who the Secretary of State must be meeting today. He told me last week that he thinks the other European countries will be looking enviously at the Prime Minister's deal. Is that still the Government's position, and if so, are they not concerned that that would threaten the entire European project, because everyone would want the glorious new future that Britain is going to have?

**David Rutley:** The EU has its own challenges, which it is no doubt seeking to take forward. We are clear that we want to take a deal forward. We felt that the deal was a good deal, but Parliament has had its say. We are now responding constructively in these negotiations, and I

am grateful to the Scottish National party for taking that forward. I just wish that Labour would take a similar stance.

**Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): Last Saturday I had the honour of attending the plough service to commemorate the 100th anniversary of Staffordshire NFU, an extremely good organisation representing farmers throughout my constituency. At that service, a number of members came up to me and expressed how concerned they are about any prospect of no deal. Will my hon. Friend set out what the consequences would be for my farmers if there were, indeed, no deal?

**David Rutley:** The Secretary of State has made it clear in his contributions here and at the recent farming conference in Oxford that there could be significant disruption for the farming sector, which is why we are working very hard to make sure that Staffordshire NFU members and farmers across the country get the best possible protection. I meet the NFU every week to listen to and work through its concerns and, of course, the No. 1 priority is to make sure we get this deal. Again, I am grateful to those parties that have sought to become part of that process and dialogue.

14. [908634] **Dr Philippa Whitford** (Central Ayrshire) (SNP): Without a deal, Scottish farmers could soon face tariffs of 30% on dairy products and 46% on lamb, which would make them uncompetitive and would damage Scotland's food and drink industry. I would have liked to ask the perhaps future Prime Minister to rule out a no deal, but will the Minister do so?

**David Rutley:** I can assure the hon. Lady that I am not the future Prime Minister. That will not happen. She does not have to worry about that. [*Interruption.*] Well, I am certainly not. I am merely filling in for him while he is not here.

The hon. Lady asks an important question, which other hon. Members have also asked. We want to make sure that protections are in place, and we want to get this deal in place, because a no deal would potentially have a disruptive effect on farmers. We will work together closely to ensure a deal happens.

**Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): It is absolutely right that the Government prepare for all eventualities, including no deal, but does my hon. Friend share my sense of incredulity at hearing those who spent most of this week attacking the deal on the table, and attacking every other deal the EU has ever done, now complaining about the prospect of there not being one?

**David Rutley:** That is the case we made. The Government and many Conservative Members felt that the deal was a good deal, but clearly we now need to respond to what the House has said, and we are doing that.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister is a well-intentioned fella. Will he take a strong message from those of us who care about DEFRA, the environment and our farming sector that we do care, that we are willing to help get this right and that we are willing to do so on an all-party basis, as long as we can bury this nonsense of a no-deal Brexit?

**David Rutley:** The hon. Gentleman is also a good fella with good intentions, and I share his concerns about no deal. What we need to do now is to find a deal that the House can unite behind. The Secretary of State would say that if he were in his place, and it is important that the Leader of the Opposition now joins that process.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): I, too, am sorry not to see the Secretary of State in his place at the Dispatch Box after what was quite the bravura audition yesterday. Someone once said:

“The day after we vote to leave, we hold all the cards and we can choose the path we want.”

It seems that those cards and paths have been pretty expensive so far. Can the Minister tell us whether his Department's largesse has sorted out the export health certificate system, which of course relies on a single spreadsheet? Has he made export agreements with 154 countries to replace the EU agreements? Lastly, has this been the worst poker hand ever played?

**David Rutley:** Lots of questions there, but I can assure the hon. Lady that I am even more saddened not to see the Secretary of State here because I am having to answer all his questions on this subject.

On the hon. Lady's substantive point, we are working on the export health certificate process, and we are working on the other trade agreements. My hon. Friend the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, the farming Minister, is working on those issues as well. Each of those steps is being dealt with.

#### Animal Cruelty Crimes: Sentencing

2. **Stephen Timms** (East Ham) (Lab): When he plans to bring forward legislative proposals for maximum five-year sentences for the most serious crimes of animal cruelty. [908619]

11. **Angela Smith** (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): When he plans to bring forward legislative proposals for maximum five-year sentences for the most serious crimes of animal cruelty. [908629]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley):** The Government will introduce the necessary legislation to increase the maximum penalty for animal cruelty from six months' imprisonment to five years' imprisonment as soon as parliamentary time allows.

**Stephen Timms:** I am grateful for that answer, but the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs called for five-year maximum sentences in 2016, Ministers promised that in 2017 and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food said last June that it would be in place by the end of March this year, but there is still no sign of it happening. Why has there been such a long delay? Can the Under-Secretary give us a firm, reliable timeframe for when this much-needed change will actually take place?

**David Rutley:** I can tell the right hon. Gentleman that we are moving as fast as we can on this. We need to find the right legislative vehicle, but it is our intention to take this forward, as I told yesterday's Public Bill Committee on Finn's law.

**Angela Smith:** Can the Minister confirm whether any DEFRA Minister, including the Secretary of State, has had any discussions on five-year sentencing with either the Leader of the House or the Chief Whip in order to secure parliamentary time for this measure?

**David Rutley:** A very active dialogue is going on to determine the right vehicle, involving the usual channels within the House; those conversations have taken place.

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Can the Government get out of crawler gear and get into first or second, because we have to bring about this five-year sentencing? At the moment, someone who pleads guilty to a horrendous crime of animal cruelty gets a maximum of four months, because they get an automatic 30% reduction. It is crazy that huge amounts of animal welfare abuse happens and we have such short sentences. So please get on with it.

**David Rutley:** We will get on with it. We take animal welfare seriously; we have introduced a third-party ban on sales of puppies and kittens, and we are working on this very actively.

#### Leaving the EU: Care and Protection of Animals

3. **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What steps his Department plans to take to maintain standards on the care and protection of animals after the UK leaves the EU. [908620]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley):** The Government have made it clear that our exit from the EU will not lead to a lowering of our high animal welfare standards. Our regulatory system will offer the same level of assurance of animal welfare following our departure from the EU as it does now. The European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 will ensure that existing EU standards are maintained once we leave the EU, and we are actively exploring options for strengthening the UK system in the future.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** How will the Minister crack down on puppy farming?

**David Rutley:** The measure we announced on 23 December will make sure that there is a ban on third-party sales of puppies and kittens, which will mean that unscrupulous breeders and puppy farmers will no longer be able to hide. This is an important piece of legislation and it shows that we have got into a much higher gear on animal welfare legislation.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The International Trade Secretary has been touring the world negotiating trade deals in the past few months. Will the Minister say precisely what involvement DEFRA Ministers have in ensuring that animal welfare issues are contained in any agreement that that Secretary of State is concluding?

**David Rutley:** DEFRA leads on agricultural issues in these trade deals and there is a clear intention that our standards will not be watered down.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): Can the Minister lay to rest some of the vile scare stories that have been emanating in the past few months about how, in certain circumstances in which we may leave the EU, there will be a diminution in animal care standards? Can he confirm that whatever the circumstances after 29 March we will retain the highest possible standards?

**David Rutley:** The hon. Gentleman makes a good point, and I assure him that we will make sure the existing regulations come over and we will maintain those high standards.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): Inside or outside the EU, Boohoo, the online retailer, has been found to be advertising clothing as “faux fur” when in fact it has contained animal fur, including rabbit. So may I ask what checks are in place and what action the Government are prepared to take to ensure that there is no animal cruelty in the clothing industry?

**David Rutley:** The hon. Lady raises an important point. This is a clear trading standards issue and, as I understand it, action has been taken, as it should be in those circumstances.

#### Serious and Organised Waste Crime

4. **Mr Simon Clarke** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Con): What steps he is taking to tackle serious and organised waste crime. [908621]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** Last year, the Department commissioned a review of serious and organised crime in the waste sector. Recommendations from that review informed our strategic approach, which we set out in the resources and waste strategy. That includes plans to prevent, detect and deter all forms of waste crime, including with the creation of a joint unit for tackling waste crime and a dedicated disruption team.

**Mr Clarke:** I thank the Minister for that answer. We also face the problem of casual fly-tipping. Residents in Guisborough have been appalled by some of the examples we have seen on Wilton Lane and on the moor road. Will she set out what the Government are doing to address that, too?

**Dr Coffey:** Fly-tipping is a genuine blight on local communities. Additional powers have been given to councils, and from this month local authorities now have the power to issue penalties of up to £400 to householders who have ignored their duty of care and whose waste is fly-tipped. The message is very clear: when somebody comes to offer to take your waste away, check online and check their licence to see that they are legitimate, because otherwise you could be getting a fine from your council.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Following on from that question, rural crime is a major issue, particularly in the villages around Warwick and Leamington. Across the whole of Warwickshire it is costing about £650,000 to clear up fly-tipping, but

wider crime is also an issue. What does the Minister recommend I should be saying to farmers in my communities?

**Dr Coffey:** It is important that evidence is gathered to try to tackle the issue. I know that farmers are taking preventive action to try to stop people entering their areas illegally. It matters that we also work together on other issues of rural crime, such as hare coursing, and other significant routes used by serious and organised crime to try to exploit the countryside.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** Does the Minister intend to liaise with the Ministry of Justice on increasing the ability of the judiciary to make examples of those who flout the law? The fines are less than the financial advantage of waste disposal, which does not add up.

**Dr Coffey:** As I have said, we have set out our intentions in our resources and waste strategy. Fining is one approach and different types of sentences is another. That is the kind of work we are doing with the MOJ and, of course, the Home Office.

#### Leaving the EU: Farming Policy

5. **Craig Tracey (North Warwickshire) (Con):** What plans he has for farming policy after the UK leaves the EU. [908623]

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** The Agriculture Bill is a central part of the Government's programme of legislation to deliver a smooth departure from the European Union. It is the most significant reform of agricultural legislation in more than 70 years. The Bill creates powers to build a new environmental land management system; to incentivise higher animal welfare; to support technology and investment on farms; and to improve fairness and transparency in the supply chain.

**Craig Tracey:** I welcome the Agriculture Bill, because for nearly 50 years our farmers have been tied to a fundamentally flawed common agricultural policy where payments are skewed towards the largest landowners. Can the Minister provide further detail on the public goods that will be rewarded under the new scheme?

**George Eustice:** I thank my hon. Friend for the sterling work he did on the Agriculture Bill Committee and as a member of the DEFRA team until recently. As he says, we are completely changing the focus of our agricultural support for the delivery of public goods. That could include improving habitats, water quality and soil health, promoting biodiversity, advancing animal welfare and allowing public access.

**Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab):** The Minister will have received the letter sent to every single Member of this House from all of the farming leaders asking the Government to take no deal off the table. That would also unlock meaningful cross-party talks on how we get out of this total mess, so why will the Government not do that?

**George Eustice:** The way to get no deal off the table is to agree a deal and to engage in a discussion about it. I simply say to hon. Members: what kind of deal do they think they would get from the European Union if they are unwilling to countenance no deal? It is nonsense.

**David Duguid (Banff and Buchan) (Con):** I welcome this Government's commitment to, and Ministers' earlier responses on, the issues of public goods, the environment and animal welfare. Will my hon. Friend confirm that future agricultural policy will also include a commitment to high-quality food and food safety?

**George Eustice:** My hon. Friend makes a very important point. The Government have been absolutely clear that we will not compromise our animal welfare and food safety standards in pursuit of a trade deal.

**Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD):** Hill farmers are essential to our landscape, food production, biodiversity and water management. Does the Minister realise that 91% of hill farm incomes come from the basic payment scheme, which his Government are planning to phase out over the next seven years? Will he therefore commit to a bespoke scheme or set of schemes to support upland farmers and other upland businesses?

**George Eustice:** Upland farmers, including sheep farmers, will be able to readily access many of the public goods listed in clause 1 of the Bill. Organisations such as the Uplands Alliance are very excited about the potential for a new scheme based on payment for the delivery of public goods.

**Ben Lake (Ceredigion) (PC):** The Bew review is looking into the mechanisms for allocating farm funding across the UK post Brexit, but do the Government intend to launch reviews of the legislative and governance frameworks that may be necessary to maintain a level playing field for Welsh farmers in the UK's future internal market?

**George Eustice:** There are two ways in which a UK framework can be delivered. First, it is important to recognise that agriculture is devolved. Although the Welsh Government have asked us to add a schedule to our Bill, which is currently going through Parliament, they also intend to introduce their own future legislation. There are provisions relating to compliance with WTO rules, and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy will also provide an approach to state aid rules.

**Dr David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op):** On Tuesday, I met members of the Irish Farmers' Association—there were other things going on as well as the debate—and they made it very clear to me how vital it is to get a long-term customs arrangement in place as soon as possible. They say that that view is shared by farmers in Northern Ireland. What is the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs doing to make sure that that happens?

**George Eustice:** As was made clear at the very start of this session, the Secretary of State is, as we speak, in dialogue with Members of this House to establish a consensus, so that we can indeed have a customs arrangement after March.

**Dr Drew:** The Minister has been quite sanguine in saying that he now supports the Norway option. Is that view shared by the rest of the DEFRA team?

**George Eustice:** The DEFRA team, which includes me, supported the Prime Minister's deal, because the deal that she brought forward was the way to most

closely deliver the outcome of the referendum. That deal has now been rejected by this House, so of course we must consider all alternatives.

### Protection of Pollinators

7. **Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): What steps he is taking to protect bees and other pollinators. [908625]

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** Protecting pollinators and the habitat is a priority for this Government, and our 2017 review of England's 10-year national pollinator strategy highlights some positive progress. We have also simplified countryside stewardship and introduced new messages to help farmers put pollinators back into our landscapes through our pollinator package.

**Matt Warman:** Three thousand sugar beet farmers will drill their crop this year, 100 of whom will be in my constituency. Many of them rely on neonicotinoids, but it is vital that we rely on scientific evidence. Eleven EU countries have granted emergency authorisation. What are the Government doing to support sugar beet farmers?

**George Eustice:** I am sympathetic to the issue raised by sugar beet growers. Of course, sugar beet is a non-flowering crop, and it does have a particular issue with the peach potato aphid and the virus that goes with it. The growers did put forward an emergency application. The advice from our expert committee on pesticides was that it did not satisfy the criteria, but we invited them to make a subsequent application.

### Foxhunting

8. **Christian Matheson** (City of Chester) (Lab): How many reports he has received of foxes being killed by hunts in England in 2018. [908626]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** The Department has not received any reports of foxes being killed in illegal ways, but I would not expect it to, as people are expected to report that to the local police. It is the Ministry of Justice that keeps the statistics on crime records.

**Christian Matheson:** The League Against Cruel Sports reports 32 kills last year, which is the bare minimum because it cannot monitor every hunt. May I suggest to Ministers that the reason why they do not collect these figures is that if they did, they would have to do something about enforcing the laws that already exist?

**Dr Coffey:** The Hunting Act 2004 makes it clear that, apart from certain exemptions, there is a ban on hunting with dogs. It is important that people take their evidence to the local police forces. I am aware of the incident in Cheshire through social media, and I understand that Cheshire police is investigating it. It is a crime, and it is up to the police force to investigate.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Richard Graham—not here. Where is the fella? It is a great shame—oh dear! Well, never mind, Hannah Bardell is here.

### Leaving the EU: Food and Drink Standards

10. **Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): What steps he is taking to maintain food and drink standards after the UK leaves the EU. [908628]

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** As we leave the EU under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018, retained EU law will ensure that we maintain our existing food and drinks standards.

**Hannah Bardell:** The Secretary of State has previously been reported as promising a genetic food revolution in the new year. In a statement, the National Farmers Union warned in the strongest possible terms against any lowering of food standards post Brexit. Will the Secretary of State or the Minister now put an end to this uncertainty, which the Secretary of State created? Will he accept an amendment to the Agriculture Bill to ensure that the standards of our high-quality produce are never lowered or diluted?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I see that the hon. Member for Gloucester (Richard Graham) is now scampering into the Chamber. He will have to catch his breath. The fella's missed his question—dear oh dear! Anyway, it is better later than never. It is good to see the chappie, and I am glad that he is in good health.

**George Eustice:** We have been absolutely clear that we will not water down or dilute our approach to food standards, food safety or animal welfare in pursuit of a trade deal. Any future treaty establishing a trade deal would of course come back to this House under the provisions of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010 and would be subject to a ratification process by this House.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): Is the Department considering improving and increasing standards post Brexit?

**George Eustice:** As we leave the European Union and establish national control in these areas, of course it is possible that we can improve our legislation in a number of areas where EU regulations do not quite work.

**Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): The Codex Alimentarius sets the standards used by the World Trade Organisation. Reportedly, the UK hardly ever speaks up in defence of strong food safety labelling and marketing safeguards at those meetings. What confidence can we have that the UK Government will do so post Brexit?

**George Eustice:** I do not accept that caricature. Indeed, we worked very hard last year to ensure that a British official took the chairmanship of one of the important Codex committees dealing with food standards, and internationally we are always promoting animal welfare and food standards through organisations such as the OIE and Codex.

### Plastic Pollution

12. **Mrs Pauline Latham** (Mid Derbyshire) (Con): What steps he is taking to reduce plastic pollution. [908631]

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** The Government recently published the resources and waste strategy, which sets out our plans to reduce plastic pollution. We have already consulted on banning straws, cotton buds and stirrers, and are consulting on extending the carrier bag charge. We will shortly be publishing our consultation on key reforms to existing packaging waste regulations, which will include a deposit refund scheme for drinks containers and increasing consistency in the recycling system.

**Mrs Latham:** The “Countryfile” programme on Sunday showed that farms use huge quantities of very thick plastic, which apparently can no longer be recycled and is being kept on airfields. How can the Government ensure that this product does not go into landfill?

**Dr Coffey:** It is possible to recycle plastic bales, but I am conscious that the secondary market may not be well established. With the reforms that we will shortly be consulting on, my hon. Friend will see that it will be in the interests of producers to ensure that materials are recyclable, otherwise it will cost them more.

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): I recently visited Canning Street Primary School in my constituency, where the children presented to me their “Keep Benwell Clean” campaign, because they are tired of walking to school through rivers of plastic. Will the Minister accept my invitation to visit the school and explain to the children there why their environment has to be polluted in this way, and what she and local authorities can do to change that?

**Dr Coffey:** I commend the children for being so concerned about plastic pollution and litter. I am sure that they are being champions in picking up litter where appropriate. That should be seen no longer as a punishment, but as a duty of civic service. Next time I am in Newcastle, which I anticipate will not be before 29 March, I will do my best to visit the children at that school.

**Carol Monaghan** (Glasgow North West) (SNP): Scotland led the UK in tackling the waste produced from single-use polythene bags, and the Scottish Government are now looking at a deposit return scheme for plastic bottles. Where such a scheme has been used, there have been recycling rates of up to 95%. Will the UK Government consider following suit with a plastic bottle recycling scheme?

**Dr Coffey:** We will shortly be publishing our proposals and the next steps towards introducing a deposit return scheme. I will be meeting Roseanna Cunningham again next month; she will have her plastics summit, and we will have a British-Irish Council meeting. Ideally we would like to work together on a UK scheme, and although we are conscious that that might not be possible, we will do what we can.

### Topical Questions

T1. [908636] **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

**The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (George Eustice):** The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs continues to progress plans for our departure from the EU, including preparing a comprehensive set of statutory instruments under the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 to ensure we have a functioning statute book on day one. We are also progressing the Agriculture Bill and the Fisheries Bill, which have cleared Committee stage recently.

**Diana Johnson:** May I just say to the Minister that it is such a shame that his Government are not willing to rule out a no-deal scenario?

The EU pet travel scheme currently allows pet owners to travel between EU countries with their animals with minimal forward planning. That is especially important for guide dog owners. But the Government are now saying that, under a no-deal Brexit, guide dog owners will have to plan their travel at least four months in advance. This is totally unacceptable, so what are the Government doing to ensure that assistance dog owners do not see inferior travel arrangements in the event of a no-deal Brexit?

**George Eustice:** The guidance that the hon. Lady cites is obviously for a worst-case scenario, but the reality on pet travel schemes is that we would have the freedom to adopt a risk-based approach, and we would anticipate that the EU would do the same. We already have provisions with Norway, for instance, that enable a pet travel scheme to operate even though Norway is outside the European Union. We are in discussion with guide dog charities to address the issue.

T2. [908637] **Gillian Keegan** (Chichester) (Con): I recently spent a day with Sussex police and the Environment Agency checking permits on vans and lorries carrying toxic waste. Although these efforts are a step in the right direction, fly-tipping incidents in Chichester almost doubled in 2018 compared with the previous five years, and they cause considerable cost to local landowners and the council. What steps is my hon. Friend taking to tackle serious and organised waste crime?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):** As I outlined to the House earlier, we recently published our resources and waste strategy. It is a key point that we need to tackle this serious and organised crime. We have already given the Environment Agency powers that it is using to do so, and indeed given powers to local councils, but there is more to do. We hope to bring forward future legislation to tackle outstanding issues.

**Sue Hayman** (Workington) (Lab): On Tuesday, the National Audit Office published a highly critical report on the Government’s monitoring of the natural environment. The report states that DEFRA “has not...done enough to engage other parts of government with its approach”.

So what confidence can we have in the Secretary of State, who is clearly busy doing other things today, to deliver his promised green Brexit?

**Dr Coffey:** We are currently working on the metrics and targets, as set out in our 25-year environment plan, to have something that is sustainable going forward. It is also important to note that we have laid draft clauses of the environmental governance Bill. In them we refer to a policy statement, which will operate right across Government, embedding into what we do as a Government the need to ensure that we leave the environment in a better place than when we inherited it.

**Sue Hayman:** That is all very well, but what we need is not warm words. We get many, many warm words from this Department but very little real action, and we need action to protect our natural environment and to bear down on climate change. So what is actually happening in response to this report?

**Dr Coffey:** The report was published only yesterday, so we need to consider it and will then reply. Only this week, we launched the clean air strategy, which was recommended by the World Health Organisation as something for other countries around the world to follow. We are going through with a new Agriculture Bill and Fisheries Bill. We are preparing an environment Bill. These are all examples of action, which the House has asked for, on issues such as clean air. There is also what we are doing with our local nature recovery networks, and we are doing all sorts of things to try to improve biodiversity. The hon. Lady will be aware of our commitment to make sure that we achieve a target of 30% marine protected areas around the world by 2030, and we will be launching our final decision on marine conservation zones shortly. So frankly, this Government are acting to make the environment a better place.

T4. [908640] **Mary Robinson** (Cheadle) (Con): The Greater Manchester combined authority is in the process of producing a clean air plan for the region to reduce harmful emissions. The Mayor, who has previously ruled out a congestion charge, is now apparently considering a charge on older cars, as well as taxis and vans, which is clearly a concern for small businesses in my area that may be impacted by it. Will my hon. Friend outline whether any funding could be made available from central Government for the retrofitting of non-compliant vehicles so that small businesses in Cheadle will not be penalised should the Mayor press ahead with those plans?

**Dr Coffey:** It really matters that we work with local authorities to make sure that we improve air quality as quickly as possible. There are broader issues with particulate matter and similar, but we are still behind on nitrogen dioxide. The Greater Manchester area is late in presenting its plan to the Department, and we are continuing to work with it. Where there are those sorts of measures—not a congestion zone but a charging zone for more polluting vehicles—we will work on, and try to fund in the best way we can, the measures needed to mitigate that.

T3. [908639] **Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): Paterson Arran Ltd is a major, important employer in my constituency, and arguably produces the best shortbread in the world. It has written to me raising serious concerns about the impact of a no-deal Brexit. It imports a

significant number of commodities, and its business would be seriously damaged by a no-deal Brexit. Will the Minister and the Cabinet now take a no-deal Brexit off the table, extend article 50, and take the vote to the people?

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (David Rutley):** As I have said in reply to earlier questions, we are working very hard to ensure that there is a deal. We want to work with all parties to do that. I was impressed when I met businesses in Scotland with the Food and Drink Federation Scotland. We need to take these steps, and I understand where the company is coming from on those issues.

T6. [908642] **Peter Heaton-Jones** (North Devon) (Con): May I thank the Minister for meeting me and a delegation of farmers from North Devon before Christmas? I am meeting those farmers again tomorrow evening. Can the Minister confirm that the Government are considering their concerns—indeed, our concerns—about the Rural Payments Agency and the Agriculture Bill in particular?

**George Eustice:** It was a real pleasure to meet my hon. Friend and a number of his constituents. We will give careful consideration to the amendments tabled to the Bill on Report and also to representations from organisations such as the NFU. The Rural Payments Agency has made significant improvement this year to the delivery of payments under the basic payment scheme, with 94% being paid by the end of December.

T7. [908643] **Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): Unlike others, I was pleased to see the Under-Secretary of State, the hon. Member for Macclesfield (David Rutley), in his place, because he too represents a Cheshire constituency. I am sure he shares my concern and that of local people who have been getting in touch with me that current legislation appears to be doing little to prevent foxhunting from taking place in Cheshire. Will the Government do the right thing and strengthen the Hunting Act by adding a recklessness clause, to end the ridiculous situation where a hunt can avoid prosecution simply by claiming that the chasing and killing of a fox by their dog was an accident?

**Dr Coffey:** The Hunting Act is already tightly drawn, and there has been a mixture of successful and unsuccessful prosecutions so far. It really matters that the police have the evidence presented to them, so that they can make a stronger case to the Crown Prosecution Service to tackle illegal hunting, which we all deplore.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Well, let us hear the fella—I call Richard Graham.

**Richard Graham** (Gloucester) (Con): Thank you very much for calling me, Mr Speaker.

One of the most exciting developments of recent times has been the announcement from the University of Manchester of a way of desalinating water through graphene sieves, which can turn it into drinking water. That has huge implications around the world. Does the

Minister agree that one of the greatest possible benefits is the decrease in the number of water bottles, which so often find their way into the marine ecosystem?

**Dr Coffey:** I also saw that interesting announcement by the University of Manchester, which just shows the benefits of this Government having invested in the university to develop graphene. There are a number of ways in which we can try to reduce the impact of plastics, and we will continue to support water companies in their long-term plans, including on desalination.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): Yet another report has been published this morning—this time in *The Lancet*—highlighting the damage that our food systems are doing to not only public health, with 11 million avoidable deaths, but the climate. I have been banging on about this for more than 10 years in this place. Is there any chance that the Government will ever listen to these reports?

**George Eustice:** It was a pleasure to have the hon. Lady on the Agriculture Bill Committee, where she raised some of those issues. In particular, we discussed the impact of imported soya on our environment and the steps we are taking to reduce that.

**Mr Speaker:** “Banging on” in this place tends to be a prerequisite of achieving anything. It is the colloquial version of my “persistence pays” principle.

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Would a Minister be willing to meet me to discuss banning the use of bolt guns as a method of putting down greyhounds that are no longer used in the racing industry?

**Dr Thérèse Coffey:** We need to tackle in a humane way however animals are put down, whether they are wildlife, domestic animals or racing animals. I am sure that a Minister will be delighted to meet my hon. Friend.

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): City of York Council is planning to develop the land adjacent to Askham bog, which is a site of special scientific interest. What discussions has the Minister had with the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government about development next to SSSIs?

**Dr Coffey:** The hon. Lady will be aware that SSSIs have an exceptionally high protection status under the national planning policy framework, which was updated last year. It is really important that these matters are considered carefully and that such development is avoided, but it will come down to a local decision for the local planning authority.

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): The Minister has talked about amendments to the Agriculture Bill. Will he and the Secretary of State really look at those amendments, and especially those that maintain high standards for imported foods, so that we do not put our own farmers out of business?

**George Eustice:** I can reassure my hon. Friend that I have already looked closely at some of the interesting amendments he has tabled.

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): Last week, Heathrow announced that it wanted another 25,000 flights a year through the airport, irrespective of runway 3's development. What advice has DEFRA given the Department for Transport on the noise and air quality implications of that unwelcome development?

**Dr Thérèse Coffey:** As with any development, an environmental impact assessment will be needed to cover those particular items, which will need to be considered with what is regarded as illegal.

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

**Chi Onwurah** (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab) *rose*—

**Mr Speaker:** Oh, very well. I call Barry Sheerman.

**Mr Sheerman:** “Oh, very well”, Mr Speaker? I am actually going to ask a topical question, unlike some of our colleagues.

May I remind the ministerial team that until we came under European regulation, we were the dirty person of Europe? We filled our seas with sewage, and we buried our waste in holes in the ground. Did the Minister see the wonderful BBC programme only last Sunday showing the real curse of agricultural plastic waste, which we are doing very little about? Will she and the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food get together with others, on an all-party basis, to try to clean up the environment and get a good deal from Europe?

**Dr Thérèse Coffey:** That was nearly as long as a speech in an Adjournment debate, but the last one of those that the hon. Gentleman secured for me to respond to was about the circular economy of left-over paint, and he did not even show up for that.

In answer to the hon. Gentleman's question, I would say that he should read the resources and waste strategy. I have already answered the question from my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Derbyshire (Mrs Latham): I said that we are working on this. We need to work with farmers to make sure there is a secondary market for that sort of plastic bale.

**Mr Speaker:** I do not know whether the Minister managed to see the programme, but I dare say it is available on catch-up TV.

**Mr Sheerman:** “Countryfile”.

**Mr Speaker:** We are most grateful to the hon. Gentleman.

**Chi Onwurah:** At the last EFRA questions, the Secretary of State was in his place and he was typically effusive in his praise for the glorious north-eastern countryside that so many of my constituents enjoy. However, he refused to say how he would protect small-scale farmers, on whom the beauty and variety of our landscape depend, from the massive American agro-industrial machine. Will the Minister now set out his red lines to protect our landscape post Brexit?

**George Eustice:** Clause 1 of the Agriculture Bill makes explicit provision to support and incentivise our landscapes and countryside to help some of those smaller

farmers. The modelling that has been done suggests that the issue is not actually all about size: some of our smaller family farms are technically the most proficient.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

*The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—*

### Protection of Historic Church Buildings

1. **Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): What steps the Church of England is taking to ensure that historic church buildings are protected. [908606]

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman):** The Church of England continues to suffer thefts of metal and other items of historical and architectural interest from its churches. The Archbishop's Council conducted an inquiry into this, and the trend appears to be gradually moving from east to west and from south to north. I encourage my hon. Friend to look at the Church of England website for ways of protecting his churches more successfully.

**Alex Burghart:** I thank my right hon. Friend for her answer. We are blessed with a great many historic churches in Brentwood and Ongar; too often, they have to be kept locked for very long periods of the week, making them inaccessible to the public. What conversations has she or the Government had with Historic England and the police to ensure that more of our historic churches can be open to the people who wish to use them?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** My hon. Friend has a real gem in the form of a beautiful Anglo-Saxon church—St Andrews, Greensted—which, despite the fact that it does not have a metal roof, has suffered these kind of thefts. At the end of last year, the Church of England participated in a Historic England review called Operation Crucible as part of the strategy against metal theft. There is no question but that the Scrap Metal Dealers Act 2013 needs to be tightened to recognise illegitimate businesses, which often have their own forges and furnaces and melt down the metal before it even reaches scrap dealers' yards.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): In the UK, there are some 340 important historic churches. National lottery funding has made money available to some of them, but there is certainly a shortfall in funds. May I ask the right hon. Lady whether other funding avenues could be made available for preservation works?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. The Church would direct him, his churches and others with historical churches facing the threat of metal theft, towards a Home Office panel for grants to protect religious buildings from hate crimes. Some churches have been recipients of these grants.

**Martin Vickers** (Cleethorpes) (Con): Sadly, many of our most beautiful churches are now closed for worship and have been declared redundant. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that Church Commissioners will continue to do all they can to preserve those beautiful buildings?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** The Church of England opens as many churches as it closes—there is often a misunderstanding about that—and whether people come to worship or to visit the historical artefacts, increasing footfall through churches is a deterrent to crime and theft. I encourage all hon. Members with beautiful churches in their communities to use them or lose them, and to encourage people to go into them so that we keep them open and keep the criminals out.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): What is the Church of England doing to keep historic church bells ringing in historic church buildings?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** The Church of England succeeded in producing a magnificent peal of bells to mark the centenary of the Armistice, and I am sure that churches in the constituencies of many hon. Members took part. Grants are available to restore belfries and bells, and a great effort was made to make churches ready for that historic moment in our nation's history.

## ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

*The hon. Member for Houghton and Sunderland South, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—*

### Electoral Commission: Investigatory Powers

2. **Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): What recent discussions the Electoral Commission has had with the Minister for the Cabinet Office on the Electoral Commission's investigatory powers. [908607]

5. **Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): What recent discussions the Electoral Commission has had with the Minister for the Cabinet Office on the Electoral Commission's investigatory powers. [908610]

**Bridget Phillipson** (Houghton and Sunderland South): The Electoral Commission has ongoing dialogue with the Minister for the Constitution, and it has raised the need for a significant increase to its current maximum fine of £20,000. That will ensure that sanctions are proportionate and provide a genuine deterrent.

**Alan Brown:** We have heard about dark money being involved in elections and the Brexit vote, including the controversial £435,000 donation channelled via the Scottish Tory candidate, Richard Cook, and the Constitutional Research Council to the Democratic Unionist party. The source of that donation is still unclear. My hon. Friend the Member for Argyll and Bute (Brendan O'Hara) has written to the Electoral Commission to ask for due diligence on that case to be published. Can the hon. Lady advise when that will happen?

**Bridget Phillipson:** In its recent report on digital campaigning, the Electoral Commission recommended greater transparency around the source of such donations, and proposals have been set out. I am sure that officials from the commission will be happy to discuss the matter further with the hon. Gentleman or his hon. Friend.

**Gavin Newlands:** With respect to the hon. Lady, the Labour party was fined a record amount for failing to declare donations during the 2017 general election. The current shambolic state of affairs in this place means that even if an election is not probable, it is at least possible. I heard the hon. Lady's answer about increasing fines, but may we have a debate about increasing such fines much higher than £20,000? In that way, political parties would be generally dissuaded from taking such action as it would exceed the cost of doing business.

**Bridget Phillipson:** The Electoral Commission has repeatedly warned that the ability to fine campaigners a maximum of only £20,000 could increasingly be seen as the cost of doing business, and it continues to urge the Government to introduce legislation to strengthen its sanctioning powers for future electoral events.

**Matt Warman** (Boston and Skegness) (Con): Transparency in printed literature is partly ensured by the necessity of having an imprint. In my recent report for the Centre for Policy Studies, I argue that digital literature should also have an imprint. Does the Electoral Commission agree?

**Bridget Phillipson:** The Electoral Commission has called for imprints to follow for digital material as they would for printed material. I am sure that officials from the commission will be happy to discuss the matter further with the hon. Gentleman, and we welcome any steps that he can take to urge the Government to take further action in that area.

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con): Our electoral integrity is so important: when people vote we must ensure that they are exactly who they say they are. Since 2003 Northern Ireland has had photographic identification. What does the Electoral Commission feel about strengthening the situation as regards voter integrity?

**Bridget Phillipson:** The commission completed independent evaluation of the May 2018 voter ID pilot trials, and it published details on that analysis and the background data in July 2018. It found that the trials worked well, but it highlighted the need for more evidence in that area. As 3.5 million electors may not have the type of identification required, the commission continues to recommend that electors should be able to apply for a voter card free of charge, as is the case in Northern Ireland.

11. [908616] **Mr Ben Bradshaw** (Exeter) (Lab): What preparatory work is the Electoral Commission doing for the growing possibility of another EU referendum? What action is it undertaking to ensure that another referendum will not be so vulnerable to the law breaking and subversion that was suffered in 2016?

**Bridget Phillipson:** The commission has the expertise, experience and a proven track record of delivering well-run elections and referendums at short notice. It maintains contingency plans to ensure it has made all appropriate preparations to deliver a referendum, should there be one.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

*The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—*

### Persecution of Christians

3. **Jeremy Lefroy** (Stafford) (Con): What (a) steps the Church of England is taking and (b) recent discussions the Church of England has had with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on tackling the persecution of Christians throughout the world. [908608]

4. **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What (a) steps the Church of England is taking and (b) recent discussions the Church of England has had with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on tackling the persecution of Christians throughout the world. [908609]

6. **Sir Desmond Swayne** (New Forest West) (Con): What recent discussions the Church of England has had with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on the persecution of Christians overseas. [908611]

8. **Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): What (a) steps the Church of England is taking and (b) recent discussions the Church of England has had with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on tackling the persecution of Christians throughout the world. [908613]

9. **Kevin Foster** (Torbay) (Con): What (a) steps the Church of England is taking and (b) recent discussions the Church of England has had with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on tackling the persecution of Christians throughout the world. [908614]

12. **Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): What (a) steps the Church of England is taking and (b) recent discussions the Church of England has had with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on tackling the persecution of Christians throughout the world. [908617]

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman):** I do realise that the grouping will make this sound rather like Foreign Office questions for Christianity—but then, the Anglican Communion is the third largest global organisation in the world, after the United Nations and the Catholic Church.

The Church of England has regular discussions with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on freedom of religion and belief. I am pleased to announce to the House that my right hon. Friend Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, invited the Bishop of Truro, before Christmas, to lead an independent review of UK Government support for persecuted Christians.

**Jeremy Lefroy:** The number of Members who attended the meeting in the House yesterday about the Open Doors report shows just what huge interest there is in this issue. It was very disturbing to hear about the significant increase in the persecution of Christians, and indeed of people of other faiths, in the past year or two. Will my right hon. Friend ensure that as the report is compiled, the bishop will talk with as many Members as possible? We hear from our constituents and from around the world about individual cases of persecution.

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** I am delighted to give my hon. Friend that assurance. I, too, was really shocked by the report presented in Parliament yesterday, which shows that 40 countries out of the 50 on the Open Doors watch list are places where Christians experience very high or extreme levels of persecution. I shall go from this place to a meeting at the Foreign Office with the Foreign Secretary, as well as the bishop, and I will make that request directly to him.

**Henry Smith:** I am grateful to my right hon. Friend. I echo the remarks of my hon. Friend the Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) in welcoming the Open Doors “World Watch List” report, launched here in Parliament yesterday.

With regard to Commonwealth countries on the list, we heard, for example, some very harrowing reports of abuse against Christian communities in Nigeria. What effort can the Commonwealth side of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office make in helping to mitigate such persecution?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** Nigeria is high up the Open Doors watch list of countries where Christians suffer persecution. I am sorry to say that in the past year 3,731 Christians were reported killed by the activity of extremists in Nigeria. As it is a former dependency of the United Kingdom, the Government ought to have some way of having greater influence. I know that the Archbishop of Canterbury, who is knowledgeable about Nigeria, uses every endeavour to bring pressure on the Government of Nigeria to better protect the Christians in their country.

**Sir Desmond Swayne:** What estimate has my right hon. Friend made of the willingness of International Development and Foreign Office Ministers to actually do something about the persecution of Christians and put it at the top of their priorities?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** I am delighted to be able to tell the House that since the last set of Church Commissioners questions, the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman) and I have paid a joint visit to a Minister of State at the Foreign Office to impress on him the importance of officials in the Foreign Office, the Department for International Development and other Government Departments, such as the Home Office, taking up the course for a better understanding of religious literacy. We were given assurances by the Minister that this would be impressed on officials.

**Bob Blackman:** I thank my right hon. Friend for her answers thus far. One area of the world where persecution is at its highest is Pakistan, where there have been a number of high-profile cases. What is the Church doing to combat these terrible attacks on Christians, who just want to celebrate their religion?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** Pakistan is very high up on the Open Doors watch list of countries where Christians suffer persecution. I am sure that like me, my hon. Friend will have heard the case of Asia Bibi raised with the Prime Minister yesterday in the House. It is important not only that we look for a solution for her and her family that assures her protection, but that we remember that what we do on behalf of Christians in other

countries can impact others around the world in the same way. The persecution of Christians in Pakistan is high on our agenda.

**Kevin Foster:** As has already been mentioned, yesterday saw the launch of the Open Doors “World Watch List 2019” here in Parliament. Can my right hon. Friend advise me of what use the Church of England makes of the analysis of the trends in the persecution of Christians across the globe in its discussions with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** Obviously the watch list is a useful guide to where the focus needs to be. The bishops take special interest in particular countries that are high up on that watch list. Bishops regularly pay visits to countries where Christians are persecuted. In fact, the bishop responsible for the plight of Christians in the middle east and Palestine is currently paying his regular annual visit to look at the decimation of the Christians in that region.

**Diana Johnson:** I was interested to hear that the right hon. Lady is about to meet the Secretary of State. He wrote over Christmas in *The Daily Telegraph*:

“It is not in our national character to turn a blind eye to suffering”,

and that the issue is about

“our deeds as well as our words.”

Will the right hon. Lady say something about the deeds she would like to see from the Foreign Secretary?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** The Foreign Secretary has acted by bringing in a bishop—an independent person—to review the work of the Foreign Office in relation to the persecution of Christians abroad. Three areas will be assessed: the level of interaction between Churches and organisations overseas with British or foreign diplomatic missions in the protection of Christians; the experience of staff at the FCO, the Department for International Development and the Home Office, who may have been on the receiving end of approaches from Churches and other organisations seeking help for persecuted Christians; and the feedback of international organisations on British activities and an assessment of the approaches of other countries’ diplomatic missions to the persecution of Christians.

## HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

*The right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington, representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—*

### House of Commons Chamber: Electronic Voting System

7. **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): What recent discussions the Commission has had on the potential costs of installing an electronic voting system in the House of Commons Chamber. [908612]

**Tom Brake** (Carshalton and Wallington): The Commission has had no discussions on the costs of installing an electronic voting system in the Chamber. Its responsibility in this matter is limited to the financial or staffing implications of any change to the present system, were a change agreed by the House. If the House agreed to pursue electronic working, further work by the House service in conjunction with the digital service would be needed to accurately identify the investment, planning and development required to deliver electronic voting.

**Patrick Grady:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the answer. I accept that a change has to be a decision of the House, but the reality is that this is not just about democracy anymore; it is about health and safety. Six hundred Members trying to get through the Lobby the other night was an incredibly worrying situation; if Mr Speaker had called for the doors to be closed, it would not have been physically possible for the Doorkeepers to do so. There was claustrophobia, and we know the issues of Members with health challenges and Members who are pregnant. The House of Commons Commission needs to consider the issue from the perspective of safety in the workplace environment, with democratic considerations to one side.

**Tom Brake:** I thank the hon. Gentleman and his colleagues for their questions—I think electronic voting will be my specialist subject on “Mastermind”. He has come up with a new angle, and I support the point he makes. Members in the packed Division Lobby when the Government were defeated very heavily will have noticed that the congestion was significant, and there were risks associated with that.

On the back of the hon. Gentleman’s question, I will ask the authorities to look at doing a health and safety risk assessment. As he will know, and as I have stated previously, if he wants to pursue the matter—I understand that he has perhaps not yet done so—he needs to ask the Procedure Committee to look at the whole subject of electronic voting.

## CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

*The right hon. Member for Meriden, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—*

### Promotion of Marriage

10. **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): What steps the Church of England is taking to promote marriage.

[908615]

**The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Dame Caroline Spelman):** The most recent figures published by the Church of England show that in 2017 the Church conducted 41,000 marriages and services of prayer and dedication. The church wedding is affordable: at less than £500, the cost of a wedding in church is not the main part of what it costs to get married. Free of charge, the clergy offer advice to help tailor the ceremony for the couple and, perhaps most importantly, to prepare them for their lives together.

**Fiona Bruce:** Church wedding fees can put some couples off marrying in church. Will the right hon. my Friend commend the excellent initiative led by my own minister, Mike Smith, vicar of St John’s, Hartford? Along with volunteers from the church, he has put together a wedding package for three couples consisting of a church wedding, a photographer, flowers, cake, a reception, and even wedding dress alterations, all for £1,000. Is that not a model that other churches could follow?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** I think it is an excellent model. As one with children of marriageable age, I only wish we lived in the diocese that is making the offer, but perhaps it will catch on. I sincerely hope it will.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): We availed ourselves of the opportunity to have our children baptised in St Mary’s Undercroft, and our daughters were married at St Margaret’s, Westminster. Are those facilities well known, and are they well used? It is a great tradition. Are Members of Parliament aware of the facilities available to them, and do they use them?

**Dame Caroline Spelman:** The hon. Gentleman has done the House a service in reminding all colleagues that that opportunity is open to them. I know that many Members have experienced wonderful family occasions. However, in my capacity as Chairman of the Joint Committee on the draft Parliamentary Buildings (Restoration and Renewal) Bill, I should warn colleagues that we shall need to look very carefully at what facilities will remain available while the House is being restored.

## Business of the House

10.36 am

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

**The Leader of the House of Commons (Andrea Leadsom):** The business for next week will be as follows:

**MONDAY 21 JANUARY**—Remaining stages of the Healthcare (International) Arrangements Bill.

**TUESDAY 22 JANUARY**—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill.

**WEDNESDAY 23 JANUARY**—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Tenant Fees Bill, followed by a motion relating to private Members' Bills.

**THURSDAY 24 JANUARY**—A general debate on Holocaust Memorial Day 2019, followed by a debate on a motion relating to appropriate ME treatment. The subjects for these debates were determined by the Backbench Business Committee.

**FRIDAY 25 JANUARY**—The House will not be sitting.

I can confirm to the House that a statement and a motion on the Government's next steps under section 13 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018 will be tabled on Monday. A full day's debate on the motion will take place on Tuesday 29 January, subject to the agreement of the House.

Mr Speaker,

"Yesterday is history, tomorrow is a mystery, but today is a gift. That's why we call it the present."

Let me say, on the eve of A.A. Milne's birthday, that that is one of my favourite quotes from "Winnie-the-Pooh"—and, as Eeyore said:

"It never hurts to keep looking for sunshine."

May I wish you, Mr Speaker, a very happy birthday for Saturday?

Finally, I leave the House with an uplifting and rather wise thought from "Winnie-the-Pooh":

"If the person you are talking to doesn't appear to be listening, be patient. It may simply be that he has a small piece of fluff in his ear."

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the Leader of the House for her birthday wishes. I am looking forward to the occasion, although probably not quite as much as when I was about to be 15 rather than 56—but there you go.

**Valerie Vaz:** May I associate myself with the Leader of the House's good wishes to you, Mr Speaker? I am not quite sure about the bit about the fluff in the ear. I do not know whether she suspects that you are not listening to what she says.

I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the business for next week. I am pleased that she said that the Prime Minister would make a statement on Monday. The Prime Minister said that the motion would be amendable. Can the Leader of the House confirm that it will be, and can she also confirm what the Government Chief Whip said when he jumped up to the Dispatch Box—he said that 90 minutes was not enough to debate

such an important issue and that the Government would provide reasonable time to hold the debate and vote by 30 January?

This is the first Government to be held in contempt of Parliament. The Prime Minister has had a vote of no confidence from within her own party. There was a vote of no confidence in the Government yesterday, which the Government won because they have a confidence and supply agreement. Yet again, however, a record was broken: 432 hon. and right hon. Members voted against the Prime Minister's deal. That was the biggest defeat of a Government in history.

The Leader of the House said in an interview on BBC Radio 4:

"The Government has been collaborating across the House ever since the beginning of this Parliament."

Can she say with whom? The Leader of the House also said that the Prime Minister will be "speaking with senior parliamentarians". Can she say with whom—can she publish a list of those favoured ones, or is this another case of divide and rule? The Leader of the House will note that the House voted against a no-deal scenario. That must be off the table, so could she confirm that that is off the table in any starting point for discussions?

This Opposition and Parliament have been working on behalf of the people. Pressure from Her Majesty's Opposition led to a meaningful vote, a term coined by the shadow Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union, my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Keir Starmer), and it took a Humble Address for Parliament to be given the impact assessments.

How can we have confidence in the referendum when the donor of the largest political donation in history is being investigated by the National Crime Agency? The leave campaign has been found to have broken electoral law, whistleblowers and journalists have raised alarms about the legality of the campaign, and the previous Government said no analysis of the impact should be given out by our independent civil service.

Yes, the people have voted, but it is our job as elected representatives to look at the evidence of the impact on the country, and not rely on the campaign rhetoric, which we now know to be based on falsehoods. We must rely on the evidence and the facts. So can the Leader of the House confirm whether she will move the business motion to extend article 50 in time? I know friends of the Leader of the House have said she might resign if she had to do that.

The hon. and learned Member for Edinburgh South West (Joanna Cherry) has asked the DExEU Minister to explain why the Government thought it appropriate as a matter of law to proceed under regulation 32, for reasons of urgency, extreme urgency and unforeseeable events, when they handed the contract of £14 million to Seaborne Freight, a company with no ships, no ports and no employees. Can the Leader of the House publish a list of all the contracts that have been awarded under this regulation by any Government Department?

As of last Friday, 73% of the time available for the Government to lay their Brexit statutory instruments has elapsed, but only 51% of SIs have been laid. A previous shadow Leader of the House of Commons, the right hon. Lord Cunningham, said in the House of

[Valerie Vaz]

Lords that there is a Brexit SI that is 630 pages long, 2.54 kg in weight and includes 11 disparate subjects. The Government are clearly doing all they can to avoid proper scrutiny. Baroness Smith, shadow Leader of the Lords, says that she holds both of them in both hands so she does not have to go to the gym. Can the Leader of the House update the House on the progress of the Brexit SIs that need to be laid before the UK exits the EU?

In yesterday's confidence vote debate the Prime Minister said:

"when you have worked hard all your life, you will get a good pension and security and dignity in your old age".

Not if you are a WASPI woman, and not if you are a couple where only one of you is over pensionable age, because a written statement on Monday showed that there would be a £7,000 pension cut for the poorest elderly couples. The Prime Minister said:

"where growing up you will get the best possible education, not because your parents can afford to pay for it but because that is what every local school provides".

Not according to new analysis by the House of Commons Library, showing that total education spending, including spending on schools and colleges, in the UK has fallen by over £7 billion in real terms since 2010. The Prime Minister said:

"where, when you have children of your own, you will be able to rely on our world-class NHS".—[*Official Report*, 16 January 2019; Vol. 652, c. 1185.]

But not if you are on NHS waiting lists, which have grown to 4.3 million. The number of people waiting longer than two months for cancer treatment has almost doubled since 2010 and £7 billion has been cut from adult social care since 2010, leaving 1.4 million elderly and vulnerable people without care and support. The Prime Minister needs to come to the House and correct the record. It is no wonder that, in his speech, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs focused on the Leader of the Opposition rather than on confidence in his own Government.

May I also ask the Leader of the House if she will in principle talk to the usual channels about proxy voting? I do not want to discuss individual cases, just the principle of proxy voting. What is the timetable for coming back to the House and ensuring that is put in place?

The Leader of the House mentioned the Holocaust Memorial Day debate. The book will be available to sign next week; it was opened this week. On Monday, it is Martin Luther King Day, whose words we must remember:

"We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all".

I hope that we all heed those words as we work towards tolerance, mutual respect, justice and opportunity and as we work to find a solution.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her various comments. I can confirm that the debate on Tuesday 29 January will not be limited to 90 minutes. The Government will ensure that sufficient time is available so the House can fully consider the matter for

the whole day. The arrangements for the debate are subject to the House agreeing those arrangements, and it will be brought forward as a business of the House motion, which will be amendable and debatable.

The hon. Lady asks about my claim that there have been discussions across the House. She will appreciate that the Government have brought forward 46 Bills, 33 of which have received Royal Assent, and that in a hung Parliament there is considerable collaboration. Nearly 1,500 amendments were tabled to the EU withdrawal Bill, and on many of them the Government sought to do cross-party deals to ensure we could get the business through. By definition, given that 33 Bills have received Royal Assent, there has been a great deal of cross-party collaboration. It is important that she accepts that. Those are the facts. That is the truth of the matter.

The hon. Lady asks what the position is on a no-deal Brexit. She will be aware that, Parliament having passed the EU withdrawal Act, the legal default is that the UK will leave the EU on 29 March and, if a deal has not been voted for, it will be with no deal, unless alternative arrangements are put in place.

The hon. Lady says that the people have spoken and she is absolutely right—the people did speak. She then suggested it is up to Members of Parliament to decide what we do in response. I would slightly disagree with her. The people have spoken and it is our job to fulfil that, in line with the requirements of the people. This House is a servant of the people of this country—the entire United Kingdom.

The hon. Lady asks about progress on Brexit SIs. She will appreciate we have gone further than any previous Government in being open and transparent about the plans for secondary legislation. I remain confident that all required statutory instruments that need to be will be brought forward in time for exit day. I have recently exchanged letters with the Chairman of the sifting Committee to clarify some of the affirmative SIs that need to be brought forward in Committee. More than 300 Brexit SIs have now been laid, which is more than half the SIs we anticipate will be required by exit day and, as I say, we remain confident.

The hon. Lady makes various assertions about what the Prime Minister said. I gently say that from the Dispatch Box the hon. Lady could welcome, as I do, the fact that the economy is 18% bigger than it was in 2010 and has grown for eight consecutive years, that wages have outstripped inflation for eight consecutive months, and that median household incomes are up by £1,400 in real terms since 2010. She should celebrate the fact that more people are in work than ever before, that wages are growing at their fastest rate for a decade, that 1.9 million more children are being taught in good or outstanding schools than in 2010 and that this Government have committed a bigger investment in the NHS than ever before in its entire history. She should celebrate those things, but I fear she does not.

The hon. Lady made a point about proxy voting. It is a serious point, and the whole House knows my view. It is vital that families get the opportunity to spend time with their new babies. I will be bringing forward a motion as soon as I can on this subject. As all hon. Members will appreciate, there are no clear-cut views—for example, on how far it should extend and to what sort

of motions it should apply—but I have been consulting broadly on the matter, and I hope to bring that forward as soon as possible.

**Sir David Amess** (Southend West) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend find time for a debate on laws governing local authority employees standing in parliamentary elections? At the moment, they are banned from standing for the authority for which they work but can stand in parliamentary elections. That may not be a problem for the House, but personally I think the law rather strange.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend makes an interesting point. The present law excludes local council employees who hold a politically restricted post, as defined in the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, from standing in both parliamentary and local authority elections. He may like to raise the matter with Cabinet Office Ministers, perhaps in an Adjournment debate, so that he can seek further information.

**Mr Speaker:** I call Pete Wishart.

**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): Thank you, Mr Speaker, and may I wish you a happy birthday for Saturday from everyone on the SNP Benches? Perhaps you can get a game of tennis in if you get the chance. I also thank the Leader of the House for announcing the business for next week.

Well, we are all still here! I congratulate the Leader of the House and her Government on winning the no-confidence vote last night. At least they can still win one vote, and the nation is grateful—or perhaps not. Amazingly, this is a Government who treat the biggest defeat in parliamentary history as a mere flesh wound. Like Monty Python's Black Knight, they fight on, armless and legless, prepared to bite the nation into submission. With similar delusion, they fight on as though nothing has happened. The red lines remain in place, there is no sense that other options are being considered seriously, and the Government still believe that a little bit of tinkering around the edges of their deal will be enough to make everything all right. The Government need to start to get real about their position and demonstrate that they are prepared to take Tuesday's defeat seriously. May we have a statement, to show good will towards the House, to say that the Government will stop the clock and ensure that no deal is taken off the table? That would be the best way to engage with the other parties in this House.

I am grateful to the Leader of the House for clarifying the situation around the Prime Minister's statement on Monday and the debate a week on Tuesday. However, the business statement did not cover the fact that, according to the amended business motion approved by the House relating to the meaningful vote, the Government have three days to bring forward that debate, so why is the debate coming seven days after the statement? Next week's business is important, but the debate could be held next week. The clock is ticking, and we do not need to wait until Tuesday week. The Leader of the House did not quite confirm this to the shadow Leader of the House, so will she ensure that any motion is fully debatable and amendable and that all options will be considered?

Lastly, this has been raised previously, but we need to review the House's appalling voting arrangements. Tuesday night was awful, with cramped conditions no better than a cattle wagon while Members of Parliament vote. What will have to happen before we decide to do something? Does somebody have to give birth in a Lobby before the matter is tackled seriously? This is the 21st century, and our voting arrangements should match the times in which we live. Get shot of these ridiculous voting arrangements.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his insight and for his encouragement of electronic voting. I fear that there is no clear view on that and that it may even prove more controversial in this House than leaving the European Union, which is one of the extraordinary things about the Houses of Parliament. Nevertheless, I am always willing to talk to him about such things. Of course, when we decant from this place into temporary arrangements, it might be possible to trial different alternatives if the House wants to do so—[HON. MEMBERS: "No!"] As the hon. Gentleman can hear, it is a controversial thought.

The hon. Gentleman asked whether no deal can be taken off the table, but he must surely appreciate that doing that and then stopping preparations for no deal would be a totally incompetent thing for a sensible Government to do. The Government must continue to prepare for all eventualities, including no deal. It is not possible to remove no deal from the table and still abide by the will of the people, as expressed in the referendum.

The hon. Gentleman asks about next week's motion. I again confirm, as I thought I already had, that it is debatable, amendable and subject to agreement by this House, on a motion that will be tabled on Monday; the statement and motion will be tabled on Monday. I offer the hon. Gentleman a bit of advice from "Winnie-the-Pooh" that I have been dying to give him:

"You can't stay in your corner of the Forest waiting for others to come to you. You have to go to them sometimes."

**Sir Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): May we have an early debate on collective Cabinet responsibility and what it means in the current circumstances? Will my right hon. Friend undertake to lead that debate, so that she can explain to the House the frustration that we all feel on her behalf at having the 2017 Conservative party manifesto, which she supported on the "Today" programme this week, undermined by treacherous comments from our own Cabinet colleagues?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is really tempting me, but I shall resist. All my Cabinet colleagues are absolutely in agreement that we will deliver on the will of the people as expressed in the referendum of 2016. We will be leaving the European Union on 29 March. That remains Government policy and we will continue to prepare for all eventualities.

**Ian Mearns** (Gateshead) (Lab): I add my personal good wishes to you, Mr Speaker, and wish you a happy birthday on Saturday. I hope Saturday also brings you three points from your game with Chelsea at the Emirates.

I thank the Leader of the House for the business statement and for announcing that next Thursday will be Backbench Business Committee business, with the

[*Ian Mearns*]

Holocaust Memorial Day debate and a debate on appropriate treatment for myalgic encephalomyelitis—ME. That will free up the time in Westminster Hall that we had put aside for the Holocaust Memorial Day debate, and Westminster Hall will now host a debate on Home Office resourcing for policing and tackling knife crime, particularly in London, on that Thursday afternoon.

I really welcome the House's debating Holocaust Memorial Day. Members might not be aware that I represent and live in the midst of a large orthodox Haredi Jewish community in Gateshead. They are my neighbours and friends. Many of them come from families that fled to Gateshead in the 1920s and the 1930s, and that is obviously something that hits home when we remember the Holocaust on that day. I also remind the Government that the Haredi Jewish community, being very orthodox and having its own particular way of living within its culture and creed, has been hit rather hard by the two-child limit on benefits. That is something that we should be aware of across this House, because that limit is having an impact on culturally religious communities.

The Leader of the House talks about the many things she believes the Government have done well, but I am afraid that in my constituency unemployment in December was 1,060 higher than in the same month in the previous year. Everything in the garden is not rosy everywhere.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I totally respect the hon. Gentleman, and I thank him for his remarks about the Jewish community in his constituency. I think all hon. Members appreciate the contribution that they make to our society. I would certainly encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can discuss the specific issues and problems.

**Sir Oliver Letwin** (West Dorset) (Con): I am grateful to the Leader of the House for explaining when the Government's motion will be debated. Will she be arranging the business of the House on that occasion in such a way that there will be an opportunity, if Mr Speaker selects a large number of amendments and if they are pressed to a vote, to vote on each of them sequentially?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My right hon. Friend will be aware that the motion to agree how we proceed on the motion will itself be amendable and debatable, and what will take place will require the House's agreement.

**Margaret Beckett** (Derby South) (Lab): I should like to declare an interest. Some years ago, when we were in a minority Government, I was in our Whips Office. Since then, for some five years, I was either shadow Leader of the House or Leader of the House. I feel an old-fashioned sense of unease when I hear people exploring options that might lead to the Government reducing or losing their control of the business of the House. However, that is of course entirely unnecessary. It is within the remit of the Government, using their access to the Order Paper, to facilitate exploration of where the will of the House lies. I strongly urge the Leader of the House to consider and explore, in consultation with colleagues, ways in which the Government might do that in order to facilitate the House's expression of its

wishes—the Prime Minister says she wants it to come to a decision—rather than, as has perhaps inadvertently happened in the past, almost obstructing the expression of the will of the House.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. When the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) served as Leader of the House, she was such a good Leader of the House and so popular and respected on both sides that I recall from 20 years ago that when we feared from press reports that her role as Leader of the House was at risk, the right hon. Members for New Forest West (Sir Desmond Swayne), for New Forest East (Dr Lewis) and for Buckingham (John Bercow) all sprang to our feet during business questions to insist that she must remain in her place.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) for her suggestion. She will equally appreciate that when, under her Government, indicative voting was attempted on House of Lords reform, it did not come up with a clear solution—that is the other side of the argument. Nevertheless, I am grateful for her remarks and suggestions.

**Sir Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Following on from the previous question, the Procedure Committee met yesterday and we are holding an urgent inquiry on these issues and on the recent rulings from the Chair. May I encourage the Leader of the House, the shadow Leader of the House and you, Mr Speaker, to come to our Committee, if you are invited?

As the right hon. Member for Derby South (Margaret Beckett) just said, there is a point about such precedents. The shadow Leader of the House hopes soon to be in government, and it would be quite a dangerous precedent if Back Benchers were given precedence over the Government in introducing business. These are major constitutional issues, and we should not play this on the hoof or approach it from our being pro-Brexit or anti-Brexit. We should try to come to some sort of consensus.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My right hon. Friend's final point is exactly right. There are some very serious issues about the way the House conducts its business and, indeed, about the way our democracy is managed, and we need to consider those very carefully and soberly, although I agree with you, Mr Speaker. I would not storm the Procedure Committee's meeting uninvited but, if invited, I would of course be available to come along.

**John Cryer** (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): Transport for London is in the process of phasing out existing rolling stock on the Barking-Gospel Oak line, which runs through my constituency, but TfL has done it without making sure that new trains will be in place. That means we will have a few weeks, perhaps longer, in which there will not be any trains on one of the big commuter lines across north London. Even for TfL this is incompetence of a pretty high order. Can we have a debate on transport, and particularly trains, so I can get a few more things off my chest?

**Andrea Leadsom:** There will be many hon. and right hon. Members who completely sympathise with the hon. Gentleman. The situation sounds appalling, and

he might want to seek an urgent Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate, because many colleagues are frustrated about issues with rolling stock.

**Kirstene Hair** (Angus) (Con): Many charities across the United Kingdom benefit from national lottery funding, including charities in my Angus constituency such as the Forfar Musical Society and the Brechin Photographic Society. I am hosting an event in my constituency on 22 February to show other charities the funding that is available. Can we have a debate in this place on the outstanding contribution of charities in our constituencies and on how they can access further support?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am sure many hon. Members would agree with my hon. Friend that many charities benefit from national lottery grants, and I commend her for suggesting a public meeting to spread the news about what is available. Last year, the Big Lottery Fund distributed more than 11,000 grants across the UK including, in her constituency of Angus, to charities as diverse as HOPE organic garden, Keptie Friends, the Brechin Photographic Society, the Forfar Musical Society and Strathmore rugby football club. Congratulations to all of them. I encourage my hon. Friend to seek a Westminster Hall debate at least, because I am sure many Members would like to participate in such a debate.

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): The Leader of the House will be aware of the deteriorating and serious situation in Zimbabwe: the internet was deliberately stopped by the Government for three days; roads, schools and banks are closed; hundreds of people have been arrested; and there is complete silence, as people cannot communicate with each other. Will she ask the Foreign Secretary to make a statement? I have tried to get an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate, and I will continue to do so, but this is serious and we must not forget what is happening in that wonderful country.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I absolutely share the hon. Lady's concern. We all had such high hopes for Zimbabwe's recovery, and what is happening is very concerning. We have Foreign Office questions next Tuesday, and I encourage her to raise this directly with the Secretary of State then.

**Sir John Hayes** (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): Every day, crime blights lives. Those just about managing in hard-pressed communities particularly suffer, as burglars steal prized possessions and trash homes; small shops are regularly burgled, with thieves making life a misery for the shopkeepers; and neighbours, through disorder and threats, spoil people's peace. Yet we hear that the Government now plan to send fewer thieves and thugs to prison. That might appeal to bleeding-heart liberals who live gated lives in leafy enclaves and see things through the prism of privilege, but it will disadvantage the police, disempower magistrates and disappoint the public. A visit from Ministers will allow them to defend this perverse plan, say why they will not defend those who suffer and give Members a chance to give a voice to victims.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My right hon. Friend raises an incredibly serious issue. He will be aware that the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee has just announced a debate in Westminster Hall next Thursday afternoon

in which my right hon. Friend might like to take part. I agree with him that prisons are there to punish offenders and keep the public safe, but they must also help people to turn their lives around. There is a balance to be struck, but I am sure that the Government will continue to consider the issue carefully.

**Marion Fellows** (Motherwell and Wishaw) (SNP): Many happy returns for when your birthday comes, Mr Speaker.

I make no apology for raising this issue yet again. I had long and successful treatment for claustrophobia shortly after I joined this House. On Tuesday night, I had to be assisted through the Lobby by a right hon. Member—he is not in his place, so I will not name him—because although I did not have a panic attack, I felt very uncomfortable. I know what a claustrophobia panic attack is like, because I have suffered such attacks in the past. I assure Members that I would have caused havoc in the Lobby had I had an attack on Tuesday night. I plead with the authorities, with the Chair of the Procedure Committee and anyone else who is listening to consider having a debate in which we can put forward these points, so that the House can really look at the health and safety issues involved in the nonsense that happened in the Lobby on Tuesday evening.

**Andrea Leadsom:** First, I am really sorry to hear about the experience that the hon. Lady had; that is not acceptable and I am happy to meet her to discuss what more we might be able to do. I do not think it necessarily means changing procedures, but there certainly could be other ways to facilitate her particular situation.

**Sir Greg Knight** (East Yorkshire) (Con): May we have a debate on reducing waiting times? Is the Leader of the House aware that during a lifetime the average motorist will spend approximately six months waiting at red traffic lights? May we have a national audit of our use of traffic lights in this country to see how many of them can be safely turned off?

**Andrea Leadsom:** That could be a very popular debate indeed, and my right hon. Friend raises an important issue. Traffic is not only frustrating for motorists, but harmful to our economic prosperity. I can tell him that we have seen more than a quarter of a trillion pounds of infrastructure investment, public and private, since 2010. A huge amount of money is going into new road building, and trying to re-work towns and cities so that the traffic keeps flowing better. There is a long way to go. He might well want to seek a Backbench Business Committee debate on this subject.

**Ruth Smeeth** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. This week I received correspondence from Cardtronics, which is ending free-to-access ATMs in my and another three constituencies. We have had a Backbench Business debate and my hon. Friend the Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Ged Killen) has a ten-minute rule Bill. May I urge the Leader of the House to work with the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and to allow a debate in Government time on the subject of the ten-minute rule Bill, so that we can tackle the scourge of paid-for money?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am extremely sympathetic to the hon. Lady's point. It is really problematic that people are not able to access their own money because of charges that they simply cannot afford. This House has looked at the issue a number of times and I encourage her to raise it directly with Ministers at Treasury questions on 29 January.

**Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con):** Happy birthday, Mr Speaker. May we have an urgent statement on changes by Barclays bank to its charges for community groups? Previously, anyone with assets worth more than £100,000 would have free banking, but the bank is now going to subject charities and community groups with assets worth more than £100,000 to very expensive charges. That will have a devastating effect on charities in Harlow, such as the Harlow food bank and the Michael Roberts Charitable Trust. May we have an urgent statement from the Government and can we take action to deal with the issue?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am pleased that my right hon. Friend has raised this point. Charities should not be placed on the same commercial playing field as businesses, and it is right that the money they raise can be spent on their charitable work. The decision taken by the bank is disappointing. I am a big fan of bank account number portability and have campaigned for it in the past. I would, therefore, make a suggestion to charities in Harlow that are concerned about this: vote with your feet and switch your account to a provider that will provide free banking. I hope that the bank concerned will have heard my right hon. Friend's question, and I suggest that he raises the issue again in an Adjournment debate.

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** International Christian Concern has reported that Vietnamese Government officials arrested and threatened 33 Christians in Phú Lóm village last November. Police reportedly tried to force the Christians to abandon their faith and worship a statue of the Buddha instead. Four of the group were arrested and beaten after they refused to do so, and Government officials continued to harass Christians in several other raids throughout November and December. Will the Leader of the House agree to a statement or a debate on this very important issue?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a matter of great concern regarding the abuse of people for their faith, and he is right to do so. I encourage him to raise it directly at Foreign Office questions next week.

**Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con):** I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Sir Edward Leigh) about the issue of making up this House's rules on the hoof. There is a very strong case for a business of the House committee, which my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House supported in a Conservative manifesto some time ago.

The Leader of the House has referred to next week's motion on private Members' Bills. She, my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Sir Christopher Chope) and I signed a motion that would have provided extra days—one of which would have been this Friday—but it was blocked by the Labour Chief Whip. Does the Leader of the House still plan to give us those extra days, or is there going to be a reduction in their number?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I have announced that the House will have an opportunity next Wednesday to debate additional days for private Members' Bills. I have listened carefully to representations made by colleagues, and I will table a motion ahead of that debate so that we can continue to make good progress on private Members' Bills in this Session.

**Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab):** On Sunday evening, 23-year-old Nicole Newman was killed crossing the road in Penge, and her eight-month-old baby remains in a critical condition in hospital. I am sure that the Leader of the House will want to join me in offering condolences to her family, including her partner Charlie. While there has been no suggestion that the driver was speeding, our council in Bromley has failed to implement 20 mph speed limits in residential areas, despite pressure from Labour councillors to do so. Can we please therefore have a debate in Government time on speed limits in residential areas?

**Andrea Leadsom:** May I first say that that is an absolute tragedy? I am sure that all hon. Members will want to send their deep condolences to the family. The hon. Lady raises a very important point about speed limits. She will be aware that it is possible for local authorities to lower or indeed raise limits where that is felt suitable. I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate so that she can discuss the details of this tragic case.

**Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con):** Staffordshire police, in order better to investigate and prosecute online child sexual exploitation, has taken on some world-leading software from Semantics 21, which was developed in my own Stafford constituency. This software has been sold around the world—in the United States, Canada, and Australia, and to police forces in Europe as well—yet it seems very difficult to get police forces in the UK, even those that would like to do it, to take it up. Will she see how we can have a debate or a statement on whether we can use world-leading software developed in the United Kingdom in UK police forces?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I commend my hon. Friend for raising the possibility of this software, and I absolutely agree that something that is created in the United Kingdom that saves police officers having to spend their time trawling through horrific images is a very good idea indeed. I encourage him to take it up directly with Home Office Ministers so that he can discuss with them what more can be done.

**Vicky Foxcroft (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab):** Yesterday, Ofsted Chief Inspector Amanda Spielman launched new guidelines for Ofsted. If adopted, the new proposals would mean that schools practising off-rolling would be punished by inspectors. I am glad to see that the proposals were welcomed by the Government, but will they provide a statement on how they intend to support schools with more resources to meet the new criteria?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am very pleased to see that the hon. Lady has an Adjournment debate scheduled soon to discuss this directly with Ministers. She is extremely diligent in the way that she tackles this issue and she is right to do that. She will appreciate that Ofsted plays a critical role in our system and its inspection of schools,

colleges and early-years providers has helped to drive up education standards right across the country. The Government are working closely with Ofsted as it develops its new framework, and will continue to do so to make sure that we keep raising standards while ensuring that the balance is right between improving school standards and protecting against exclusions.

**Bob Blackman** (Harrow East) (Con): May I join others, Mr Speaker, in wishing you a happy birthday for tomorrow, and, unusually for me, in hoping that you watch Arsenal win, particularly as they are playing Chelsea?

Across the country, a spate of local authorities is embarking on very dodgy financial deals. In particular, Harrow Council has wasted £25 million on a failed regeneration scheme and is trying to hush it up. Can we therefore have a debate in Government time on the limits on local authorities to borrow and invest in regeneration schemes?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am sorry to hear of my hon. Friend's concern about this particular investment by his local council. I encourage him to take it up either in an Adjournment debate or, indeed, at Housing, Communities and Local Government questions on Monday 28 January.

**Mr Barry Sheerman** (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate the Leader of the House on her note of whimsy as she opened proceedings today. It was much appreciated. A new harmony seems to be breaking out, which many of us, on all Benches, will welcome.

On a very serious point, as a Member of Parliament for West Yorkshire, I was deeply disappointed to see, yet again, police arrests of gangs suspected of grooming young girls and children. This is possibly the 14th town, city or urban area with such a case. Can we not have a debate on the need to look at the causes and what has been happening in our towns and cities so that we can really understand what has been going on and how we stop it?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I understand that the hon. Gentleman works with my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Victoria Prentis) on a cross-party group that is looking into the issue. It is right that we do that and I commend him on trying to find a way forward. I encourage him to seek a Backbench Business Committee debate so that that discussion can take place directly with Ministers. It is incredibly important that we do all we can to find out what is causing this problem of grooming young children and that we put a stop to it as soon as possible.

**Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): An NCP car park in the centre of Crawley has been sending motorists fines, even though it has not obtained the correct planning permission for signage. I seek assurances from the Government that the Parking (Code of Practice) Bill of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight) that is currently in the other place will receive Royal Assent at the earliest possible opportunity.

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend raises a point that concerns not just his constituents in Crawley, but many others around the country. Drivers expect NCP to play by the rules and erect clear signage, making them aware

of any charges. The private Member's Bill of my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Sir Greg Knight) has gathered support across the House and with industry trade bodies, creating a single code of practice that applies to all private parking operators. This will be a significant step towards greater fairness, and I look forward to its swift passage through the Lords.

**Ian C. Lucas** (Wrexham) (Lab): Can we have an urgent statement on the north Wales growth deal that was announced in the autumn Budget? This morning's announcement by Hitachi concerning Wylfa power station takes away a £20 billion investment in north Wales and completely alters the premise on which the growth deal was introduced. We urgently need to discuss this, as it is a major infrastructure project not just for north Wales and north-west England, but right across the UK.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman is right to raise this issue. I was a big fan of that project and am disappointed to see what is happening now. He will appreciate that there is a statement following business questions and I encourage him to take this up with Ministers then.

**Anne-Marie Trevelyan** (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (Con): Will the Leader of the House bring forward a debate in Government time for the House to discuss enshrining in law the rights of the 3.2 million EU nationals living in the UK now so that, regardless of whether or not a deal can be finalised by 29 March, our great nation's commitment to these EU citizens—our friends and neighbours—is absolute?

**Andrea Leadsom:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this important issue. All EU citizens who have come to the UK to make their lives here and contribute to our economy and society are very welcome, and they will remain welcome under all circumstances, whether we leave the European Union with or without a deal.

**Alex Norris** (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): The outstanding Roy Castle Lung Cancer Foundation, in conjunction with our local health services and my own Rebalancing charity, are bringing lung scans to Aspley, Bilborough and Strelley this month, following our very successful roll-out in Bulwell last year that detected cancers and saved lives. Might we have a debate in Government time about the importance of lung health and the benefits of rolling out lung health screening across the country?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman and his constituents on their excellent and incredibly important work in lung screening. I agree with him about the importance of such screening. He will be pleased to know that the new NHS 10-year plan includes a much greater focus on early detection and prevention, with the aspiration of many more people surviving cancers in the future. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can raise these issues directly with Ministers.

**Douglas Ross** (Moray) (Con): Could we have a debate about local hospitals? This year is the 200th anniversary of Dr Gray's Hospital in Elgin. Despite being the

[Douglas Ross]

smallest district general hospital anywhere in Scotland, the 550 staff provide outstanding care for local constituents. Would the Leader of the House accept my invitation to visit Dr Gray's to meet the local staff, who provide outstanding care in the hospital?

**Andrea Leadsom:** As ever, my hon. Friend is a strong voice for his constituents, and I congratulate Dr Gray's hospital on its anniversary. I know that he has been working hard to support the "Keep MUM" campaign to reverse the downgrading of the maternity unit at the hospital—an issue that he has raised at business questions previously. I would love to visit my hon. Friend's constituency if I can find a slot in my diary; he has raised so many fascinating stories about his constituency that I think it would be a truly interesting visit.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I have been shocked at times by the attitudes that are displayed in this House. When I was a Government Whip, I remember being particularly shocked by a Tory Opposition Whip who refused to nod through the Lobby a recently delivered mother—a nursing mother. I think that this week many of us in this House are ashamed of the position that one of our colleagues has been put in simply to register her vote on the most important thing that probably any of us will be voting on during our time in this place, whereby she had to put her health into second place in order to do that. I think that many of us feel ashamed. That is not the way, in 2019, that we should treat each other in any workplace. Because we will now be having a series of other very important votes, may I ask the Leader of the House when we will actually see the proposal for proxy voting implemented so that Members are not put in that position ever again?

**Andrea Leadsom:** May I say that I have the greatest regard for the hon. Lady? She raises very important issues in this place and she is right to do so. She is raising the issue of one of our colleagues who chose to come to the House to vote. The usual channels will all confirm, and indeed the Speaker confirmed yesterday, that a pair was offered. That is the normal arrangement for somebody who cannot be present. It was offered well in advance and that offer remains open to her. I myself am extremely concerned about the hon. Lady's welfare and wish her all health and happiness with her new baby. I do personally wish that she would follow the advice of her doctors. I genuinely do not believe that any of her constituents would possibly require her to turn up here in a wheelchair when it was perfectly possible to have received what is the normal arrangement in this place for people with conditions—and there were others, with long-term health conditions, who were paired on that same day. I really do wish that she would accept that offer.

**Mr Speaker:** I thank the hon. Lady for her question and the Leader of the House for what she has said. Of course, as we discovered last summer, it is possible for the credibility of the pairing system to be damaged, perhaps irreparably, when it is abused or dishonoured. Moreover, as hon. and right hon. Members are aware, the House has twice debated the matter of proxy voting in circumstances of baby leave, and on both occasions the will of the House in support of such a system was

made clear. Therefore, it is imperative, following those two debates in February and September of last year, that effect is given to the will of the House. It would of course be intolerable—literally intolerable—if, for example, a Whips Office, because of its own opposition to such a change, were to frustrate the will of the House. That simply cannot happen, and I very much doubt that Members will be tolerant of it for any length of time. The House has spoken and change must happen. It is a lamentable failure of leadership thus far that it has not done so.

**Hannah Bardell** (Livingston) (SNP): I do not mean to labour the point, Mr Speaker, but I think it utterly incredible that in our employment as Members of Parliament we are treated differently from anybody else across the UK or beyond. There is no other job anywhere where someone would be asked to, and put in the position where they have to, choose to come to work the day before they give birth or to delay the birth of their child. I am sorry, but I am fed up with hearing excuses from the Leader of the House and ridiculous arguments about not putting in place proxy voting, baby leave, and, frankly, electronic voting. We only need to look to Wales and Scotland, where we have Parliaments that have seats for every Member and electronic voting. For goodness' sake, this is the 21st century—what are this Government doing? It is about time they sorted this out so that we can enjoy a proper status and be able to consider having children. I do not have any children but I may consider having some at some point, and I do not know how that would be manageable in the current circumstance.

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her comments, and I am listening very carefully. She will appreciate that what happens in this place is a matter for Members. A number of Members have raised with me the need for those with long-term illnesses, family emergencies and so on to be accommodated, but I have heard from other Members that that would not command the support of the House. I am seeking to provide a solution that can command the support of the House.

The hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) was able to be nodded through. If it was a matter of having her vote recorded—[*Interruption.*] Members are shaking their heads. The usual channels agreed that she could come to this place at any moment on that day and be nodded through, to have her vote recorded. On this occasion, until we have finalised the way forward, that is my strong recommendation. I hope that the hon. Lady will take medical advice and not come into the House unnecessarily.

**Mr Speaker:** I am very sorry that the hon. Member for Livingston (Hannah Bardell) has had to raise this and that the Government Whips Office is blocking progress on this matter, but let us hope that some progress will be made before too long. [*Interruption.*] Well, that is the situation—that is the reality, and that is the evidence. It is very clear; there is no doubt about it.

**Chris Ruane** (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): Penblwydd hapus, Mr Speaker, as we say in Wales.

In 1991, 9 million prescriptions were written for antidepressants. By 2016, that figure had gone up to 65 million. In 2004, the National Institute for Clinical

Excellence recommended and approved the science of mindfulness for the treatment of repeat episodes of depression. Can the Leader of the House guarantee a debate in Government time on why the use of antidepressants has shot up over that period, while mindfulness has just bubbled along?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises an incredibly important point. I certainly was not aware of the shocking rise in the use of antidepressants. He will be aware that mindfulness courses are offered in this place. I have tried to attend one, but due to the busyness of this place, I have not managed to get there yet. I certainly agree that we could all do with some mindfulness at this time.

The hon. Gentleman will be aware that the Government are investing significant sums in improving mental health and making good on the pledge for parity of esteem between physical and mental health. We will see many more people able to access talking therapies and the kind of support he is talking about, but I encourage him to seek a Backbench Business Committee debate, because I am sure that many Members would want to contribute to it.

**Tonia Antoniazzi** (Gower) (Lab): There is a great deal of ambiguity about state pensions for 1950s women, now that the legal challenge by the campaign group BackTo60 is in the High Court. Can the Leader of the House advise whether parliamentarians can continue to discuss and make representations in the House about this very important issue and, more importantly, whether the Government will respond?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I can assure the hon. Lady that Members can always continue to raise issues and concerns in this place. She will be aware that the Government do not comment on judicial reviews that are under way, due to the separation of powers. I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate or a Westminster Hall debate, so that she and other Members can discuss, as we have on many an occasion, the real concerns about the WASPI women.

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): I echo the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Gower (Tonia Antoniazzi). On a slightly different point, I have a constituent who entered into two contracts relating to machinery for cosmetic laser treatment. The contract for the training and asset, neither of which were particularly effective, cost my constituent a great deal of money. In addition, great concern was expressed after the training about the value of it and whether it was in fact safe to carry out the procedure. Can we have a debate in Government time on the use of health equipment for cosmetic purposes and companies' use of dual contracts to, in essence, entrap people to spend money on a product that does not appear to be worth it?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a very important point. We are all aware of stories of unnecessary procedures and the inappropriate use of so-called medical interventions. He is absolutely right to raise that, and I encourage him to seek either an Adjournment debate on the specific case he wants to raise, or perhaps a Westminster Hall debate so that hon. Members can contribute with their own experiences.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): The Leader of the House does not need mindfulness; she should just carry on reading "Winnie-the-Pooh". For when she sends her card—signed, "Love, Andrea"—to you, Mr Speaker, I would remind her that when Piglet asked Pooh:

"How do you spell 'love'?",

he replied:

"You don't spell it...you feel it."

Even a bear of very little brain knows that this House wants to rule out a no-deal Brexit. When is the Leader of the House going to give us an opportunity to do just that?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am just too tempted, Mr Speaker; you are going to love this. I say in response to the hon. Gentleman:

"Rivers know this: there is no hurry. We shall get there some day."

On the hon. Gentleman's point, a competent Government have to continue to prepare for all eventualities. That is just the reality.

**Colleen Fletcher** (Coventry North East) (Lab): Coventry's year-long reign as the European city of sport is officially under way. Our city will use the year not only to promote and celebrate the benefits of sport and physical activity, but to act as a catalyst for a fitter, healthier and happier Coventry. Will the Leader of the House join me in congratulating my city on securing European city of sport status, and will she also arrange a debate in Government time on the positive impact that sport can have on individuals and the wider society?

**Andrea Leadsom:** First, I thoroughly congratulate all in Coventry on the fantastic start to their year as city of sport. We all wish them well. It is a brilliant role model for all of us who want to see more activity in schools. In our own lives, we should all get out there and do sporting activities when we can. I congratulate the hon. Lady on raising that in the Chamber, and I will certainly look at whether we can facilitate Government time for such a debate.

**Gavin Newlands** (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): The Bridge of Weir village post office in my constituency is run by the community for the community, but it is not recognised as a community post office. It is therefore unable to access the funds set aside to secure the future of village post offices, due to rules set by the Government on distance to retailers and other post offices. However, no other retailer is interested in taking on the franchise, and there is very limited public transport to the next village post office. May we have a debate on the importance of community post offices and the rules surrounding them, particularly in the light of many bank branches closing and people relying on post offices?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the issue of community post offices. They do a fantastic job, and they are often the only retail outlet as well as the only financial services outlet. As he knows, the post office network has agreed to provide basic banking services for communities, which is absolutely vital. I encourage him to seek an Adjournment debate, so that he can raise his thoughts directly with a Minister.

**Carolyn Harris** (Swansea East) (Lab): Last April, the Prime Minister announced the establishment of a children's funeral fund in memory of my son, Martin. Nine months later, we have still not seen it. That means that nearly 3,000 families have had to pay to bury their children. In November, I and other Members from across this House wrote to the Prime Minister and asked for an update. We have not received a response. Will the Leader of the House advise me where else I can go to make sure that Martin's fund becomes a reality?

**Andrea Leadsom:** May I once again commend the hon. Lady for her fantastic campaign, which has had such widespread support across the House? I will be very happy to chase up a response as soon as possible on her behalf.

**Matt Western** (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): May we please have an urgent debate on the disposal of local authority public assets? We are seeing an industrial-scale sell-off. It is clear that certain local councils, such as local Warwick District Council, are entering into deals with private companies, such as Public Sector plc, without even going out to tender. Those companies are profiting greatly, as are the Guernsey-based private equity companies that are helping to finance the deals. I am extremely concerned that we are on the verge of a Carillion-style risk, given the concentration of these deals with one company such as PSP.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman is right to raise that concerning issue. Questions to the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government are on Monday 28 January, and I encourage him to raise the matter directly with Ministers.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Before 29 March, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs must get through something like 80 statutory instruments, and the Agriculture Bill and the Fisheries Bill will come back on Report and Third Reading. The Leader of the House might be Superwoman, but how will she do that?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I am absolutely not Superwoman, but I consider the matter carefully on a regular basis—indeed, I consider daily the priorities for legislation and the time available. Obviously we are not flush with time, but I believe we have enough to get all our secondary legislation through, as well as the primary legislation that needs Royal Assent by departure date. I will continue to keep such matters under review, and they will require the co-operation and support of the House.

**Melanie Onn** (Great Grimsby) (Lab): The National Police Air Service helicopter has been called out 1,044 times by Humberside police in the past year, and deployed only 593 times. May we have a debate in Government time about the need for and availability of shared policing resources, to ensure that areas such as Grimsby get the community safety they deserve?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Lady raises an important point, and it is vital that resources are shared appropriately when they can be, to ensure that all our citizens receive appropriate levels of support from our police and other

emergency services. I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate so that she can raise the matter directly with Ministers.

**Gareth Snell** (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab/Co-op): The Leader of the House's responsibilities for the restoration and renewal project mean that she has a great opportunity to shape one of the biggest public sector procurement exercises over the next generation. With that in mind, how will she ensure that once this palace is renewed, it is stuffed to the rafters with the best of British manufacturing? When it comes to ceramics—[*Laughter.*] Yes, I am predictable, but my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent North (Ruth Smeeth) and I would be more than happy to facilitate conversations between the ceramics industry and architects here to ensure that, whether for pipes, plates, teapots or tiles, Stoke-on-Trent has its place in the new palace.

**Hon. Members:** Hear, hear!

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman got a resoundingly popular response to that. Of course, there is a long way to go with the restoration and renewal of the palace. We have made good progress, and the legislation is now under joint scrutiny under the chairmanship of my right hon. Friend the Member for Meriden (Dame Caroline Spelman). Once that has taken place, we can start considering procurement procedures. There is already a commitment to look carefully at maximising the use of UK producers as far as possible, and there will be plenty of opportunities for all sorts of small and medium-sized enterprises in our constituencies.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): Ellis, who is the grandson of my constituent Eleanor Haining, has a rare and life-threatening brain disease—indeed, he has the only known case in the world with such early symptoms. As can be imagined, he needs a lot of specialist equipment to get him from home to hospital, and his family urgently need a larger car. The disability living allowance mobility component cannot be accessed until a child reaches three years of age, so may we have a Government statement to address that anomaly and say whether specific exemptions could be applied in such circumstances?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman rightly raises a serious constituency issue, and if he would like to write to me with the details I will take it up with the Department for Work and Pensions on his behalf. I am sure that if he raises it with Ministers they will also be happy to deal with him directly.

**Vernon Coaker** (Gedling) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House and everybody who has made it possible to debate knife crime next Thursday. This is a serious issue, and I believe that last week, on 9 January, there was a meeting of the serious violence taskforce. I will not stop saying that the Home Secretary should come to the Chamber to make a regular statement to the House about what is happening with respect to knife crime and other serious violence on our streets. Debates are fine, but we need regular statements. Will the Leader of the House speak to the Home Secretary about that so that we get regular updates? I think all Members of the House would appreciate that enormously.

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman has raised this very serious issue on a number of occasions at business questions, and he is absolutely right to do so. He knows that I share his grave concern about what is happening on our streets. He is also aware that the serious violence strategy and taskforce, the Offensive Weapons Bill, and the various community projects to encourage young people away from an appalling life of crime, pain and death are a real focus for the Government. I can assure him that I will write to the Home Secretary following our exchange today and pass on his concerns.

**Liz McInnes** (Heywood and Middleton) (Lab): May we have a debate on the UK's most common genetic disorder, haemochromatosis, following today's report that it may be 20 times more common than was previously thought?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I too heard about that report, which was very concerning. The hon. Lady is absolutely right to raise this matter in the House. I encourage her to seek an Adjournment debate so that she can discuss it directly with Ministers.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): All the best for your birthday on Saturday, Mr Speaker. I do not know about you, but in my experience it is a very fine week to have a birthday, and this year has been more memorable than most.

It was a great pleasure last week to visit Members of the 277th Boys' Brigade in my constituency, who attend each week at St Monica's primary school in Milton. I presented them with badges for all their work during UK Parliament Week on the centenary of the Representation of the People Act 1918, which led to women's suffrage. They did a lot of work on that, so it was great to present them with the badges.

Will the Leader of the House consider holding a debate in Government time on the excellent work of youth organisations such as the Boys' Brigade, which was founded in Glasgow by William Alexander Smith in 1883 at Woodside hall, just a small distance away from where the Boys' Brigade in my constituency meets today? Today, the Boys' Brigade has over 750,000 members in more than 60 countries around the world. That is a huge achievement and a huge opportunity. Will the Leader of the House consider calling a debate in Government time on that wonderful achievement?

**Andrea Leadsom:** First, may I congratulate the Boys' Brigade in the hon. Gentleman's constituency? It is the most amazing youth movement right across the world and it really is an example of what can be done to encourage young people to engage with the world around them, particularly during Parliament Week. Just last year, we celebrated 100 years since some women got the vote. Congratulations to everyone on their work. I do think there would be popular calls from hon. Members to discuss this issue, and I encourage the hon. Gentleman to talk to the Chairman of the Backbench Business Committee to see whether it could facilitate such a debate.

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): The Greater Manchester spatial framework is causing a great deal of anxiety in my constituency. The plan, with

a Government-imposed housing target, will mean a net loss of green-belt land. At the same time, insufficient funding is in place to redevelop brownfield sites that the community is desperate to see redeveloped. How can it be right that landowners, through no positive action on their part, can be made millionaires overnight through a simple change in land use policy, when brownfield sites, which are desperate for funding from the Government, are being left to rot? How can that be a fair settlement for the community?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman raises a very serious point. We all recognise the urgent need for much, much more house building, so that more people can meet the aspiration of owning their own home or being in secure living accommodation. It is vital that we do that, but the way in which we do it is incredibly important. Local Government questions are on Monday 28 January, and I encourage him to raise that with Ministers then.

**Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): Mr Speaker, may I, too, wish you a happy birthday on Saturday? It seems that all the best people are born in January, especially my mum. [HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear."] That's on the record now.

**Mr Speaker:** David Bowie was as well.

**Chris Elmore:** Indeed, Mr Speaker.

The Leader of the House will be aware of my ongoing work to try to tackle the impact of social media, especially cyber-bullying, on the mental health of young people. The inquiry I chaired has recently concluded and we hope to bring a report forward this spring. What is clear from the early findings, including from young people who have given reams of oral and written evidence, is that the Government need to do more to start to tackle the problems relating to the effect of social media on young people's mental health. May we have a debate soon, so that we can debate these important issues and the Government can start responding to the very real problems that young people are facing across social media platforms?

**Andrea Leadsom:** I have something in common with the hon. Gentleman, as my mum also has her birthday in January—as of course does A. A. Milne, who has been the theme of today's business questions. Indeed, A. A. Milne's birthday is tomorrow.

The hon. Gentleman is raising a very serious point about the harm being done to young people's mental health, not necessarily only by cyber-bullying and online trolling and abuse, but also by the overuse of social media, which militates against them having an outdoor life whereby people say, "Go outside and play if you're bored." A lot needs to be done not only by the social media giants, which have to come to the table and sort out some of the problems we have, but by society generally to make it less acceptable to spend hours and hours online instead of doing other things. The hon. Gentleman raises an important point, and I pay tribute to him for doing so. I encourage him perhaps to seek a Westminster Hall debate so that all Members can share their experiences.

**Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): May we have a debate on pension credit and universal credit? Will the Leader of the House say what justification there can be for forcing some older couples to claim universal credit instead of pension credit, thus cutting £7,000 from those low-income households?

**Andrea Leadsom:** The hon. Gentleman will be aware that we have had quite a lot of urgent questions and statements on universal credit, and I hope he has taken the opportunity to raise the issue then. I reassure him that the Government are committed to ensuring that the roll-out of universal credit is fair. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has already put in place some changes. If the hon. Gentleman wants to raise a further issue, I encourage him perhaps to seek an Adjournment debate so that he can raise it directly with Ministers.

## Nuclear Update

11.52 am

**The Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Greg Clark):** With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement following Hitachi's announcement this morning that it intends to suspend development of the proposed Wylfa nuclear power project, as well as work relating to Oldbury.

The economics of the energy market have changed significantly in recent years. The cost of renewable technologies such as offshore wind has fallen dramatically, to the point where they now require very little public subsidy and will soon require none. We have also seen a strengthening in the pipeline of projects coming forward, meaning that renewable energy may now be just as cheap, but also readily available.

As a result of the developments over the last eight years, we have a well-supplied electricity market. Our electricity margin forecast is more than 11% for this winter, having grown for each of the last five years. While that is good news for consumers as we strive to reduce carbon emissions at the lowest cost, that positive trend has not been true when it comes to new nuclear. Across the world, a combination of factors, including tighter safety regulations, has seen the cost of most new nuclear projects increase as the cost of alternatives has fallen and the cost of construction has risen. That has made the challenge of attracting private finance into projects more difficult than ever, with investors favouring other technologies that are less capital-intensive up front, quicker to build and less exposed to cost overruns.

As I made clear to the House in June, the Government continue to believe that a diversity of energy sources is the best way of delivering secure supply at the lowest cost and that nuclear has an important role to play in our future energy mix. In my June statement, I therefore reaffirmed the Government's commitment to nuclear. I also announced that we would be entering into negotiations with Hitachi over its project at Wylfa. Given the financing challenges facing new nuclear projects, I made clear to the House that we would be considering a new approach to supporting Wylfa that included the potential for significant direct investment from the Government.

As I am sure the House will understand, while negotiations were ongoing the details were commercially sensitive, but following Hitachi's announcement I can set out in more candid terms the support for the project that the Government were willing to offer. First, they were willing to consider taking a one-third equity stake in it, alongside investment from Hitachi, agencies of the Government of Japan, and other strategic partners. Secondly, they were willing to consider providing all the debt financing required for the completion of construction. Thirdly, they agreed to consider providing a contract for difference, with a strike price expected to be no more than £75 per MWh. I hope the House will agree that that is a significant and generous package of potential support, which goes beyond what any Government have been willing to consider in the past.

Despite that potential investment, and strong support from the Government of Japan, Hitachi reached the view that the project still posed too great a commercial

challenge, particularly given its desire to deconsolidate it from its balance sheet and the likely level of return on its investment.

The Government continue to believe that nuclear has an important role to play, but, critically, it must represent good value for the taxpayer and the consumer. I believe that the package of support that we were prepared to consider was the limit of what could be justified in this instance. I was not prepared to ask the taxpayer to take on a larger share of the equity, as that would have meant taxpayers' taking on the majority of construction risk, and the Government's becoming the largest shareholder with responsibility for the delivery of a nuclear project. I also could not justify a strike price above £75 per MWh for this financing structure, given the declining costs of alternative technologies and the financial support and risk-sharing already on offer from the Government, which were not available for Hinkley Point C.

Let me reassure the House that Hitachi's decision to suspend the current negotiations on the project was reached amicably between all parties once it became plain that it was not possible to agree a way forward. Hitachi has made clear that while it is suspending project development at this stage, it wishes to continue discussions with the Government on bringing forward new nuclear projects at both Wylfa and Oldbury, and we intend to work closely with it in the weeks and months ahead. We will also continue to strengthen our long-standing partnership with the Government of Japan on a range of civil nuclear matters; and, importantly, we will continue to champion the nuclear sector in north Wales, which is home to world-leading expertise in areas such as nuclear innovation and decommissioning and which offers ideal sites for the deployment of small modular reactors.

If new nuclear is to be successful in a more competitive energy market—I very much believe that it can be—it is clear that we need to consider a new approach to financing future projects, including those at Sizewell and Bradwell. Therefore, as I said initially in June, we are reviewing the viability of a regulated asset base model and assessing whether it can offer value for money for consumers and taxpayers. I can confirm that we intend to publish our assessment of that method by the summer at the latest.

Through our nuclear sector deal, we are exploring the possibility of working with the sector to put the UK at the forefront of various forms of nuclear innovation. We are looking into whether advanced nuclear technologies such as small modular reactors could be an important source of low-carbon energy in the future, and we are considering a proposal from a UK consortium led by Rolls-Royce that would result in a significant joint investment.

I began my statement by outlining the challenges that the nuclear industry faces as the energy market changes. I will set out a new approach to financing new nuclear in the planned energy White Paper in the summer. I know that the future of the nuclear sector is of great interest to many Members, and I will ensure that those on both sides of the House, and its Select Committees, have an opportunity to consider the proposals.

I understand the disappointment that the dedicated and expert staff at Wylfa and Oldbury will feel as a result of today's announcement by Hitachi. New

commercial nuclear investments around the world are experiencing the same challenges as new sources of power become cheaper and more abundant. Nuclear has an important role to play as part of a diverse energy mix, but it must be at a price that is fair to electricity bill payers and to taxpayers. We will work closely with Hitachi and the industry to ensure that we find the best means of financing these and other new nuclear projects.

Our commitment to Anglesey—with its nuclear, renewables and deep expertise, it is a real island of energy—will not be changed by this decision. I will work with the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen), the Welsh Government and the local community to ensure that its renown is supported and strengthened, and I will do the same with my hon. Friend the Member for Thornbury and Yate (Luke Hall).

I pay tribute to the staff of Horizon and Hitachi and to my own officials, those in the Department for International Trade and our embassy in Japan, and those of the Government of Japan, who spent many months doing their utmost to support a financing package. I know that they left no stone unturned in seeking a viable commercial model for this investment, and I very much hope that their work and professionalism will lead to a successful partnership following this period of review. I commend this statement to the House.

12 noon

**Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, but he must recognise that the Government's new nuclear strategy, adopted by the Conservatives and spearheaded by their Liberal Democrat coalition partners in 2013, is now in complete meltdown. The Government have reacted far too slowly to ongoing concerns from nuclear partners, such as Hitachi's UK nuclear arm Horizon, which have been raising concerns over funding mechanisms since purchasing the project from RWE and E.ON back in 2012. Today's decision to withdraw from the Wylfa nuclear power plant lays a significant blow on our economy.

The company's statement reads:

"Horizon Nuclear Power has today announced that it will suspend its UK nuclear development programme".

That sounds very much like not only is Wylfa on the chopping block, but so, perhaps, are plans for Hitachi's other nuclear project—the Oldbury nuclear power plant in Gloucestershire. The Secretary of State has stated that Hitachi wants to work on new projects at Wylfa and Oldbury. What does that mean in the light of the clear statement Horizon has made this morning?

Only two months ago, the Government's lack of clarity over funding for new nuclear led Toshiba to withdraw from its new nuclear project in Moorside. With the three reactors expected at Moorside and two each in Wylfa and Oldbury, that makes a total of 9.2 GW of new nuclear energy that will not now be built. Can the Secretary of State tell us where he will find this power—not only through the next winter, but over the next 10 years?

The long-term coherence of the UK capacity arrangements is now significantly disrupted. With the capacity market also falling foul of legal challenge, these elements add up to a strategic energy sector that is now being grossly mishandled by this Government.

[*Dr Alan Whitehead*]

Now that their nuclear plan has gone up in smoke what plan can the Secretary of State spell out to us for finding new backers for these projects? Given the apparent capacity constraint, is he intending to uprate the coming contracts for difference auction, removing the caps on capacity and funding that he has imposed to provide further opportunity to build new renewable energy capacity to replace what has been lost?

For this plant at Wylfa alone, Hitachi had planned to invest £16 billion. Does the Secretary of State have contingency plans, rather than warm words, that he can announce today for the economies of Anglesey and north Wales, where Wylfa was projected to create up to 10,000 jobs at peak periods of construction and 850 permanent jobs? For that matter, what about Moorside and the plant it lost two months ago? Government dithering leading to the cancellation of that plant has seriously undermined the UK's energy security, its decarbonisation goals and the economy of Cumbria. The people of Moorside expected the plant, and roads, infrastructure and even apartment blocks had been built in preparation, all of which will now go to waste.

I come back the issue of Wylfa. Given that it is the Welsh economy that has lost £16 billion of inward investment, will the Secretary of State think about the £1.3 billion—less than a tenth of the price—required to build the Swansea tidal lagoon?

Given that energy is one of the sectors that creates the most carbon, today's news deepens our profound concern about the Government's ability to meet their own climate targets. The Labour party is proud to have announced our goal of reaching net-zero greenhouse gas emissions before 2050 and we congratulate the Government on attempting to catch up with our green ambitions. But given that the clean growth plan was already falling short and the Government were already failing to meet those targets, can the Secretary of State give us some detail today on how he expects to meet UK carbon budgets in the light of today's developments? Can he assure us he is not intending to replace the low-carbon power that has been lost with new fossil fuel plants?

Finally, there appears to be some confusion about what was and was not said about nuclear power when the Prime Minister met Japanese Prime Minister Shinzō Abe last week. Did she raise Wylfa nuclear power station when she met the Japanese Prime Minister? It is an odd coincidence that this decision from Japan-based Hitachi has come so close to those meetings. Either they talked about the project and what was said was unsatisfactory, and the project was cancelled, or the Prime Minister did not think it worth mentioning, and it was still cancelled.

Confidence in the Government is a very live question today. The people of north Wales and Moorside have every reason to have none in this Administration.

**Greg Clark:** I will respond to the hon. Gentleman's points, but I will start by saying one thing about nuclear investment. I have been clear in maintaining my support and that of the Government for new nuclear, but, for investments of over 60 years, a degree of cross-party support is required for those commercial investments, which, as we have seen, are difficult to secure.

The hon. Gentleman expressed disappointment that the investment was being suspended, but he himself has said we do not need nuclear power. The Leader of the Opposition has said he is passionately opposed to nuclear power and nuclear weapons in equal measure, the shadow Chancellor said he would end nuclear power within the first 100 days of a Labour Government, and the new Welsh First Minister said:

"I think the attitude to nuclear power we have here in Wales is to be sceptical about it".

If we in this House want to encourage international investors to invest in new projects, it behoves us to express solidarity and consistency of purpose.

I have been very clear about why Hitachi made this decision. We understand it. It is was commercial decision. The hon. Gentleman did not say whether he would have gone further than we were willing to go. Is he proposing that we take more than one third of the equity—in effect, take Government control and all the risk attached to such an investment? He did not say whether we should be providing a contract for more than £75 per MWh, which would go straight to the bills of customers—both industrial and residential. It is hard to say how we can go beyond financing all the debts. I think, then, that fair-minded Members would accept that we have made a substantial and generous offer, but unfortunately it has not been possible to achieve the outcome that all sides wanted.

The hon. Gentleman asks how we can continue discussions and why the company has suspended, rather than cancelled, the proposals. It is for the reasons I have said. We are going to look at new financing models, including the regulatory asset base model recommended by the Public Accounts Committee. I think it makes sense to do that.

On our future energy needs, the hon. Gentleman was wrong to talk about the next 10 years, because we are talking about supplies beyond that. There is no issue with the future security of supply; National Grid itself has said that. Plans for Wylfa are long term and there is time for the market to react to this announcement. In many ways, the challenge of financing new nuclear is one of falling costs and greater abundance of alternative technologies, which means that nuclear is being out-competed. Far from there being a difficulty with future supply, those are the reasons why the competitiveness of nuclear is more difficult.

The hon. Gentleman mentions the other projects, including at Moorside in Cumbria. As I said, that decision was taken for different reasons, but in the review and the White Paper we will publish, that model will be available to all such sites. Finally, in the case of other renewables, we have seen a great expansion in renewable capacity, and that will continue. He mentioned the case of the Swansea tidal lagoon. No one is more enthusiastic than I about innovation and new technologies, but the truth is that the costs of the proposed project were three times that of Hinkley Point C, and a full programme would make a tiny contribution to our energy supply for a much greater cost.

I hope that we can work together in the weeks and months ahead. The hon. Gentleman is an expert and a dedicated student of energy policy. In considering the White Paper, I hope that we can agree an approach that will command the support of international investors, so that this country can continue to be a nuclear nation.

**Stephen Crabb** (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for his statement and for the extraordinary lengths that he was willing to go to in trying to create the right conditions for this important north Wales project to happen. However, given Hitachi's decision, given the decision on Moorside and, in fact, given the failure of a whole swathe of Japanese nuclear projects around the world, are the days of relying on mammoth nuclear power stations that make huge demands of taxpayers' cash over? Should we not be putting more energy into examining smaller nuclear reactor technology?

**Greg Clark:** My right hon. Friend is right that small modular reactors have significant potential. The nuclear sector deal that we agreed with the sector and published last year contains a substantial commitment to small modular reactors, many of which would be deployable on the sites of existing and recently decommissioned nuclear reactors. However, even large new nuclear reactors can make a useful contribution. There is a challenge in every country, and this is by no means just a feature of Japanese investors. I have described clearly and, I hope, candidly the challenges that exist given the abundant availability and falling prices of alternatives. That is why we will take forward a serious assessment of whether a different financing model might make the economics more competitive. Again, the sector deal that we struck contains a programme to reduce the build costs of new nuclear, which would of course also help its financeability.

**Alan Brown** (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP): This statement confirms that the UK Government's nuclear programme is in tatters, yet the Secretary of State comes to the House, commends this statement, and says that he will carry on regardless, which makes absolutely no sense whatsoever. The National Audit Office confirmed that the Hinkley Point C strike rate of £92.50 per MWh was a bad deal. We know that offshore wind is currently £57.50 per MWh, but that is based on a 15-year concession, as opposed to a 35-year concession for the nuclear deal.

The Secretary of State has confirmed that the Government were so desperate for Wylfa that they would take something like a £6 billion stake and provide £9 billion of debt financing, yet he pretends that they were being prudent by limiting the 35-year contract to £75 per MWh. His use of the word "generous" in the statement could not be more appropriate. When Toshiba pulled out of Moorside with the loss of £100 million, its share price increased. At the time, the Secretary of State said, "Don't worry. The circumstances are unique." With this latest setback from Hitachi, the UK Government need a proper re-evaluation of their nuclear policy; they should not look just at alternative funding mechanisms.

Four existing nuclear power stations are due to close by 2024, taking more than 4 GW of capacity out of the grid, so what is the Government's plan for replacing that capacity? New nuclear power stations are clearly not an option that could be completed by 2024. When will we know how much money is going to be thrown at Rolls-Royce for the small modular reactors that the Secretary of State mentioned? Why are the Government still blocking onshore wind in Scotland when it is clearly the cheapest mode of generation? When is the cut-off date for the ongoing discussions with Hitachi? When

will the plug finally be pulled? When did the Government first find out about Hitachi pulling out? It was already being reported in the press, so how long before coming to the House to make this statement did the Secretary of State find out? When will nuclear power be properly benchmarked against onshore and offshore wind? When will the Government wake up and end their ideological obsession with nuclear?

**Greg Clark:** Given the hon. Gentleman's suggestion that the strike price for Hinkley Point C was excessive, I would have thought he would welcome and approve of my statement, which sets a limit on what it is possible to provide to finance a private investment. He asks when the decision was made by Hitachi. My understanding is that it was made in Japan at 9 o'clock this morning, and I hope he would accept that I have come to the House as soon as possible.

The hon. Gentleman is critical of the nuclear industry, but I would have thought that he might want to pay tribute to Scotland's proud tradition in the nuclear sector and to the people that have worked and contributed to our energy supply and still do. Chapelcross, Dounreay, Hunterston and Torness have for decades provided good jobs and employment both directly and in the supply chain across Scotland and continue to do so today. My determination to continue our tradition of being a nuclear nation offers continuing opportunities to Scotland, and I would have thought that he would welcome that.

Far from being at the expense of renewable energy, our energy policies have supported Scotland to become a world leader in securing energy from renewable sources. In fact, we heard earlier this month from WWF Scotland that wind output in Scotland has broken through the barrier of 100% of demand for the first time. That comes as a result of the policies that this Government have put in place to bring down the costs of wind, which is highly competitive. As a result, that is causing some competitive challenges for other technologies, including nuclear, but I would have thought that the hon. Gentleman would welcome the progress that has been made on renewables.

**Mr David Jones** (Clwyd West) (Con): This announcement, although widely anticipated, will be greeted with dismay in north Wales, where Wylfa was and remains an important part of the vision for the future of the north Wales economy, as expressed in the north Wales growth bid. My right hon. Friend will know that the all-party parliamentary group on Mersey Dee North Wales has been working closely with both central and local government in connection with the growth bid. Will he or one of his Ministers be prepared to meet the group to discuss Wylfa, its future and the potential for other means of energy generation in north Wales?

**Greg Clark:** I pay tribute to the role that my right hon. Friend played in the earlier stages of discussions for the Wylfa site. As is evident, such matters are complex and difficult to secure, but he laid the groundwork for some of the progress that has been made, and I hope that the process might ultimately be successful. Of course, I have complete commitment to the north Wales growth deal, and I would be delighted to have a meeting

[Greg Clark]

with him and my ministerial colleagues. The Secretary of State for Wales will be in Anglesey tomorrow and will be meeting members of the local community.

As I said in my statement, we regard Anglesey and north Wales as having exceptional strengths in our energy future. Bangor University, for example, contributes exceptional world-leading innovation, and we have backed that in the sector deal. Colleagues across Government and I will work closely with colleagues in north Wales to ensure that that potential is realised.

**Albert Owen** (Ynys Môn) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for coming to the House at the earliest opportunity to give this statement. He will know the importance of this matter to my local community, to the Welsh and UK economies and, indeed, to the Government's nuclear policy. With 10 years of planning, a lot of work has gone into this project, as he rightly acknowledges. It started off under the Labour Government and was continued by the coalition Government and, indeed, the current Government. Wylfa is the best site in the United Kingdom for a new nuclear build, but Hitachi's announcement puts the jobs of 400 people at risk, many of whom are my constituents. There is the potential for some 8,000 to 10,000 construction jobs, hundreds of operational jobs and, importantly, 33 apprenticeships, so I hope that we can work to ensure that we save as much of that as possible. The supply chain and small and medium-sized enterprises are important as well, and they have been planning for this for years.

So I ask the Secretary of State: can we work together to keep this project alive and ensure that we create the momentum so that it can be ready for a future developer, or indeed this developer, with the right mechanism? We need a better mechanism for financing, not just in the nuclear sector but for all large energy construction, including the tidal lagoon. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) in this regard, because I feel that an opportunity for innovation has been lost with the tidal lagoon, and the Welsh economy needs it. We know that £16 billion has been taken out of the Welsh economy as a result of that announcement, and we need to redistribute that.

I echo the right hon. Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) in saying that we need extra help and extra resources to plug the gap following this announcement today. We have a mechanism through the north Wales growth deal whereby the Welsh Government work with the UK Government to create jobs, and I urge the Secretary of State to work with the new First Minister and the Economy Minister on this. The north Wales growth bid can be successful. I will be meeting the Secretary of State for Wales as well, but I want to ask the Secretary of State to work closely with us on this. Will he host a delegation involving myself, key stakeholders and his officials to look at a funding mechanism for the future that will work not just for new nuclear but for all large projects? North Wales is a centre of excellence for low carbon, nuclear, renewables and marine energy. It has the potential; let us work together to make this happen.

**Greg Clark:** I repeat my commendation of the hon. Gentleman. He has been a consistent and passionate campaigner not only for the interests of his constituents but for the excellence of the industry in north Wales,

and in Anglesey in particular. I can give him that wholehearted commitment. My officials will certainly meet him, but they will also come with me and my nuclear Minister and we will work together in a completely open-book way on all the options. The hon. Gentleman serves with distinction on the Select Committee, which I think will also want to scrutinise the options and the potential for financing. I repeat the commitment I gave to my right hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd West (Mr Jones) that we continue to regard the north Wales growth deal as an excellent base to reinforce the strengths of the area, and I will work very closely with him on this.

The hon. Gentleman also mentioned marine energy, which is one of the opportunities that we have in his constituency and around north Wales. Far from having closed the door to marine technologies, we want to continue to invest in innovation. When it comes to deployment, the technologies need to demonstrate value for money, but we will work with them, as we did with the offshore wind sector, to bring costs down so that they can win at auction alongside other technologies.

**Mr John Whittingdale** (Maldon) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that it remains highly desirable to have a diversity of providers and technologies in civil nuclear generation? Will he therefore confirm, particularly in the light of recent concerns expressed about some Chinese investments, that the Government will remain fully supportive of the proposal from China General Nuclear to invest in a new power station at Bradwell-on-Sea in my constituency, subject of course to a generic design assessment and other permissions being obtained?

**Greg Clark:** As my right hon. Friend knows, CGN is an investor in the Hinkley Point C nuclear power station, which is being built as we speak. That is proceeding at pace. When it comes to Bradwell, CGN is again making successful strides through the approval process. All investment is subject to that process, but I can confirm that it has our full support as it goes through the regulatory approvals.

**Chris Ruane** (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): I, too, thank the right hon. Gentleman for coming to the House today to deliver his statement. I also thank him for his openness to meeting north Wales Members on the issue of Wylfa Newydd. In his statement, he said that central Government were now relying more on renewables. May I put the north Wales picture to him? I can tell him that 1,500 wind turbines—sea turbines—were planned for the Rhiannon field off the coast of north Wales, but those plans have been cancelled by the private sector. The tidal lagoons for Wales were key to the development of the Welsh economy, yet the Government pulled their support for the Swansea Bay tidal lagoon. That had a knock-on effect for the huge lagoon planned for off the coast of north Wales, and we have heard today about the cancellation of a £16 billion investment in the north Wales economy. This will devastate the north Wales economy. The people of north Wales need to know that the Prime Minister is batting for them and for the UK. Will the right hon. Gentleman ask the Prime Minister to place in the House of Commons Library the minutes of her meeting with the Prime Minister of Japan, to ensure that we know that that is what she has been doing on behalf of the people of north Wales?

**Greg Clark:** The Prime Minister has repeatedly discussed nuclear investment with the Prime Minister of Japan, as have I with my opposite number there. In fact, in November, I flew to Tokyo to discuss the negotiations going on here, given the difficulties that the investor was having, and I met my opposite number at the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry. This has been a substantial, and cordial, Government-to-Government relationship, and the hon. Gentleman has my assurance that we will continue that. I mentioned in my statement the work of our embassy in Tokyo, which has been an excellent and expert source of advice. That will continue to be available.

When it comes to investment in renewables, the hon. Gentleman will know that Wales is a substantial and proud leader in renewable energy. I think Gwynt y Môr is the second largest wind farm already deployed in Europe. I mentioned in my statement the rising availability of alternative technologies. To put this in context, in 2017 we procured more than 3 GW of offshore wind in a single contract for difference auction at £57.50 per MWh. That is more in a single auction than this plant was going to provide. As I have said, the challenge is the competition coming from other technologies, and Wales is a beneficiary of some aspects of that.

**Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con):** In his statement, my right hon. Friend said that the economics of the energy market had changed significantly in recent years, meaning that renewable energy could now be not only cheap but readily available. Does he share my concern that consumers will not see all the benefits of the reduced prices, given that we are bound into these exceedingly long-term and hugely expensive contracts? An example is Hinkley, whose strike price means that it will probably be the most expensive form of energy in the history of energy generation. Can he give me an assurance or commitment that nuclear power will not result in consumer bills skyrocketing in the years to come?

**Greg Clark:** That is demonstrated in my statement today. We were talking about a strike price substantially less than that of Hinkley, and I said when I made my statement to the House on Hinkley that we would do that. I say gently to my hon. Friend, who is a lifelong environmentalist, that exactly the same arguments were advanced against the initial contracts for offshore wind—namely, that they would be burdensome and that we should not enter into them. We have now seen substantial capacity becoming available at prices that will shortly be free of subsidy entirely. That is an excellent development for consumers, for the reasons that he has given, but it is also the case that the manufacturers in the supply chain are located right across the UK, which is a further industrial benefit of the strategic policy.

**Sir Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD):** I agree with the Secretary of State that Britain has had huge success in renewables, especially with cheaper offshore wind, thanks to the Liberal Democrat policy that he has kept in place. However, I also want to express astonishment at the generosity of the offer to Hitachi. With the equity stake and the debt finance, it appears to be even greater than that offered to Hinkley Point C, yet Hitachi—like Toshiba at Moorside—is still unwilling to build new nuclear in Britain. What does the Secretary of State

blame most for this setback to his nuclear strategy? Is it the fact that renewables are becoming much cheaper than nuclear, is it Japan's fears about Brexit, or is it something else?

**Greg Clark:** I am disappointed in the right hon. Gentleman who, as a former Secretary of State, I would have thought knows the changing economics of the energy market, which I set out pretty clearly. I gently remind him that, as Secretary of State, he was responsible in his time for the negotiation of the terms of the Hinkley Point C agreement, so it is surprising to hear him being so critical of it.

The right hon. Gentleman wants to take credit for one of the policies for which he was responsible but not the other, which I might uncharitably say is characteristic of his party. As with Hinkley Point, there was a recognition that financing such significant projects—£16 billion from a private company—is hard to do through the conventional channels of private investment. It is desirable to have nuclear as part of a diverse energy mix. If I might put it this way, having a substantial mix of technologies has an insurance quality. We should recognise that, but there is a limit to what we can pay for the benefit, which is reflected in my statement.

**Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con):** Sizewell C is an important component of the world leading low-carbon energy sector emerging along the north Suffolk coast. Can the Secretary of State confirm that the Government remain committed to Sizewell C and to negotiating a value-for-money deal with EDF?

**Greg Clark:** I can confirm that to my hon. Friend.

**Ian C. Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab):** Can the Secretary of State confirm what the Prime Minister said to the Prime Minister of Japan when she raised the issue of Wylfa with him last week?

**Greg Clark:** Sadly, when the Prime Minister was meeting the Prime Minister of Japan, I was in this Chamber winding up the debate on the meaningful vote. I would otherwise have been in their company, but I was doing my duties in this House. I was not at the meeting, but I can put the hon. Gentleman's mind at rest. The involvement of the Prime Minister in this and other joint investments with Japan has been consistent and very long standing. As I said to the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane), I have visited Japan many times to discuss this at the highest level with the Government and with the parties.

**Luke Hall (Thornbury and Yate) (Con):** I thank the Secretary of State for coming to the House to set out his discussions in such detail. He will appreciate the level of concern in south Gloucestershire this morning, especially among the people who rely on the jobs at Oldbury and its supply chain, because of the uncertainty following this announcement. There are localised issues, such as the properties bought up around Oldbury that now lie vacant. People are unsure about the future of those properties and about some of the more specific, niche issues. Will the Secretary of State come to Oldbury and meet me to discuss the issue with local councillors, workers and stakeholders to make sure we can find a route forward?

**Greg Clark:** As I said to the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr. Whitehead), I recognise that this is a sad time for the staff, who are expert and well respected in their fields. This is a financing decision, and it is no reflection on the quality of their work. They are of the highest calibre.

Of course I will come to meet my hon. Friend and his constituents to discuss how we can make sure that his part of the world, as well as north Wales, continues to have the reputation for excellence in energy that it has long enjoyed.

**Mr Clive Betts** (Sheffield South East) (Lab): The Secretary of State made some very supportive comments in his statement about small modular reactors, which I welcome. I thank him for meeting me recently to discuss the ideas put forward by Professor Keith Ridgway and others at the nuclear advanced manufacturing research centre in Sheffield for ways in which we can develop capacity to produce the parts for SMRs in Sheffield. The Secretary of State has issued supportive words about that, but will he now go further and get his officials to work with Professor Ridgway and others to develop these plans, which would be good for both our energy policy and our industrial strategy?

**Greg Clark:** The hon. Gentleman is quite right. I visited the nuclear advanced manufacturing research centre, as he knows, and I was impressed with the facilities. The sector deal makes a commitment to new nuclear technologies, and a consortium has made an application to the industrial strategy challenge fund. He understands that the operation of that fund, as with all science and innovation investments, is correctly scrutinised by a panel of global experts. They have given the application a positive assessment, but it has further due diligence to complete. Of course, I will update him and the House when that process has finished.

**James Heappey** (Wells) (Con): I welcome what the Secretary of State said in his statement about the decreasing costs and increasing availability of renewables. If we are to embrace a renewables-heavy energy mix, does he agree that we need to look at what changes we must make to the capacity market to allow demand response, storage and other types of digital flexibility to play their part fully in that energy system?

**Greg Clark:** My hon. Friend is quite right, and he has great experience and expertise in energy matters. We have talked a bit about offshore wind today, but one of the big changes that is taking place in the energy market, and affecting the economics of energy, is in the technologies and ways of working such as demand-side response and storage. We have not mentioned those, but they are contributing to how our energy system can be both more resilient and lower cost than was dreamed possible even 10 years ago.

**Deidre Brock** (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The Secretary of State rightly points to the fact that renewable energy is a Scottish success story, and such events vindicate the Scottish Government's decision not to join the UK Government's vision for the UK as a nuclear nation. Will he please outline the Government's sunk costs in terms of civil service time and any other development costs incurred as a result of this project?

**Greg Clark:** The model we have pursued is one in which these proposals are private sector-led. I place on record my respect and gratitude for the time, effort and financial investment that Hitachi has made in working with us to develop the proposal to this stage. Of course there have been discussions with my officials, but the vast majority of the costs have been with the proposed developer.

**Mr Paul Sweeney** (Glasgow North East) (Lab/Co-op): I declare an interest as a council member of the Institution of Engineers and Shipbuilders in Scotland, which recently published a report by Professor Iain MacLeod of the University of Strathclyde entitled, "Engineering for Energy: A proposal for governance of the energy system".

This is a major issue because of the risk of blackouts increasing from hours to days, particularly in Scotland. If that does occur, and we are talking about a lengthy delay in restarting the bid, there will be negative consequences for the supply of food, water, heat, money and petrol. It would be a disastrous situation for the Scottish economy and could lead to civil unrest. The root cause of that risk is the closure of large-scale coal and nuclear power stations, and the grid has not been reformulated and replanned to deal with the intermittency of renewables. That is a massive risk that the Scottish Government have not done anything to address. What will the Secretary of State do to reduce this massive existential risk to the national security of this country?

**Greg Clark:** I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman, but I note his interest and his experience in this field. National Grid is undertaking a substantial programme of transformation to make the grid smarter and able to accommodate intermittent renewables. Again, progress has been made. The amount of renewable energy being deployed is vastly in excess of what the right hon. Member for Kingston and Surbiton (Sir Edward Davey) was advised was possible when he was in office. Great strides are being made. A smarter grid is a more effective and more resilient grid.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Secretary of State call together the MPs who are affected by the supply chain implications? In my case, Berkeley was predicated on both Wylfa and Oldbury. People with potential are being retrained in the nuclear industry. Does he understand the knock-on effects that that will have, and will he meet us to see how we can try to mitigate them?

**Greg Clark:** I would be delighted to do that. The Under-Secretary of State for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, my hon. Friend the Member for Watford (Richard Harrington), who is responsible for the nuclear industry, and I regularly meet the representatives of the industry, including the supply chain. I emphasise that it was Hitachi's decision to suspend the development of the project but, as the hon. Member for Stroud (Dr Drew) knows, a bit further down the road from him is Hinkley Point C, one of the most significant pieces of civil engineering being constructed in the world.

People are being trained in construction and in nuclear engineering in a way that has not happened in this country for more than a generation, giving opportunities to many suppliers. Nearly two thirds of the value of the

Hinkley Point C contract goes with domestic suppliers. He knows that there is a renaissance of the suppliers of nuclear expertise, and I am happy to meet him and the companies that we regularly meet.

**Martin Whitfield** (East Lothian) (Lab): I am grateful for the speed with which this statement arrived at this House today, and I compliment the Secretary of State on that. Part of EDF's fleet is at Torness is my constituency, and Members have pointed out the many skilled jobs involved and contributions that these workers make. Some of the answers to the problems that will come in 2030, which is, unfortunately, not too far away, lie in not only bigger issues, such as the small modular reactors that have been discussed today, but with smaller, simpler decisions. I am thinking of things such as the simplicity of being able to move apprentices around the fleet in the UK, which is impossible for EDF at the moment because of the differentiation in approach taken by the Scottish Government north of the border and the Government down here. Will the Government confirm that they will continue to work with EDF in particular—I say that on behalf of my constituency—and all suppliers to try to solve all the small problems, as well as the big ones, to facilitate a better, stronger future for the nuclear industry, which we require in order to keep the lights on in the UK?

**Greg Clark:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for such a constructive contribution. He raises an excellent point, and I would be happy to meet him and EDF to solve that problem, of which I was not aware. It seems to me that if we are to benefit from the opportunities that exist across the UK to develop skilled work and make it available to residents of all parts of the UK, we should not put obstacles in the way of that.

## Point of Order

12.41 pm

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. Along with 32 Members of Parliament from across the House, I applied to the Backbench Business Committee last autumn for a debate on the upsurge in violent antisocial behaviour, which is happening in a number of constituencies. I understand that many applications are made. Although we were successful in ours, we were told that we had to be put on a waiting list, as time had not been allocated by the Government. Just last night, a number of my constituents came to me to inform me about delinquents throwing bricks at buses in the Orchard park part of my constituency. Obviously that is very worrying for bus drivers, passengers and other road users, and I very much hope that action is taken forthwith. My point is that this House adopted the Wright reforms to allow Back Benchers to bring forward issues of concern to them and their constituents in a timely manner, but at the moment the Government do not seem to be allocating sufficient time for Backbench Business Committee debates. I know that there are two taking place today, but I am not aware of any additional days for such debates after that. I know we are very pressed because of Brexit, but is there anything you can do to put pressure on the Government to make sure that time is allocated for us to debate these issues of real importance to our constituents?

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order. The business statement has just taken place, and I am not sure whether this issue was aired then. I see that next Thursday we will have another Backbench Business Committee debate, along with another business statement—there may also be one in between. Perhaps she might like to raise this issue at that point. She also might like to discuss it with the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee, because I know he has fairly regular meetings to discuss the timings. In the meantime, I am sure those on the Treasury Bench will have heard her comments and will feed them back.

## Sustainable Seas

### ENVIRONMENTAL AUDIT COMMITTEE

#### *Select Committee Statement*

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Rosie Winterton):** We now come to the Select Committee statement. Mary Creagh will speak on her subject for up to 10 minutes, during which time no interventions may be taken. At the conclusion of her statement, I will call Members to put questions on the subject of the statement and call Mary Creagh to respond to these in turn. Members can expect to be called only once. Interventions should be questions and should be brief. Front Benchers may take part in the questioning, and I am sure they will indicate if they wish to do so. I call the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee, Mary Creagh.

12.45 pm

**Mary Creagh (Wakefield) (Lab):** I begin by thanking the Chair of the Backbench Business Committee and you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to present the Environmental Audit Committee's report on sustainable seas. I have a copy of it here, and it is our 14th report to this Parliament. We launched our inquiry last April, examining how our oceans can be protected from climate change, overfishing, resource extraction and pollution, and what more the Government should do. Human activities in both coastal and open waters have dramatically increased in recent years. The UN estimates that up to 40% of the world's oceans are impacted by humans, with dire consequences, including pollution, depleted fisheries and the loss of coastal habitats. We have treated the seas as a sewer—literally—and that has to stop.

Plastic makes up 70% of all the litter in the ocean, with most of it coming from land, being transported by rivers and draining into the sea. If no action is taken to reduce plastic pollution, it will treble in the next 10 years. The amazing "Blue Planet II" programme showed us the consequences: a turtle tangled in a plastic sack; and the death of a newborn whale calf from causes unknown. Plastic litter and chemical pollution are everywhere in the ocean. These plastics are eaten by seabirds and they suffocate coral reefs; they break down into microplastics, which are eaten by sea life, which we then eat, potentially transporting chemicals into our human food chain. The long-term harm from plastic and chemical pollution is unknown because, as the Government's chief scientific officer told us, we have not looked hard enough.

There is so much more that the Government should do to prevent our waste from reaching the ocean. We could start by not exporting our waste to countries with poor recycling infrastructure. Supporting Indonesia and Malaysia to reduce their plastic while simultaneously exporting the UK's contaminated plastics to them shows the Government's lack of a joined-up approach to reducing plastic pollution. The Government published their resources and waste strategy in December. It places much more onus on producers to pay for the cost of clearing up and treating waste, as was recommended in the Environmental Audit Committee's reports on plastic bottles and coffee cups last year. But we cannot wait

until 2042 to phase out avoidable single-use plastics, and the plastic bottle deposit return scheme, which was promised by Ministers in 2017, will not be ready until 2023.

The Government have signed up to the 14th sustainable development goal target to prevent and significantly reduce marine pollution of all kinds by 2025. So here is our plan. We want to see the Government ban single-use plastic packaging that is difficult to recycle; introduce a 25p latte levy on disposable coffee cups, with all coffee cups to be recycled by 2023; and bring forward their deposit return scheme and extended producer responsibility schemes before the end of this Parliament. The Government must also set out how they will create and fund the UK's domestic recycling industry to end the export of contaminated waste to developing countries.

Climate change is causing a triple whammy of harm from ocean acidification, ocean warming and deoxygenation. This harms the entire food web and disrupts our weather systems. The recent Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change report showed us that a 2°C rise above pre-industrial levels will significantly harm biodiversity and fish stocks, and will destroy nearly all the coral reefs in the world. If we can keep the temperature rise to 1.5°, we will still lose 90% of coral reefs. Until we did this inquiry, I did not know that the UK has a cold-water reef in the south of England.

That is why we have to redouble our actions to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions and meet the Paris agreement on climate change. The Government must set out their plans to achieve that in the first half of this year and set a net-zero emissions target by 2050 at the very latest. Species affected by climate change include krill and plankton; if they are removed from the marine food chain, that could lead to a one-third collapse in the populations of predators such as polar bears, walrus, seals, sea lions, penguins and sea birds.

Britain's overseas territories and their waters cover an area nearly 30 times the size of the UK, and nearly 90% of the UK's biodiversity is located in their waters. They have the most unique and biodiverse areas on the planet, and we have a huge responsibility to protect them. We welcome the Government's December announcement on the creation of a marine protected area for the South Sandwich Islands. We have also discussed with the Minister for Energy and Clean Growth, who is in the Chamber, how the exploitation of minerals from the deep sea could begin in the next decade. The prime sites are around the deep sea hydrothermal vents, but those habitats are unexplored and unique. We heard from scientists that in a very small-scale study they found six hitherto unknown species. This is the great last wilderness left on earth; in fact, it may be where life on earth first began. Mining those sites could have catastrophic impacts—from local extinctions of as yet unmaped ecosystems and species, to the production of sediment plumes, which can travel long distances through the water column, smothering seabed organisms. Our report urges the Government not to pursue licences at active hydrothermal vents in their own jurisdiction and internationally, and to use their experience in regulating marine industries and their influence on the International Seabed Authority to impose a moratorium on exploitation licences in those areas.

We heard how so much of the sea—58% of it—is outside national jurisdictions, has little or no protection and is suffering from the tragedy of the commons: everyone goes there to graze their sheep, but there is nothing left at the end. Everyone goes there to take their piece, but no one is protecting it. We must lead international negotiations. The Government have signed up to the UN's ambition to protect 30% of the world's oceans by 2030, but that will work only if our Government, alongside other nations, fund the satellite monitoring and enforcement mechanisms for those areas that we want to protect.

The UN is currently negotiating a high seas treaty. We call on the Government to seize this chance and push for a Paris agreement of the seas. Like the climate change agreement, it would contain legally binding targets and regular conferences of the parties to hold Governments to account, and designate marine protected areas and the funding needed to achieve them. We look forward to the publication of the Government's international ocean strategy later this year. I hope it will include and build on our Committee's cross-party ambitions.

We are an island nation. We care passionately about our seas and oceans. I commend the report to the House, and commend my Committee colleagues for such an excellent report.

**Mr Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): I commend the hon. Lady for her statement, and her Committee for its superb report. I hope that other Select Committees will follow her example and make statements directly to the House. Page 48 of the report recommends a 25p coffee cup levy and that all coffee cups should be recycled by 2023. All our constituents can readily identify with that issue. It does not strike me that recycling coffee cups need be that problematic, so why do we need to wait four years for them to be recycled?

**Mary Creagh:** That is an excellent question. The Government's resources and waste strategy states that they want the industry to work towards voluntary commitments and that they will introduce a deposit return scheme for plastic bottles, but that they are ruling out the latte levy, which we think would influence a very important behaviour change. We need to change the way in which we consume the planet's resources and bend the curve of our plastic use. In the time between us writing our coffee cup report and last December, despite all the warm words from the coffee cup industry and all the available discounts, the number of coffee cups used went up by 500 million. The target increases every year as more people buy and drink coffee. Industry efforts are not working. The product is difficult to deal with because it has a plastic lining and a paper outer part, and it needs specialist collection and specialist disposal. Some companies are working heroically in trying to tackle the issue, but even if we get to 30 million or 100 million, there are still 3 billion coffee cups in circulation every year.

I agree passionately with the hon. Gentleman that it should not take another four years. The Government need to regulate, but I am afraid that they are reluctant to do so. It is interesting how far ahead of policy the nation and consumers are, and I hope that Ministers are listening.

**Kerry McCarthy** (Bristol East) (Lab): This is another excellent report by the Environmental Audit Committee and I am very proud to have been a part of it. The underlying principle that such reports should always follow is that the planet's resources are precious and should be preserved, not plundered, whether they be fish or rare minerals that could be found in hydrothermal vents. That should underpin everything we do. Does the Committee Chair share my concern that while the Government are treading water, the race for deep sea mining and the rise of other environmentally damaging economic activities in the seas are going ahead untrammelled, and that there is a risk that if we do not act quickly, we will not be able to put the genie back in the bottle?

**Mary Creagh:** I thank my hon. Friend for her question. She is a fantastic member of the Committee and a real thought leader in many of the areas under discussion. As she said in Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs questions, she has been talking about the food system—"banging on" is how she put it, I think—and following the persistence principle for many years.

My hon. Friend is right about the race for deep sea mining. We are in a new wild west of exploration. The irony is that we are prepared to plunder and churn up the last great, unexplored wilderness—the equivalent of Yosemite national park and other brilliant places that people travel the world to see, such as our own Lake and Peak districts—so that we can have more "smart" phones. Those rare earth minerals are used in our smartphones and in some of our industrial applications. If we were better at recycling the rare earth elements in the 7 billion mobile phones, or however many there are, on the planet—I think there is at least one for every man, woman and child—we would not have to do that. A positive side-effect of the exploration is that we are finding out more about these unexplored areas, but the question is: what happens when we know they are there, and what will we discover? That is a problem.

**Zac Goldsmith** (Richmond Park) (Con): I thank the hon. Lady for chairing the Committee and for her brilliant précis of a brilliant report. Needless to say, as a member of the Committee I fully endorse all its recommendations and am very proud of it.

I hope the hon. Lady will allow me to highlight two of the recommendations. The Government's blue belt policy is probably our single biggest opportunity to protect a very large portion of the world's oceans. The report rightly urges the Foreign Office to back full protection of the waters around Ascension Island. It is worth saying that the Ascension Island Council, as well as DEFRA, has made very promising noises, but the blockage seems to be the Foreign Office. The first recommendation, therefore, is for the Foreign Office to get going, agree with the Ascension Island Council and DEFRA, and provide maximum protection at minimum cost to an incredibly important part of the world.

The second recommendation is to build on the recent announcement of increased no-take areas around the South Sandwich Islands, to provide full protection for those extraordinary and pristine waters, much of which featured in the "Blue Planet" series. That view is backed by an almost unprecedented alliance of scientists, experts and non-governmental organisations. The solution will

[Zac Goldsmith]

cost very little, if anything, in public money, but it will deliver huge results for nature, so will the Foreign Office get on with that as well?

**Mary Creagh:** I absolutely agree with the hon. Gentleman, who was instrumental in getting consensus around the recommendations to the Foreign Office. Ascension Island could benefit from a huge boost from tourism if it was designated. He is right that the Antarctic krill fishing industry is very heavily regulated, but, again, it is in danger of over-exploitation in order to feed our insatiable demand for farmed fish, including salmon. Increasing the no-take areas and protecting them properly is really, really important.

**Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Lady and her Committee on a very good report. I was struck recently by the Simon Reeve series on the Mediterranean, which highlighted, in particular, the vast areas of plastic greenhouses around Almeria in south Spain, where they produce enormous quantities of vegetables and fruit for European supermarkets, including those in this country. I have written to all the supermarkets in this country, but I am not convinced that proper measures are in place to guarantee that the supply chains are meeting high environmental and labour standards. Those chains make use of migrant labour from Africa and have awful working conditions. Does she share my view that the supermarkets have a real responsibility here?

**Mary Creagh:** I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his question, and I share his concern about the plastics that come off the greenhouses where our tomatoes and cucumbers are grown, which are discarded and then literally chucked into the sea. We treat the sea as a waste disposal unit, and it is not. There is more that supermarkets can do in tackling the full carbon footprint of the fruits and vegetables that they import and making sure that they stamp out any abuse and any forced and slave labour in their fruit and picking supply chains. We know that that they is an area where forced labour and child labour are prevalent.

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): I commend the hon. Lady and her Committee for this excellent report. May I also mention the excellent work that is done by the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, which is based in my constituency to both identify the problems and come up with solutions? Based on its work, the UK can be a global pioneer in the sustainable stewardship of our seas?

**Mary Creagh:** I thank the hon. Gentleman, who is a former and much esteemed member of our Committee, for that question. I saw the CEFAS ship on a visit to his constituency when I was shadowing the DEFRA brief. He is right that we have world-leading marine biologists and marine scientists. The world looks to the UK for our brilliance and thought leadership on the subject. One criticism that we have of Government is that they have stopped funding our long time series around ocean certification measurements. One key recommendation is that we need to measure the acidity of the ocean. We know what it was going back decades, but we need to

have more monitoring sites around the UK, so I hope that he will help us in pushing the Government on that task.

**Alex Sobel** (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I thank the Chair of the Environmental Audit Committee for her leadership on this report, which built on our report on plastics. Does she agree that Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials did a great job in trying to make the Weddell sea a marine protected area, but that they need to redouble their efforts with the Chinese, Russian and Norwegian Governments? However, our work on plastics is well behind. We do not have a compulsory deposit return scheme guaranteed, and the target for eliminating single-use plastic is not until 2042. We need to have both those things in place much quicker.

**Mary Creagh:** Again, I appreciate the input of my hon. Friend and neighbour into the Committee and this report. He is right: we need to speed up our ambition. The scientists have warned us that we have 12 years to tackle climate change. It is no good putting targets in place for 2042—that is far too little, far too late. We heard about some of the interesting foreign policy discussions that are going on around Antarctica, particularly some of the negotiations with the Norwegians and the Russians. Clearly a lot of politics is involved in the oceans, and we have to be mindful of that.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): May I also add my thanks to the Chair, the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), and the Committee for bringing this report forward? You were very clear that these must be quick questions, Madam Deputy Speaker, so I will be succinct.

I live on the edge of Strangford lough in my constituency. Ards and North Down Borough Council has managed to get a grant to carry out an environmental project at the mouth of the narrows of Strangford lough, where the ebb and flow of the tide is, to harvest the litter and plastic that flow through there. That might be a small project in the bigger picture of what we are talking about today, but small projects collectively make an immense difference in the long run. What assistance is there for councils across the whole of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland to involve themselves in projects that, singularly, do not do a terrible lot, but collectively make a big difference? Can the hon. Lady tell me whether grants are available?

**Mary Creagh:** That sounds like an absolutely brilliant initiative from Ards and North Down Borough Council. I think that the hon. Gentleman also has an oyster fishery in Strangford lough, the produce of which I have enjoyed on several occasions. I am not aware of what funding is available, but I am sure that officials will write to him on that issue.

**Sandy Martin** (Ipswich) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend and congratulate her Committee on its excellent and challenging report. It is likely that much of the plastic entering the oceans has been collected supposedly for recycling. Does she agree that, at the very least, this country needs to institute comprehensive and rigorous checks of all recyclable materials exported for processing? We need to put our own house in order as well as demanding an international agreement to protect our seas from the dumping of supposedly recycled material.

**Mary Creagh:** My hon. Friend the shadow Minister is absolutely right. We do have to put our own house in order. We know that most of the plastics enter the ocean from, I think, five rivers in Africa and Asia. There is no point in our carrying out heroic clean-up work here at home if we are then going to export the material to far-away countries such as Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand that do not have the right infrastructure in place and whose own populations are now rebelling against being consumed in a mountain of our contaminated plastics. We need to do more, and there is much more that we can do. The Government can start by carrying out better enforcement. There are some great waste exporters, but there are also some criminals in the waste sector. The Environment Agency carried out just three unannounced inspections in 2017. That is not enough. When we sent in the National Audit Office, it found that the audit systems and processes for waste export did not tally, so someone somewhere is playing the system, and we need to crack down on it here at home.

**The Minister for Energy and Clean Growth (Claire Perry):** I do have a question, but, with your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to genuinely thank the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh) and her Committee for once again producing what I really feel is an excellent piece of work. She has heard me speak before about the work that this Committee does in looking across Government and across boundaries. We saw it with the “Greening Finance” report, which had some superb recommendations around understanding risk from a regulatory perspective, particularly for pension regulators, and she will know that the Government have responded to that. I genuinely thank her and her Committee for their work. It is an extremely high-quality Committee, with some very talented and able colleagues and very good Committee staff.

It is ironic, is it not, that this House is almost empty, but that it was packed when we were debating the next three years in Europe? There are very few of us here today to understand what is happening to 70% of our planet. This report joins up the challenge of climate and environmental sustainability across land, sea, air, and, of course, the very important littoral zones. That is what we need to do and are doing, and this is a superb report.

The Government, of course, are listening. The hon. Lady will know that she has made a number of recommendations that are relevant to my Department, as well as to the Foreign Office and DEFRA. I am off after this to have a meeting with one of the DEFRA Ministers. The hon. Lady knows, I think, that she is pushing at an open door with this Government, and we will continue to do whatever we can to support these recommendations.

Finally, I do have a question for the hon. Lady. So much of what she says is relevant to both our overseas territories and our Commonwealth partners, which, in many cases, are small island states facing down a barrel of disruption—literally—from climate change and ocean pollution. Has she communicated the findings of this report to those countries and organisations? If not, how can we as a Government facilitate her in doing so?

**Mary Creagh:** I thank the Minister for her kind words and for her many appearances before our Committee, giving evidence on a variety of different subjects. I have also been neglectful in not thanking our brilliant Committee staff, who have worked so hard on the various Committee reports that we have produced, and on this one in particular.

The Minister is right; here we are in an almost empty Chamber, with people at home saying “Why is nobody talking about this?” Obviously Brexit is taking up so much time because it is urgent, but this is also urgent and important. We debated whether or not to launch the report on this date, but we decided that we needed to talk about the other important stuff as well as Brexit.

The Minister is also right that our Commonwealth territories are on the frontline of illegal activities, including illegal fishing, which is depleting their domestic, more sustainable fishing practices. They are at all sorts of risk, not least from the changes in weather systems that come from ocean warming, which made the hurricanes that sadly hit them last September much more powerful, slow-moving and damaging.

We have not communicated this report to anyone in the overseas territories, although the Committee has met representatives of some countries, including parliamentarians from Belize in October. Perhaps I could meet the Minister at the back of the Chair to discuss how we can get the report out to a much wider audience in the Commonwealth and overseas territories.

## Backbench Business

### Mental Health First Aid in the Workplace

1.11 pm

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I beg to move,

That this House notes that the UK is facing a mental health crisis; further notes that, according to the Independent Review into Mental Health in the Workplace 2017 commissioned by the Prime Minister, each year 300,000 people with long-term mental health conditions lose their job; recognises that Centre for Mental Health research shows presenteeism from mental health is estimated to cost the economy £15.1 billion per annum; acknowledges this same research shows it costs the economy £8.4 billion per annum for mental health absenteeism; considers that a recent poll by OnePoll found that 38 per cent of people reported being stressed about work; observes that the Health and Safety Act 1974 made it a legal necessity for workplaces to train someone in medical first aid; and calls on the Government to change this law via secondary legislation to provide clarity that an employer's first aid responsibilities cover both physical and mental health and to add a requirement for workplaces to train mental health first aiders.

It really is a pleasure to speak in support of this motion, alongside its co-sponsors the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer). The application for this debate was supported by more 60 Members from all parts of the House, and we are very grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allocating time for our discussion today.

Following the particularly challenging moments that this House has experienced over the last few days, today's debate is a salutary reminder that the work of this Parliament goes on, and that we are capable of debating in a constructive and collegiate fashion. Our motion addresses a real and pressing need to support people affected by mental ill health. Our argument is simple. The Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 ensured that every large workplace has someone trained in medical first aid, and that is now an accepted and established part of every office, factory, warehouse, hotel and anywhere else that people work; so why not a trained mental health first aider in every workplace? We want to change the Health and Safety Act via secondary legislation so that an employer's responsibility explicitly covers the mental health as well as the physical health of their employees. This debate is a true cross-party initiative, calling on the Government to make a small change to the law that would constitute a step towards establishing parity of esteem—real equality between physical and mental health.

**Sir Greg Knight** (East Yorkshire) (Con): This is an excellent motion. Does the hon. Lady agree that when workplace training on first aid—including mental health first aid—takes place outside the workplace, the employer should be required to give the employee time off during working hours to attend?

**Luciana Berger**: There are many different ways in which this could be implemented. I myself have attended mental health first aid training at the workplace, but I certainly would not be averse to employers giving their staff time off for such training. I will later come to

many examples showing that this is already the case with a number of employers, particularly large employers, across the country.

This debate was born out of the “Where's Your Head At?” campaign, which was launched by campaigner Natasha Devon and supported by Mental Health First Aid England and Bauer Media, which have together collected over 200,000 names on a petition that a number of us delivered to No. 10 Downing Street. I commend those organisations for all their hard work, and pay tribute to their commitment and determination to see this positive change introduced. It really is admirable. Bauer Media—an organisation with radio stations and a number of magazines, such as *Grazia*—has really taken the idea forward, paying for billboards across the country to promote the campaign. I commend its social action on a matter that, as an employer, it knows would make a difference in its own workplaces.

This really would be a simple shift, but one with a huge beneficial impact on the lives of millions of British workers. No one can seriously contend that there is not a need for such a measure. Hon. Members only have to look at some of the statistics. NHS Digital suggests that one in six adults experience mental ill health, including depression, anxiety and stress-related illnesses. There are around 28 million people in work in our country, so it is not unreasonable to assume that 5 million people in work today are affected. In a recent poll, 38% of people reported being stressed about work. It is a tragedy that, according to the Stevenson-Farmer “Thriving at Work” report—a review commissioned by the Government and published just over a year ago—some 300,000 people with a long-term mental health condition are losing their jobs every single year.

**Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. She is making a powerful case and is describing an epidemic of mental ill health that has many different sources. The Environmental Audit Committee is looking into this as part of our planetary health inquiry. When I met my local Wakefield UK Youth Parliament, I was struck by how concerned the young people were about mental health in schools, and I discovered that South West Yorkshire Partnership NHS Foundation Trust has provided mental health first aid training in schools for teachers. Does my hon. Friend agree that that needs to be rolled out across all schools so that teachers or trusted adults in schools can deal with young people and children in crisis?

**Luciana Berger**: I thank my hon. Friend for her important intervention. Of course, today we are talking about what happens in the workplace, but what happens with young people in places of education is equally critical. I sit on the Health and Social Care Committee, and we have interrogated the Government's plans for the next generation and young people. There are plans in place to have a designated mental health senior lead in every school, and we should ensure that at least one person has that training. We could be doing better than that, but at least it is a start. I support the idea, and it is great to hear what is happening in my hon. Friend's constituency.

Let me be very clear that we are talking about a huge number of people affected in our country every single day—our friends, colleagues and workmates who surround

us. There is, of course, a huge economic cost as well as a very significant human cost. The Centre for Mental Health estimates that people with mental health conditions staying at work longer than they should costs our economy over £15 billion every single year, and that people being absent from work because of mental ill health costs our economy £8 billion a year. These are not insignificant sums. I reiterate that 300,000 people with a long-term mental health condition are losing their jobs every single year because they find themselves in an acute state, have to leave work, are not supported and get to a critical state, rather than having experienced early intervention or prevention, which might have helped them in the first place.

The Health and Safety Executive says that 15.4 million working days were lost in the last year alone because of stress, depression and anxiety, and the British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy—I declare an interest, as I was recently appointed one of its vice-presidents—has calculated that stress is costing British businesses £1,000 per employee per year in sick pay and associated costs. That is very significant for the national economy, and for individual organisations and businesses. I do not think I need to set out any more statistics to evidence the fact that there is a clear need. Mental illness is having a significant impact on millions of workers across the country and costing our economy billions of pounds.

**Dr David Drew** (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend is making an excellent speech. As we have all heard in our constituency surgeries, one of the real costs is that people who suffer from mental illness find it very difficult to get back into employment because of the stigma, and I have to say that the public sector is among the worst at having a bias against people with mental health problems. Does she accept that?

**Luciana Berger**: I thank my hon. Friend for making that important point. I am going to move on to talk about tackling the stigma and discrimination that we know still exist in our country. We have made some progress in the national conversation about tackling mental ill health, particularly with the younger generations, but in too many workplaces and too many communities, there is still the discrimination and taboo connected with mental ill health. As a constituency MP, I see that almost weekly. Men of an older generation feel that they are able to talk to me because I campaign on this issue and am very open about it, but they are perhaps unable to speak to their work colleagues—sometimes not even to their close family—because of the discrimination that they feel still exists. We are certainly on a journey as a country.

One objection to this proposal might be that mental health requires highly specialist medical intervention, not someone in the workplace with only a few days' training—and of course that is absolutely true. Mental health conditions do require specialist diagnosis and treatment. That is why many of us, on both sides of the House, have been calling for more investment in this area to ensure that we have the clinicians within our NHS to address the mental health crisis in this country. But let us be very clear that this motion, with this specific initiative, is not seeking to substitute mental professionals with mental health first aiders. Mental

health first aid training gives people the knowledge, the skills and the confidence to intervene early if someone is struggling with their mental health. It is not in any way intended to be a replacement for trained mental health professionals, either in the NHS or in our workplaces; rather it offers an early warning system and an opportunity for employee support. It is also, in response to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Dr Drew), aimed at tackling the taboo that we often see. Raising awareness of mental ill health and placing it on an equal footing with physical ill health tackles some of the stigma and discrimination that we still have to break down.

If any colleagues would like a clearer explanation, let me say this. All of us here present would know where to go for assistance if we had a physical injury. If we had perhaps slipped, or had a burn or a cut, we could go to the officers just down there through the Chamber. Perhaps, either in this place or in a previous role, we were that first aider. But how many colleagues, or their staff would know where to go if they were struggling with their mental health? How many would have known who that person was, or if they existed at all, in their previous job? Training people in our workplaces in mental health first aid would mean that employees in workplaces right across our country had an instant answer to that question.

No one should assume that a mental health first aider is the same as a mental health professional, any more than anyone assumes that a current workplace first aider is the same as a heart surgeon, an A&E doctor or a cancer specialist. The point is that a mental health first aider provides early intervention and a critical and important signpost. They would be able to answer questions about how and where to go to get treatment. They can help to change the culture in an office or on a shop floor so that someone with a mental illness has support. They can provoke a conversation about mental health that can break down some of the stigma and prejudice. They can be a valuable first point of contact for someone struggling with their mental health in what might otherwise feel like a very lonely environment.

We do not need to talk in purely hypothetical terms. At the end of last year, the *Where's Your Head At?* campaign sent a letter to the Prime Minister in support of statutory mental health first aiders. It was supported by over 40 businesses, including WHSmith, Standard Chartered and Thames Water. I am particularly proud to say that a friend of mine and good Labour colleague, Sadiq Khan, the Mayor of London, has, in the capital, done so much on mental health first aid training at City Hall and in London's schools as part of his public health strategy. St John's Ambulance will have trained 10,000 people by the end of this last period. Mental Health First Aid England has now trained over 350,000 people in mental health first aid. Councils are investing in this and other providers are making similar strides forward. Those who have completed the training say it is hugely beneficial to them and their co-workers. It gives people the skills, knowledge, confidence and language to spot the signs of mental ill health, provide support and make early interventions. But most critically, it is helping the people affected. It really can make a difference.

One of the elements of the mental health first aid training that I completed was about what to do if someone you work with is experiencing suicidal ideation and might be considering taking their own life. Some

[Luciana Berger]

6,000 people in our country have taken their own life in the past year and this particularly impacts on young men. This is an area where quite often people do not know what to say or do, but training such as this, and training from the Zero Suicide Alliance, which offers a free online half-an-hour session, are the tools that can really make a difference. In some cases, it really is a life or death situation.

A number of unions have come out in support of the change to the law we are seeking to make today. Community, The Teacher's Union and Unite were all signatories to the letter to the Prime Minister I just mentioned, and the Communications Workers Union and the GMB have since joined calls for this change to the law.

The costs of training—another question that is often raised—are very clearly outweighed by the benefits of better mental health in our workplaces. Training can typically take place over a number of days, but it can also take place over one day—or half a day, providing opportunities particularly for small businesses and organisations to train people in mental health first aid, too. The training that I did was with the Liverpool city region Mayor, Steve Rotherham, and the senior leadership of Merseytravel in Liverpool. I have half a day left to do, but I have done almost the whole course and seen what the benefits can be. So we do not need to gaze into a crystal ball. We can talk to people who have been trained. But again, in particular, we can reflect and engage with the people who have been helped.

I would like to share some of the thoughts of organisations that have gotten in touch in recent days to share their experience of training mental health first aiders, the value they place on this important initiative and why they are supporting our call today. The insurance company AXA has trained over 100 of its staff to become mental health first aiders, so now each of its UK offices has one. It has also trained as mental health first aiders the staff of the companies that it provides insurance to, helping other businesses across the country to improve mental health in their organisations.

Another success story is that of Thames Water, where 350 employees across the organisation are trained in mental health first aid. They wear green lanyards so that they can be easily identified by the wider workforce. A further 250 employees have joined the company's mental health online engagement forum. Thames Water has calculated that there has been a 75% reduction in work-related stress, anxiety and depression among its employees—a not insignificant impact.

Colleagues may not know—I was certainly not aware of this—that the construction industry is the sector where workers are most affected by mental ill health. In response to that, the Construction Industry Training Board has now committed £500,000 to the Building Mental Health initiative, which will train 156 construction workers as mental health first aiders. Further to this, Mates in Mind is a fantastic charity that works to address the stigma around poor mental health and improve positive mental wellbeing in the UK construction industry. It aims to have reached 75% of the construction industry by 2025.

I give these examples as evidence to colleagues that a number of businesses across the country have been proactive in their approach to mental health and are

reaping the rewards. There are many more I could have shared, but I am conscious that many Members want to contribute to the debate.

This is an idea whose time has come. In a decade from now, when mental health first aiders are an established part of the workplace, we will wonder why we did not start sooner. It is good to have the Minister here today. As I am sure she recognises, this is a measure that can bring us together across party lines. The Minister and the Government have the chance to do a really important thing in supporting this motion. I should say that that is in line with their own pledges in the Conservative party manifesto in 2017. The Government have the opportunity to amend the 1974 Act and to take a clear step towards achieving real equality.

The term, “parity of esteem”, may seem meaningless, but it means real equality between physical and mental health. We legislated for that principle in the Health and Social Care Act 2012. We are now seven years down the road and still waiting to realise that ambition. The Minister will also know that the Prime Minister has been clear on this from the start of her premiership, when she made the commitment to address the inequality between physical and mental health one of the key “burning injustices” that she wanted to erase. This motion, and the policy that it seeks to implement, gives the Prime Minister and her Government the opportunity to solidify her commitment to this mission.

Unlike certain other matters that we are discussing in the House this week and over the weeks ahead, this initiative has cross-party support. It has the support of businesses and of our constituents—over 200,000 people have signed the petition. It has the support of so many mental health campaigners across the country. I sincerely hope that all Members on both sides of the House will support it here this afternoon.

1.29 pm

**Johnny Mercer** (Plymouth, Moor View) (Con): I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger). She is right that it is wonderful to be in this place today with the noise dialled down, so that we can work on and think carefully about one of the most important issues in this country. Mental health is the No. 1 challenge for millions of people in this country every day. If we can meet that challenge in some way by working in the collaborative way that she talked about, that is wonderful. I am really pleased that she has secured this debate and that the Minister is here to listen to it. I also pay tribute to the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb). The three of us have worked together on a number of issues. Like in any team, there are those who lead from the front and do all the heavy lifting and hard work, and that is definitely not me. I want to say a massive thanks to them for their efforts in getting us here today.

When I came into this place in 2015, I talked about how I wanted to end in this Parliament the stigma around mental health. I have found since then that there is still this—it is hard to understand—air around suicide that people do not want to talk about or address, but it remains the biggest killer of men under 44 in this country. Unless we talk about it, we will not come up with ways that interdict and meet the challenge.

**Liz Twist** (Blaydon) (Lab): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree on securing the debate. Does he agree that we need not only to encourage people to talk through industry schemes such as Mates in Mind; we also need to listen? That is why the move towards mental health first aid workers is so important.

**Johnny Mercer:** The hon. Lady is right. There is no point in getting people to come forward and talk about mental health, which can be very difficult, if we do not have the services or access to them to help them, after they have made themselves vulnerable in that way. That is why I am so keen to keep our foot to the gas and ensure that we start delivering on this. We have made progress—that is undeniable—but clearly there is a long way to go, and I will come on to that.

I want to address the point about legislation. As someone who does a lot of work in the armed forces community and on the armed forces covenant, I know that people will say, “Why legislate?” I have learnt in this place that we can have a number of good ideas and initiatives that we can encourage people to do but, ultimately, this is too big a challenge to be left to personalities involved in companies at different times. Sometimes we have to legislate for it. This is not a problem for the companies that already do this, but sometimes the most vulnerable people in our communities deserve the Government legislating and letting them know that we are on side.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I am sorry that I was not here for the beginning of the speech by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger). I was having my own health and wellbeing check with our excellent service here. The practice nurse was particularly keen to know about my stress levels, given the experience we have all had in the last week, but I am good for another few years.

My hon. Friend may know that I am the co-chair of the all-party parliamentary group on mindfulness, which is a simple way of looking after employees’ mental health. Before Christmas, we held a seminar here involving military figures. He knows, from his experience, the high level of mental health issues among that group. I am glad to say that the Army is now seriously looking at how this measure can be introduced, and why wouldn’t it? This is a win-win situation: if an employer looks after its employees and its workforce, they tend to do a better job, and they look after the company or Army unit better as well.

**Johnny Mercer:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. He is right; the military has come a long way. It gets a hard time, but the Army in particular has come a long way on the importance of mindfulness and how much easier it is to keep a healthy mind than get better from a mental illness. I thank him for all the work he does on that. We all come to this place for different reasons, but there is no doubt that the mental health challenge of a decade and a half of combat operations has ripped apart the circle of friends that I grew up with, so I have a real passion for getting this right.

As the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree says, we need to look at this in a slightly different way in this country. We are very good in this place at talking from the Front Bench about what we are putting into services in terms of money and priority, and that is extremely

important, but we need to turn the telescope around and ask what it actually feels like to be in the community waiting for access to child and adolescent mental health services or mental health treatment. That is the true metric of what we do in this place. I strongly encourage the Government to look at that approach.

Why am I so interested in this? As everybody now knows, I have had OCD for a long time. Obviously, I like to pretend that it is some sort of distant memory, but my close friends and family know that it is not. It is much better, but there is no doubt that, if there had been mental health first aid when I was a boy, growing up and going into the military, my life would have been completely changed. We cannot underestimate how important it is to intervene early, when someone is so much more likely to get better. I will never forget the Saturday afternoon when I ended up in the Maudsley, thinking, “How did I end up here? How did this all start?” If policies like this had been talked about 20 years ago, millions of lives would have been very different.

I talk about this because it sends a powerful message: you can get better. People think that they are managing their mental health for the rest of their life, they reach their zenith and that is it. I cannot over-emphasise how wrong that is. Clearly managing a mental health challenge is a difficulty, but it can absolutely be done, and the chances of doing that are exponentially increased by early intervention. If we can get into workplaces and say to people, “We take mental health as seriously as physical health,” we will affect millions of lives, which is ultimately what we come to this place every week to do.

I pay tribute again to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree and the right hon. Member for North Norfolk, who have done a lot of the heavy lifting on this. There are not many people here today, but in some ways, that does not matter. There will be people following this intensely because they have a mental health challenge. They may be 15, 16 or 17-year-old young boys, like I was, who never talk about it and who learn about what is going on through their phone but do not even talk to their parents. When I spoke about my OCD in the *Evening Standard*, I had loads of phone calls the next day, but the best one was from a 16-year-old boy who said he had never spoken to his parents or anyone about it.

There will be a lot of people watching this debate who were devastated when it was cancelled before Christmas. They are the people we are here for, and that is why people like me speak out. It is not easy to speak about individual issues in this House, but I want to say to boys and girls who are watching this now and may be struggling: don’t think for a minute that because there are not lots of people here, and there is not the raucous shouting that we have seen in the last few days, this is in any way less important to many of us in this place. Just because we are quieter, it does not mean that we do not hear you.

There is a mental health revolution going on in this country—we have seen it start and people are talking about it. The Government have committed to parity of esteem. We are flicking over from meeting one in four mental health needs at the moment to one in three. Clearly there is a big unmet need and we have further to go, but it is an unstoppable direction of travel, and today is another point on that march.

[Johnny Mercer]

I sincerely hope that the Government can take forward these recommendations. I slightly disagree with the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree only on one point: parity of esteem does mean something. However, she is right: it does not if people in our communities do not feel it. It is not good enough here to say, "Parity of esteem is a wonderful thing. Haven't we done well? We've put it into Government legislation." It is meaningless unless the people who use the services actually feel like they are treated in the same way and have the same access to treatments as those with physical health problems. I commend the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree and the right hon. Member for North Norfolk for the march we are taking on this, together with the stuff we have done on money and mental health. In this Parliament of immense turbulence, for those who are watching—the quieter ones, whom I have spoken about—this march will continue. They have some wonderful advocates in this place and we keep going.

1.40 pm

**Jon Cruddas** (Dagenham and Rainham) (Lab): It is good to see the subject of mental health in the workplace being discussed this afternoon, and I obviously congratulate colleagues from all parties who have secured the debate. To echo the point made in both speeches so far, given the recent discussions here, it is good that Members can come together and discuss subjects of national significance in a spirit of fraternity.

It seems to me that there are two basic elements to today's debate: first, how to implore employers to accept their responsibilities to do more; and, secondly, to take the opportunity to showcase good practice in our communities, where employers are stepping up to the challenges in offering mental health first aid.

As we know, the backdrop is that we are increasingly aware of the scale of the mental health challenges we face. For example, one in four of us will experience a mental health issue at some point in our lives, according to the World Health Organisation. As has been mentioned, the report by Lord Dennis Stevenson and Paul Farmer, "Thriving at work", has highlighted the costs of poor mental health provisions in the workplace. They suggest that some 300,000 people with long-term mental health issues lose their jobs every year, that poor mental health costs employers billions of pounds each year and that the economy in turn loses billions per year as a result.

The numbers are staggering and quite extraordinary, but the subject of our discussion is not really a question of overall economic utility; it is the suffering of our fellow citizens, and what a good society and what good employers should be doing about these profound challenges. We should think of it this way: a Business in the Community publication, "Mental Health at Work", has found that 15% of employees face dismissal, demotion or disciplinary action after disclosing a mental health issue at work, which could mean that this reality applies to some 1.2 million people of working age in the UK. It has also told us that just 11% of employees felt able to disclose mental health issues to their line manager. These figures are appalling, so things have to change. That is why employers must do more to address these issues.

On the other hand, as I said, we should use this debate to highlight new initiatives where employers are stepping up to meet their responsibilities. I therefore

want to reference the workplace mental health work of a company at the heart of my constituency—the Ford Motor Company.

Throughout last year, many Members may have seen or caught sight of the "Elephant in the Transit" film, which the Ford Motor Company put out, which was aired in TV ad breaks, in cinemas and, more generally, across social media in order to raise awareness of mental health issues. It is a short film—I would guess of only 30 seconds—and contains a pretty simple but very smart message. Basically, there are two young, working class lads in a Transit, and between them sits this massive elephant as the lads chat about their plans for the weekend. One clocks that his mate is not quite right—he has learned to see the signs—so he pulls over the truck to talk to him about it all. It is spot-on, and it really is aimed at a key demographic in this area—young, working-class males. In this instance, Ford has teamed up with Time to Change. It has sought to cut through the stigma, especially among young, working-class males, so that we can more openly discuss mental health issues.

This is not an isolated initiative on Ford's behalf. It has also been working with Mental Health First Aid England to launch a training programme to reduce stigma, to encourage people to speak out more about mental health and to find safe, non-confrontational spaces to talk. The idea is that, through this training, Ford dealers and managers will understand how to act as a first point of contact for a colleague developing or experiencing a mental health issue.

The training is to teach people to spot the signs of mental health issues, offer initial first aid help and guide a person towards the appropriate support, as well as about how to listen non-judgmentally, reassure and respond, even in a crisis. The training can also help stop preventable issues arising by building a supportive culture around mental health. It is to equip Ford's key people in these roles with the skills to talk about mental health with confidence and without judgment. The way the company want to normalise the topic of mental health among their workers has impressed me, so today we should acknowledge such initiatives.

Ford has also backed the "Where's Your Head At?" campaign—it was mentioned earlier—which is calling for change in workplace health and safety laws to protect mental health in the same way as physical health. If successful, it will ensure that every workplace provides mental health first aid as well as physical first aid, helping those in need at the earliest possible opportunity. Again, Ford has been working with Mental Health First Aid England for the training. Overall, I think we can agree that it is the responsibility of British employers to ensure that provision for mental health issues in the workplace meets the necessary standards.

I have to admit that I have many times taken chunks out of employers for what they have not done, and that includes the Ford Motor Company many times, compared with what they should be doing. Given that tendency, it is up to me to highlight good practice by the self-same employers. It seems to me that these initiatives by Ford should be acknowledged and put on the record in the debate today. More generally and simply put, it is good that we have time to talk about this subject this afternoon. Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for giving me a few minutes to make a few points.

1.46 pm

**Peter Aldous** (Waveney) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) on securing this debate, and the Backbench Business Committee on granting it.

For many, first aid in the workplace has too often in the past been a green box that is kept in the corner and which, if we are lucky, is opened very occasionally when someone cuts a finger or scalds themselves when making a cup of tea. However, it is much more than that: not only can there be more serious physical illnesses to which we have to attend, such as a broken limb or a heart attack, but there are mental health challenges of which we need to be increasingly aware.

Very often, workplaces are highly stressful settings, which can accentuate mental health challenges. It is important that we put in place measures to reduce stress, to help pick up those first signs of mental illness and to ensure that people needing treatment and support receive it as quickly as possible. This is not only vital for those who are feeling unwell, but good for their employers.

I chair the all-party group on first aid, the secretariat for which is provided by St John Ambulance. I was on its management board in Suffolk before I came to this place. Mental health first aid training is increasingly being provided by St John Ambulance, which by the end of 2018 had provided 5,000 people with the skills to become mental health first aiders in their workplace, and this figure is due to rise to 10,000 this year. This is a good start, but it needs to be put in the context of 1 million physical first aiders in the workplace, requalifying on a three-year cycle. There is clearly a lot of work still to do.

I shall first highlight the research carried out by St John Ambulance, which shows clearly why we need to step up our game, and then I will move on to outline some cases that illustrate the benefits of embedding mental health support in the workplace. St John Ambulance carried out two surveys in 2018—one of 1,000 employees responsible for booking general first aid courses, and the other of 800 people who attended general first aid courses. The findings of the first survey prompted a variety of conclusions.

First, one in four people in work have left a job due to mental health problems. A further 43% of people considered leaving a job due to stress or mental ill health, yet fewer than one fifth of the organisations in which they worked had mental health policies in place. Conditions including depression and stress had caused nearly a quarter of respondents to miss work for a day or longer, and six out of 10 people asserted that their employer should do more to address mental health issues.

Individual responses from employees who took part in the research included a variety of comments:

“The company I work for are pretty archaic;”

“I believe my manager would mock me;”

“They recognise it as a valid condition but see it as an inconvenience.”

Nearly two thirds of people said that they would feel uncomfortable asking for a mental health sick day. On a more positive note, more than a third of people said that their employer recognised stress as a valid condition

and worked to help, but more than a quarter said that bosses did little or nothing to help. In the second survey, more than half the respondents were unaware that employees have rights if treated unfairly by their bosses on mental health grounds, and nine out of 10 felt that organisations should have a mental health policy.

Both items of research indicate why the recent initiative by the Health and Safety Executive is so important. It has long been assumed that an employer’s responsibility for supporting mental health is covered by a standard risk assessment that takes into account all health and safety needs. In practice, however, due to the stigma attached to mental health, that simply has not been happening, and 44% of people do not feel able to tell their employer when they are feeling anxious or depressed at work, with most citing “embarrassment” as the main barrier.

There is overwhelming evidence of the need to embed a culture of mental health aid and support in the workplace. Last month St John Ambulance hosted a national conference with speakers and delegates drawn from such diverse sectors as construction, banking, retail, education, local government and the armed forces. Case studies included wellness programmes, a universal approach to mental health first-aid training, sleep training, talking groups for people as they tackled changing life circumstances, and the development of positive mental health champions. In one organisation, referrals to counselling by health professionals have fallen by 48% as a result of its initiatives, while another cited a 75% drop in absence due to work-related illness. The obvious impact on the bottom line has enabled senior leadership to buy into those programmes, which are now regarded as crucial to its success.

Having provided physical first-aid training for employers over many years, it is the experience of St John Ambulance that mandatory regulation will be necessary if every organisation is to give mental ill health the attention it deserves. It believes that further work is needed, especially among SMEs, to establish the right framework for such regulation. Extensive consultation will be required, and progress must be made in recognising the necessary impact on employees and employers. The Government must set out a firm timetable through which to consider proposals from experts, employees and employers, and they must consult on proposals for regulations to deliver parity of esteem, as called for by the Health and Social Care Act 2012, and implied by the Stevenson and Farmer report, “Thriving at Work”.

1.54 pm

**Norman Lamb** (North Norfolk) (LD): After yet another week of fractious and angry political discourse, what a pleasure it is to work with two honourable friends—I use that term advisedly—the hon. Members for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) and for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) on an issue of incredible importance. It is important that those watching or reading about this debate recognise that it is possible for right hon. and hon. Members to focus on important issues such as mental ill health, as well as fractious arguments over Brexit.

I thank the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View for what he said about his experience of OCD. Interestingly, OCD has also affected my family as our oldest son was

[Norman Lamb]

diagnosed with it as a teenager. He has since spoken about his experience, and I speak with his authority and approval. What the hon. Gentleman said about the importance of people in his position speaking out about such conditions is important. I remember the moment when, as a teenager, Archie said to me, “Why I am the only person who is going mad?” For a parent to hear that from their child is awful and incredibly distressing, and it makes one realise what a teenager must be going through if that is how they feel about their situation. Of course that is an entirely false perspective, because one then realises that so many others are experiencing their own challenges, and when that realisation dawns, it makes it much easier for individuals to speak out. I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he said and for talking to the press about this issue, because cumulatively that makes a difference.

The Time to Change campaign has been incredibly powerful in helping to normalise mental ill health, and every time someone in a public position speaks out, it becomes a little easier for another teenager to seek help and not be frightened about opening up. I join the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree in acknowledging the work of Natasha Devon, who is a great campaigner for mental health issues, and I thank Bauer Media and Mental Health First Aid England for championing this important cause.

On the cost of mental ill health, I wish to focus first on the cost to the individual, because it is often not recognised by those who do not experience it just how painful and disabling mental ill health can be. If someone is experiencing anxiety, depression or a condition such as OCD, their life is completely dominated by that. They often cannot enjoy life or be happy, and whenever we speak about the economic cost of mental ill health, we must focus on the most important thing, which is the cost to individuals of the ill health that so many experience.

Alongside that, however, there is a significant cost to employers—not just private sector employers, but the public sector, charities and so forth. Health and Safety Executive data show that 57% of days off work through ill health are due to mental ill health of one sort or another, and not confronting that represents an enormous cost to employers. This is not just about time off work, because many people end up falling out of work and on to benefits, and others turn up to work but underperform—the concept of presenteeism—because they are not feeling on top of their game, or because they are obsessed by anxieties or concerns that prevent them from performing their work responsibilities effectively.

Addressing mental ill health is a win-win-win for everybody, because this issue affects not just individuals, but employers and even the Government, who gain as a result of us taking it more seriously. If someone falls out of work because of mental ill health, they end up claiming benefits, and that is an enormous cost to the Government and also impacts on the NHS. Everybody benefits by us taking this issue more seriously. The question then is how best to achieve an advance. The hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) made a very important point when he said that we need to think carefully about how we frame that.

Under existing law, employers are under duties to protect the mental health and wellbeing of their workforce. The Institution of Occupational Safety and Health makes

that point very strongly in its brief for this debate. It makes the point that under the Health and Safety at Work Act etc. 1974 and associated regulations, employers are under a duty to manage the psycho-social risk to their employees at work. There is also the duty under the Equality Act 2010 to make reasonable adjustments where people are suffering from some sort of disability, including mental ill health. I also applaud the Health and Safety Executive for the new guidance it issued in November 2018. For the first time, it includes a section on mental health. That is important. These are all advances worth acknowledging. I would also like to acknowledge the work of Paul Farmer and Lord Stevenson, which was commissioned by the Government. Their report “Thriving at Work” recommends mental health core standards for every employer.

None the less, the first aid legislation is very much framed in terms of physical health. It is very important to establish clearly in legislation—just as we did in the coalition Government, where we legislated for parity of esteem in the NHS—a very important principle for the workplace: an equality in the importance of both physical and mental health in the workplace. I want to stress that it is about much more than just mental health first aid, vital though that is—I totally endorse all the comments made by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree.

I want to highlight the potential risks, as the hon. Member for Waveney made clear, of not getting this right. There is a risk of the tick-box exercise, where an employer can just say, “Yes, we have trained someone up in mental health first aid. We’ve done nothing else, but we have ticked the box and therefore we have met the regulation.” That would be a failure for all of us if that was the outcome of this exercise.

The more fundamental point is that the approach we should be taking is about preventing ill health in the workplace. The whole focus should be on creating healthy workplaces, where people are treated with dignity and respect. It is vital that employees across the workforce have the opportunity to raise their awareness and understanding of mental health. Alongside that, however, we have to think about the causes of stress and anxiety in the workplace. Often, it is due to unhealthy workplaces, where people are not respected and where there is a bullying culture. Depressingly, we see that quite often in the NHS. That has to be confronted, because that is the cause of so many people feeling anxious, distressed and depressed as a result of what happens at work.

**Mr Kevan Jones** (North Durham) (Lab): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree that there are very simple things companies can do—BT and quite a few others do this—to improve work-life balance? For example, they can ensure that people do not have to answer emails late at night or over weekends, or, when people have bereavements, they have a sensible bereavement policy that supports the individual, rather than just allows for a number of days for an individual to get over it.

**Norman Lamb:** That is an incredibly helpful intervention. I totally agree with the right hon. Gentleman. It is about getting the whole culture in the workplace right on flexible working, understanding that parents sometimes have responsibilities to their children and carers have responsibility for an elderly loved one. Not working

ludicrous hours of the day and night is also incredibly important. How we achieve the legislative change is very important. It is vital that we raise awareness through mental health first aid, but we also need a fundamental focus on the prevention of mental ill health in the workplace.

In the remaining minutes, I want to focus on some of the things we did in the west midlands. After I was chucked out of the Department of Health by the electorate in 2015, I was asked to chair a commission on mental health in the west midlands. Our whole focus was on how to prevent mental ill health and take a more public mental health approach. We focused particularly on the workplace. We first focused on how to get people who had experienced mental ill health and had been out of work—often for years and years—back into work. Work is actually good for people. Meaningful work, where we gain a sense of dignity and self-respect, is really important. We are undertaking—with £8.5 million of Government support, I should say—a randomised control trial, applying a strong evidence-based approach called individual placement and support. We give people intensive support to get them ready for employment, get them into a proper job and then support them in that job. We are looking at how we can apply that in primary care, so we capture people earlier, and give them access to someone who can train them and support them for employment. We want to change the mind set of GPs, so they are not just thinking about the sickness of their patient but how they can help them to recover and get back into work—that is critical.

I hope that as a result of the randomised control trial, we will be able to learn lessons which we can then apply across the country. If we can get lots of people with severe and enduring mental ill health back into work, we will achieve something very significant. Sadly, at the moment this extraordinarily strong, evidence-based approach is the exception rather than the rule. Most people across the country do not get access to it. The Government have made a commitment to double the numbers, but that is still a very small proportion of the total. It needs to be expanded rapidly.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Is the problem that mental wellbeing is not hardwired into Government policy? Some policies, for example Department for Work and Pensions work capability tests and others, actually work against individuals. Voluntary work is very useful in getting people back into work, but at the moment there are limits around what people can do while they are still on benefits. Does the right hon. Gentleman think that some flexibility on that would help this process?

**Norman Lamb:** I absolutely do. I was going to say, “Don’t talk to me about the work capability assessment, because it will get me very angry.” We need reform of the welfare system to help to facilitate people returning to work, rather than just treating them as second-class citizens, as it often does.

**Luciana Berger:** I am listening very carefully to the right hon. Gentleman’s remarks, which are very pertinent. On people being in work or not in work if they are affected by a mental health condition, I was struck to learn that for my local mental health trust, Mersey Care, which provides services for the whole of Merseyside,

the latest available figures—not the most recent financial year, but the previous one—show that just 3% of the patients under its care, in both the community and in in-patient services, were in any form of work. That figure is similar for patients under the care of many mental health trusts across our country. Does he believe that people outside this place might not be aware of that fact, but it is staggering and should concern us all? We should be doing everything possible to support people with mental ill health conditions into the workplace.

**Norman Lamb:** I totally agree. My plea to the Government is that, as we hopefully commit to spending more on mental health, we spend at least part of that on preventive measures. If we can get someone into work, it makes a whole difference to their lives. The evidence shows that many people who are helped back into work are then able to stay in work; reducing the burden on the NHS and the benefits system, but giving people dignity and self-respect.

Another initiative we are undertaking in the west midlands is the wellbeing premium. It was my idea, which again is being supported by the Government and I am grateful to them. The idea, which we are trialling over a year, is to give an incentive to employers to improve the way in which they support people in work by training their line managers—the most critical thing one can do—and see whether we can reduce the number of people who end up on sickness absence. The idea is to give them a temporary incentive for one or two years, for example by a reduction in the business rate or a reduction in national insurance payments. If by that we can reduce sickness absence, the number of people falling out of work through ill health and the problem of presenteeism, everyone benefits. It will be interesting to see how that succeeds.

In the west midlands, we are also pursuing the thrive at work commitment, which is trying to build a social movement of companies that all sign up to a commitment to up the level of support that they provide people, changing the culture in workplaces. A toolkit is provided to companies, and that could make a substantial difference across the region.

The action plan also has a commitment to train up 500,000 people across the west midlands in mental health first aid. That is a totally different approach to what we have been used to, which is an NHS very much focused on sickness and providing treatment for sickness after what is often a very long wait, as the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View pointed out. Instead, the whole focus of the system should be on prevention. If we do that, we can achieve a real breakthrough.

To conclude, let us amend the legislation and get mental health first aid to become the standard in every workplace. Critically, that should be part of a much wider programme that is focused on prevention and on building good healthy workplaces with the right culture, where people have respect, are engaged in the work they are doing and are treated with dignity. With that commitment is a dedication to the work they are doing and a commitment to raise awareness of mental ill health among all staff and to train managers properly. Through a combination of regulation and incentives, we can make a real difference for people.

2.11 pm

**Gerald Jones** (Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney) (Lab): I rise to speak briefly in support of the motion. In doing so, I congratulate the three Members who brought the application for the debate to the Backbench Business Committee. In particular, I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) for the work she has done over a long period on this important issue.

As we know, poor mental health impacts on so many people across our country at various points in their lives. As we have heard, it will likely impact on one in four of us to a varying degree at some point in our lives. We know that more support is required to help people suffering from mental ill health in the workplace—support to halt people from deteriorating and to help them back to better mental health. I took part in a mental health first aid training course in a previous employment. It was a worthwhile experience that opened my eyes to the things to look out for and put me in a better position to provide help and support to colleagues. I recommend it to anybody.

I fully appreciate—it was the reason for this debate—that not all employers across the UK offer this training to employees, and that should change. Evidence suggests that 83% of employees in workplaces where mental health first aid is offered have seen an improvement in signposting to mental health support. That is significant. We also know that it helps anyone experiencing a period of poor mental health to talk. From speaking to organisations such as Merthyr and the Valleys Mind in my constituency, I know how important it is to have that opportunity to talk to someone. That is hugely important in the context of work colleagues, so for employers to treat support for mental health on a parity with physical health would be a big step forward. As we have heard a number of times during the debate, talking would also help raise awareness across society and help in some way to end the stigmas of the past.

We know that periods of mental ill health can affect anyone, regardless of age, gender or background. We know that there are serious issues with post-traumatic stress disorder and other mental health issues in our armed forces. We know that the issue affects a lot of men, particularly young men. Suicide is still the biggest cause of death for men under 45. If there was more awareness, particularly in workplaces, and especially those that are male-dominated, it would do much to support those suffering from mental ill health and provide an opportunity to intervene at an early stage.

Having more support for mental health in the workplace makes sense from a financial perspective, as workplace mental health issues cost the UK economy billions of pounds a year. However, while the financial position is of concern, the cost to individuals, their families and their quality of life is much more concerning. We know that some 300,000 people with long-term mental health conditions lose their jobs every year. Left untreated, mental ill health impacts on a person's relationships with friends and family and ultimately their quality of life. As I have highlighted, many have said in recent years that mental health should have the same focus as physical health, although for a variety of reasons that does not yet appear to be happening.

As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree, the Health and Safety at Work etc. Act 1974 made it a legal necessity for workplaces to train someone in medical first aid. If we are to have parity of mental and physical health, we need to make changes. As the motion states, the Government should change the law to provide a clear direction to employers regarding their responsibility not only for physical health but for mental health.

Workplaces would benefit from having trained mental health first aiders. It would provide not only a financial benefit to the economy, but a positive impact on many people's wellbeing. I hope the Government will take note and act quickly.

2.16 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) on securing this debate, and I thank her for setting the scene so well. I thank right hon. and hon. Members from all parts of the Chamber for their valuable contributions. I echo the comments of others in the Chamber about what a joy it is to have a debate on a subject on which we can all agree. We agree on the strategy and the way forward. I am reminded of the programme I watch on a Sunday night—"Call the Midwife". Perhaps others watch it, too. There is always a real tragedy at the beginning of the programme, but at the end, things always turn out well. I hope that Brexit turns out the same. We will see how it goes.

Most of us in the Chamber have a good understanding of the impact that mental health issues have on people's emotional and physical state. In the short term, mental health problems alter personality traits and the behaviour of individuals. In the long term, they can lead to suicidal thoughts. In the worst-case scenario, they can eventually drive a person to commit suicide. There were 318 suicides registered in Northern Ireland in 2015, which was the highest since records began in 1970. People often have trouble coping with mental health issues, which of course will translate into their work life. Mental health cannot be compartmentalised. That is not the key to working and living with mental health problems.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** It is too tempting not to intervene on the hon. Gentleman. Is he aware—I am sure he is—that Northern Ireland has a particular issue? When I was a Minister in the Ministry of Defence, I was shocked to see that even though the violence of the troubles was 20 or 30 years ago, there is still a legacy of mental illness from those times.

**Jim Shannon:** The right hon. Gentleman has obviously had sight of my notes, because I was going to refer to that point later. He is absolutely right. The 30-year terrorist campaign has a legacy, and it affects us. I will mention that in my comments.

When I was first elected in 2010, I took in a new part of my constituency, Ballynahinch, which I very quickly found out had some serious problems in relation to suicides. They were mostly among young people, and unfortunately they seemed to be cluster suicides, if I can use that terminology. A number of young people took their lives, but the community very quickly reacted in Killyleagh and Ballynahinch. Church groups, community groups and interested individuals came together and

addressed those issues. With Government Departments, they helped to reduce the level of suicides. It was particularly stressful to be confronted with that as an MP so early in his parliamentary term.

One in six workers suffer from anxiety, depression and unmanageable stress each year, causing 74% of people with a mental health problem to take more than a year out of work. In 2015, 18 million days were lost to sickness absence caused by mental health conditions. Mental health issues affect both the work and the lifestyle of countless people. Urgent action must be taken to educate employers about the difficulties that result from mental illnesses, mainly to help those who are struggling in the workplace but also to benefit those employers, for whom that may mean cost outlays. It follows that not only is a happier worker a more productive worker, but there should be a natural decrease in sickness periods. Other Members have mentioned that.

If employers are to take steps to promote and improve people's wellbeing in their workplaces, they need to be able to identify an instance in which someone may be struggling with mental health problems, but it is not always easy to do so. I understand that, because I have talked to many people who seem to be smiley, jokey and happy, and may be the life and soul of the party, but when they go home they are very different. Sometimes we do not really know what is happening. In the workplace, there needs to be someone who can see through the façade to the real person underneath.

Some 49% of workers said that they would not be comfortable disclosing a mental health issue at work. Others in the workplace should be educated to ensure that they can recognise individuals who are dealing with such problems. They should be trained in mental health issues—and that should include mental health first aid—so that the workplace can become a positive environment.

Given that two in five employers admit that they have seen a rise in mental health problems, it is important for workplaces to foster a culture of support and openness for those needing help, making them feel reassured about seeking assistance from fellow employees. The Scottish Association for Mental Health, backed by the Scottish Government, has adopted a programme on physical activity. I can say with all honesty and sincerity that the Scottish Government, and their Health Department in particular, lead on health issues in general, including mental health issues. I know that the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens) will probably mention this, but I think it important for us to recognise good practice wherever it may be, and I hope that we can replicate it in other parts of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Better together, that is what I always say.

I believe that the Department for Work and Pensions must take the lead, and that all workplaces should be supplied with a mental health toolkit as standard practice. It should be issued not just to those who request it, but to all who are paying tax for a business. That could be modelled on the content of the current publications by Public Health England, Business in the Community and the Samaritans—what a good job they do to address these issues. Every one of us will know what really tremendous work they do in our constituencies, and I cannot praise the volunteers highly enough. To engage employers to participate in initiatives such as “Time to

Change” and be educated further on the subject of mental health, there must be a move from the Department, and help must be garnered from it.

It has been suggested that as well as becoming involved with mental health organisations, companies should review their absence policies and make keeping-in-touch arrangements, as evidence suggests that 12.7% of all sickness absence days in the UK can be attributed to mental health conditions. There must be tools to enable employers to create an employee assistance programme. I have read research indicating that in the few businesses that use such a programme, 25% of employees say that their organisation encourages staff to talk openly about their mental health issues. Research shows that the more people do that, the easier it becomes to deal with their problems. We are always hearing that “it's good to talk”, and that is so true, but many of the people we meet may not have anyone to talk to.

Such programmes not only help the individuals who are suffering with mental health problems, but benefit companies. Better mental health support in the workplace can save UK businesses up to £8 billion per year. If we do the job right we can save money, and so can the businesses, because they will have a happier and more productive workforce.

Three quarters of all mental health problems are established by the age of 24, when people are entering long-term careers. That is another factor that we should recognise at that early stage. As many as 300,000 people a year lose their jobs because companies are not sure how to provide the help and support that they need. In the past year, 74% of people have felt stressed as they have been overwhelmed or unable to cope owing to the demands of their career. Managers should be able to spot the signs of common mental health conditions, but that happens only when they receive dedicated training. Others have referred to the need for such knowledge of what is happening. Many managers are blind to, or uneducated about, the symptoms of mental illnesses, and it is all too easy in the busy working world to be consumed by a goal and not to see the elements that are in play around us. We would never send an engineer into a dangerous environment without the necessary training, so why should we assume that companies can automatically notice when an employee's health is plummeting?

I am sure that you, Mr Deputy Speaker, are like the rest of us in this regard: we often eat at our desks. However, that does not mean that everyone else has to do it. We have to recognise that sometimes it is good to get away from our desks and go for a walk, and have our minds on other things for a time. The benefits of regular breaks and eating lunch away from desks, and creating a positive workplace state of mind, should be promoted to those who have a busy life and seek to cram things into every second at the risk of their mental health.

As we heard a moment ago from the right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones), Northern Ireland in particular is struggling with the issue of mental health owing to a lack of resources. When compared with 17 other countries, Northern Ireland was shown to have the second highest rates of mental health illness, 25% higher than those in England. That is certainly largely due to 30 years of the troubles and the legacy of the terrorist campaign, but it is more than that. We

[*Jim Shannon*]

must address those issues and do better in enabling people to lead high-quality lives with the tools to handle stress and daily life. A massive step in that regard would be creating mental first aid as standard in workplaces.

Workplace mental ill health costs employers about £26 billion a year, and many places are struggling to find the large amount of money that is needed to improve their awareness of mental health. A report for the NHS found that mental illness accounts for nearly half of all ill health in people younger than 65, and that only a quarter of people in need of treatment currently get it.

This is a health issue, but it is important for four Departments to come together with a strategy, because it is not just about health. It should also involve the DWP, the Department for Education and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy. Companies need to be given more support and funds, as does the NHS to help those who are suffering in the long term, as it is currently unable to provide the materials needed. Action needs to be taken, because the number of sick days due to mental health issues is increasing rapidly owing to negative work environments: 89% of employees with mental health problems say that it affects their work lives hugely. That needs to change, for the betterment not only of business and the economy but of those who are struggling with mental health issues.

I look forward to the comments of both the Minister and the shadow Minister. I am convinced—as, I think, is everyone in the Chamber—that we shall hear a positive and helpful response from the Minister.

2.27 pm

**Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Let me first praise the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) for securing the debate and for making an excellent speech. Let me also congratulate her, because she may well be the first person to have a motion passed in the House this week: every other motion seems to have been voted down.

I want to talk about some of my personal experiences. Before I came to this place, I was a trade union activist. When dealing with mental health issues, I had to remind employers of the provisions of the Equality Act 2010 and reasonable adjustments, and to make them understand the nature of a particular condition and what can happen as a result of it. I used to encourage managers to ensure that first aiders were aware that someone might have such a condition. In particular, they needed to know if an employee was taking a specific medication because of the possible side effects. Medication can have an impact on behaviour and performance.

The hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) produced some shocking statistics on issues such as dismissal. In my view, much of that is due to aggressive management policies on attendance, not just in the private sector but in the public sector. When someone has been absent for a certain number of days, that can trigger an interview leading to the removal of sick pay or other forms of disciplinary action. That makes people go into what has been referred to as presenteeism. People also feel that, because they have been off for a certain number of days, if they are off

another day, they will get the treatment. If we are going to have attendance management policies, they should be based on facts; they should not be aggressive and done just on the basis of trigger points.

I associate myself with the remarks by the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) about bullying. Bullying and harassment in the workplace is an issue and impacts on people's mental health. So I strongly support the motion's proposals to ensure that first aiders have adequate training. That is very much encouraged in trade unionised workplaces. I know hon. Members across the House will agree with me that trade unions play a vital role in trade unionised workplaces, ensuring that an employee with a mental health condition is looked after and given the proper support and that employers understand their conditions. This reminds me that one of the favourite books in the Glasgow Unison office was the "MIMS" book, which explained every piece of medication and their side effects. It was used as a tool to explain to employers the behaviour of those on medication or with a mental health condition and other problems that can arise, and to explain how to address those in a way that was fair and appropriate.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) encouraged me to promote the health service in Scotland and the 10-year mental health strategy, and I will talk briefly about that. Between January and June last year, there were a number of courses. There were 43 one-day courses on healthy workplaces for NHS managers, and 552 people were trained. There was training for trainers; 28 people are now delivering more courses. There were eight workshops on resilience and wellbeing; 97 people were trained on that. There were also three managers' competency workshops; 36 people were trained on that.

In Scotland there is a 10-year mental health strategy. It seems to be working. Out of 40 actions, 13 are complete and 26 are progressing and ongoing. These training programmes are vital, as the hon. Gentleman said. The workplace training programmes deal with topics such as surviving the pressures of work-related stress, managing organisational stress and getting the Health and Safety Executive on board with those arrangements.

There is an opportunity for the UK Government to look at their good work plan as well in relation to ensuring that mental health issues in the workplace are dealt with appropriately. Issues to do with insecure work are not yet being tackled by the Government. That can have a real impact on someone's mental health and wellbeing. There are issues about how the DWP deals with some of these issues, which I hope the Government will look at. For example, someone who refuses a zero-hours contract job could be sanctioned under universal credit, but if someone is on a legacy benefit they would not be sanctioned. The pressures of the DWP system of benefit conditionality can often be punitive.

**Karen Lee** (Lincoln) (Lab): I often get letters from people on zero-hours contracts. They might, for argument's sake, get up at 5 o'clock in the morning and spend an hour cycling to a job only to find out there is not a day's work for them. That puts them under such stress and causes so much more anxiety, and pressures their mental health. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this is just one of the drawbacks of zero-hours contracts? We hear

such a lot about how wonderful it is that everybody is in work, but if we scratch the surface we see it is not actually quite that simple.

**Chris Stephens:** I strongly agree. I do not know if the hon. Lady has had the opportunity to look at the Workers (Definition and Rights) Bill, which I have introduced and deals with some of those issues. People on zero-hours contracts or working parents turn up at work with an expectation that they are going to be working for a certain amount of hours—four, perhaps—and are told they will instead be working for eight hours and then have to deal with childcare; or they turn up and, as the hon. Lady said, find they are not required that day. That must have an impact on someone’s mental health and wellbeing.

I ask the Government to look at the punitive measures in terms of benefit conditionality. That is also a recipe for people to be recycled into unsuitable, potentially exploitative work just to avoid a sanction.

I support the motion. I ask the Government to look at these issues about the clear and direct impact on the mental health of workers and possibly changing some policies in that regard. I thank all Members who have spoken so far for their excellent contributions.

2.35 pm

**Julie Cooper (Burnley) (Lab):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) on securing this debate and pay tribute to her for the excellent work she does in this area. I also thank the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) for helping to secure this important debate, and particularly pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for sharing his personal experiences, which are very powerful. My mother suffered with OCD all her life and regularly said to me, “If I had a damaged leg I would have got help and sympathy, and there would have been no stigma attached.” So I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue.

Debates such as this with a particular end in sight—to raise awareness and end stigma—are important. I join with Members, in this wonderful spirit of co-operation in all corners of the House, in saying to anyone out there suffering with mental ill health and to their family members that many of us in this place are sincerely dedicated to effecting good change.

We have heard powerful contributions from all sides of the House on the impact that mental health issues can have on people’s lives, and indeed on our economy. For the one in four people who will experience mental health issues, there are serious consequences in all areas of their lives, including at work. It is estimated that 5 million workers, nearly one in seven, are experiencing a mental health condition. Women in full-time employment are twice as likely to have a common mental health problem as full-time employed men, and 300,000 people with a long-term mental health condition lose their job every year. The human cost of this is hard to calculate; these are people who have lost their livelihoods because they cannot get the support they need.

While the human cost is difficult to quantify, we do know that there is an enormous economic cost overall. For the whole of the UK it costs up to £99 billion a

year. The Mental Health Foundation found that over 12% of sick days in the UK can be attributed to mental health conditions. The Health and Safety Executive reported that 15.4 million working days are lost each year to work-related stress, anxiety and depression—more than are lost to physical ill health. Mental ill health hits smaller businesses hard, and research from the insurance sector found that it costs small and medium-sized enterprises £30,000 in recruitment costs, training time and lost productivity to replace a staff member. There is another side to presenteeism. As the TUC points out, UK workers with mental health problems also contribute to the economy, adding £226 billion to the UK’s GDP in 2016 alone. They are contributing despite living with mental ill health, so it is only right, at the very least, that society gives something back to them. Despite them often suffering illness, their work supports our economy, so our society must support them.

Mental health does not exist in isolation. It is fundamentally bound up with how we live our lives, and the stresses and strains of modern life take their toll. In my constituency of Burnley, one in five people report feeling anxious or depressed, which is higher than the national average. As many Members have said, incidents of suicidal thoughts and outright acts of suicide have risen worryingly since 2000, with the number of people who self-harm more than doubling over the intervening period. Workplace conditions can be responsible for such strains. Indeed, three quarters of adults say that they are stressed about work. As a former employer, I say to employers out there that the best thing that they can do to improve productivity and profitability is to invest in the health and wellbeing of their workforce, including mental health, which is paramount. Sadly, mental health support is severely lacking for many workers and access to services that prevent mental health problems is getting worse.

Mental health services are still a long way from reaching the promised parity of esteem. Mental health trusts have less money to spend on patient care in real terms than they did in 2012. That underfunding is leading to delays for people who are trying to access services. In some areas of the country, people are waiting four months to access basic talking therapies—four months without the support that they need to stay in work. When it comes to mental health in the workplace, as research from MIND and others has shown, we can actually put a number on the cost of failing to fund mental health services adequately. Poor mental health at work is estimated to cost the taxpayer between £24 billion and £27 billion a year, which is made up of NHS costs, benefit costs and lost tax revenue. Those costs can be avoided if our mental health services are properly funded to give people the support they need.

Just as work can be the cause of stress and, ultimately, mental ill health, work is also where mental ill health can manifest itself. Today’s discussion has shown us one way that support at work could be provided. Mental health first aid, much like physical first aid, can provide a first port of call when mental health problems arise. We have heard already today about the value of early intervention. My hon. Friends the Members for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas) and for Liverpool, Wavertree raised specific examples of where companies have invested proactively in employing and training mental first aid

[Julie Cooper]

workers, and we heard that Thames Water has seen a three quarters reduction in sickness absence related to mental health issues.

It is clear that mental health first aid can work, but there is no duty on employers to provide it. Labour's view is that there should be. In 2012, the Government encouraged employers to offer mental health first aid, but we still have not seen it taken up as widely as it should have been. The amount of Government resources for mental health first aid training is clearly not enough to embed mental health first aid. Last year, the review of workplace mental health by Paul Farmer and Lord Stevenson recommended that all employers put in place systems to support workers with mental health conditions. As we have heard today, mental health first aid can play a key role in that. At the time, the Government accepted the recommendations of the Farmer and Stevenson review, including those about the role of employers. Will the Minister tell us what action the Government are taking to put the recommendations into practice?

The debate today has called for a change in the law, and Labour joins that call. The Government must come forward with proposals to support employers to ensure that mental health first aid is provided. This matter is too important to be left to the good will of employers. Legislation is required.

Mental health first aid alone will not be enough, however. Its role will also be to refer people on to professional mental health services when that is appropriate. Mental health first aid is not a solution when the wait for professional mental health services could be months. It must be part of a wider network of support, alongside clinical services that give people appropriate and timely support. If this Government are serious about tackling the burning injustice of mental ill health, there must be less tinkering around the edges, and a comprehensive new system of support that can intervene as soon as possible when problems emerge. The human cost and economic impact of what is becoming a mental health epidemic can no longer be ignored, and the Government must demonstrate that they take this seriously and act now.

2.45 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Jackie Doyle-Price):** I should like to thank all the contributors to the debate. It has been marked by a lot of enthusiasm and passionate advocacy in support of improved mental health. In particular, I would like to pay tribute to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger), the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb) and my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) for securing the debate and for bringing their characteristic ambitious agendas into play, alongside their well-informed and passionate advocacy on behalf of them. It can often be challenging to respond to all three of those Members, but on this occasion I have really enjoyed listening to their contributions and I agreed with much of what they said.

We all share the same objective, which is to secure support as early as possible for people who are suffering mental ill health and, more specifically, to enable more

people with mental ill health to stay in work. That is good for their health—as long as it is good work and they are well supported—but it is also good for the economy when more people are encouraged to work. That was clearly illustrated by the figures cited by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree for those receiving care from Mersey Care, which bring into stark relief the size of the challenge. They show that only 3% of those patients are in work, which is something we should all reflect on. It underlines the importance of ensuring that we get better at supporting people who are suffering mental health challenges and at encouraging them into work.

I am pleased to be joined on the Front Bench by the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton). She is also responsible for the Health and Safety Executive, which obviously has a big role to play in this agenda. She has been listening carefully to all Members' contributions today. She and I are united in an objective to ensure that we keep more people with all kinds of disability in work, and that we get those who are currently excluded from the workforce into it. We have a wide package of measures that we are taking forward in that regard, some of which have been referred to today.

The Government are committed to building a country that works for everyone, and that must include ensuring that disabled people and people with mental health conditions can go as far as their talents can take them. Too many people with a mental health condition are unable to do that, and that is a burning injustice that must be tackled. As the right hon. Member for North Norfolk pointed out, people who are unemployed for more than 12 weeks are between four and 10 times more likely to suffer from depression and anxiety. That statistic illustrates why it is good for society, as well as for the individual, that we tackle this issue. The good news is that staying in or returning to work after a period of mental ill health really does aid mental health recovery. It really does make perfect sense.

**Norman Lamb:** The Minister will be aware of the objective in the five year forward view to double the number of people who get access to individual placement and support. Can she indicate how that programme is going? If she cannot do so now, will she write to me?

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I can say that we are making progress, but I would prefer to write to the right hon. Gentleman with more details, if I may. I have seen some of that individual placement and support in operation, and it is hugely inspiring. In those mental health trusts that are giving one-to-one support, people are finding that the reward and discipline of going to work really does aid their recovery, even in some of the most challenging cases. I will write to the right hon. Gentleman with more information on that.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** Will the Minister liaise with colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions? As I said to the right hon. Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb), voluntary work is a helpful access point for people who want to get back into work, and the current limitations on people being allowed to do certain voluntary work hinder some who want to take that route into work.

**Jackie Doyle-Price:** I completely agree with the right hon. Gentleman, and my hon. Friend the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work agrees too. Employers are often risk-averse about using voluntary work, and we in government need to ensure that we are making it easy for people to apply for those routes. My hon. Friend says she will write to the right hon. Gentleman on that matter.

A number of points have been raised in this debate. On the issue of mental health first aid in schools, I can advise the hon. Member for Wakefield (Mary Creagh), who is not in her place, that the Government have a commitment to ensuring that at least one member of staff in each primary and secondary school receives mental health first aid training. We have currently reached 1,537 schools with that training.

I am delighted to hear from my constituency neighbour, the hon. Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas). Like him, I am well aware of much of Ford's activity, and it is good to hear what it has been doing in this regard.

My hon. Friend the Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous) highlighted the work of St John Ambulance in promoting mental health first aid and, again, I commend its work. The right hon. Member for North Durham (Mr Jones) made the excellent point that this is a cross-governmental issue. I have mentioned DWP, but the five year forward view carries the message that this issue must be tackled across Government, and we remain focused on delivering exactly that.

The Prime Minister has set out an ambitious set of reforms to improve mental health. We have heard references to parity of esteem, and I reiterate to all hon. Members that the fact that parity of esteem is written into legislation is not the end; it is just the start. The truth is that, in delivering true parity of esteem, we have to manage a programme of behavioural change throughout our services and, indeed, throughout society. Frankly, none of us should ever be complacent about whether we have achieved it. Parity of esteem will take a lot of time, and it is great to see just how much energy is being applied to it.

We have heard a number of references to Time to Change, and it is clear that the cultural transformation in society has been massively aided by Time to Change and that destigmatisation is really helping with delivery. None the less, we have a big role to play in service provision. We are creating 21,000 new posts in the mental health workforce. We are implementing the first waiting time ambitions for mental health so that people have faster access to the care they need. We have recently published the first review of mental health legislation in a number of years. And, of course, we are massively improving early intervention by investing in more services in schools.

We are investing more through the 10-year plan, and the Prime Minister has announced that the NHS budget will grow by over £20 billion. In turn, in the long-term plan published last week, the NHS confirmed that there will be a comprehensive expansion of mental health services, with an additional £2.3 billion in real terms by 2023-24. The ambition is that that will give 380,000 more adults access to psychological therapies and 345,000 more children and young people greater support in the next five years.

We are ambitious, although I do not pretend that, by putting it into law, we have suddenly achieved parity of esteem. We are on a journey in how we commission and deliver services and, of course, in how we behave across society. There is still much to do, not least in the workforce. Destigmatising mental ill health is contributing to understanding and challenging the prejudice and stigma, but we still need to do more.

We have heard much reference to the Farmer-Stevenson review. The Prime Minister appointed them to advise us on how employers can better support all employees to remain and thrive in work. We set out a broad-ranging strategy further to support disabled people and people with health conditions, including mental health ones, to enter into and thrive in work. We did that through our response, where we accepted all those recommendations; indeed, the leadership council to deliver that met only this morning. The work and health unit, which I lead jointly with the Minister for Disabled People, Health and Work, will be overseeing progress on those recommendations, which range from short-term deliverables to longer-term reform. That will include looking at potential legislation in due course.

The key Thriving at Work recommendation is that all employers, regardless of size or industry, should adopt six core standards that lay the basic foundations for an approach to workplace mental health. The review also recommended that all public sector employers, and private sector companies with more than 500 employees, deliver mental health enhanced standards. Those include increasing transparency and accountability through internal and external reporting of their performance against those standards. The Prime Minister accepted those recommendations that apply across the civil service and NHS England. The civil service, as an employer of 420,000 employees, really should be leading by example on this. Equally, the NHS, as both the provider of services and as a large employer, should be leading the way.

The Government have also taken action to work with partners to develop a framework to support organisations to record and report their performance on disability and mental health in the workplace. Last November, we published that voluntary framework, which highlights transparency and reporting as the effective levers in driving the cultural change we need to develop. But we know that every line manager, supervisor and leader has a crucial role to play in supporting employees to stay well and stay in work, which is why the work and health unit is also working with partners to identify the support and skills that line managers need, across all sizes of organisation, to create inclusive and supportive workplace environments. So we are exploring how we in government can share those examples of best practice, so that all employers get better at this. Many of them will recognise that they need the tools to do the job, because no one knows what they do not know, and we in government have a role to play in spreading that good practice.

We recognise that mental health first aid has a role to play in the Government's ambitious strategy to transform workplace mental health. Mental health first aid is a helpful training resource to educate people to care not only for others, but for themselves. It also helps to improve understanding about mental health and mental illness; to build that culture and better understanding within organisations; and to encourage people to stay

[Jackie Doyle-Price]

well and get the support they need to manage any mental health symptoms and problems. I was also struck by what the right hon. Member for North Norfolk said: on its own, it is not enough. We would not want to have legislation that became a floor of service in mental health.

A number of references have been made to Thames Water and its success in delivering mental health first aid, all of which is true, but mental health first aid is just part of its embedding a supportive workplace culture for those with mental ill health; it is not the only tool that the company uses. It has introduced mental health first aiders across the business, but it has also expanded its internal clinical occupational health team to support the business in case management, health screening, health surveillance and well-being. The occupational health team now processes an average of 100 referrals a month, 98% of which are for non-work-related issues. Up to 80% of the cases referred every month are for those still in work, which shows that people are accessing longer-term care; this is about keeping them in work, rather than just their getting mental health first aid. We need to be careful about honing in on one simple measure of supporting mental health in the workplace, rather than encouraging a more holistic culture of supporting wellbeing.

I can also advise the House that the Health and Safety Executive, working together with Mental Health First Aid England, has recently published revised guidance for employers on their compliance with the Health and Safety (First-Aid) Regulations 1981. The guidance clarifies for employers the existing requirement to consider mental health alongside physical health when undertaking a first aid needs assessment. The findings from the needs assessment will help direct employers to decide what measures they need to put in place.

The advice of the Health and Safety Executive is that the Stevenson and Farmer review recommendations go way beyond the provision of mental health first aid. The Government's view is that the best way to secure employer action, to enable those experiencing mental ill health to remain and thrive in work, is to engage with employers to adopt a comprehensive approach based on the Thriving at Work mental health standards. Mental health first aid is not an exclusive way of delivering employer action, but it can form part of it.

To improve information and advice for employers, we are supporting Mind and the Royal Foundation to continue developing their mental health at work online gateway, which we launched on 11 September 2018. The online platform is aimed at employers, senior management and line managers but is accessible to anyone, and it helps them to find help and support for colleagues, to challenge stigma and to learn more about mental health in the workplace. The guided search tool helps with the development of toolkits, blogs and case studies to help everyone in their journey to improve the workplace. Mental Health at Work is a UK-wide initiative that supports people across all workplaces, in all sectors, of all backgrounds, and in all regions.

In conclusion, by working with our partners, including health professionals and employers, this Government are working to change culture and professional practice fundamentally, to tackle poor mental health and to

ensure that disabled people and people with health conditions can reach their full potential, not only in the workplace but across society as a whole.

I thank all Members for their contributions and for their interest in the subject. We need to continue to discuss the issues and to encourage good practice. We have heard many good examples today, but we need to consider debating the issues so that we genuinely foster a culture at work that supports people with disabilities and with mental ill health to get jobs and to stay in work.

3.2 pm

**Luciana Berger:** I want to thank and put on the record my gratitude to colleagues who have joined us and made contributions this afternoon. I appreciate that we are extremely busy with Brexit proceedings, so I am most grateful to everyone who has made the time to be here for this important debate. I also thank those who have made interventions. In particular, I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Johnny Mercer) and my right hon. Friend the Member for North Norfolk (Norman Lamb)—I call them friends because we have worked very closely together on this and other related mental health matters—as well as my hon. Friend the Member for Dagenham and Rainham (Jon Cruddas), the hon. Member for Waveney (Peter Aldous), my hon. Friend the Member for Merthyr Tydfil and Rhymney (Gerald Jones) and the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon), and the Front Benchers, the hon. Member for Glasgow South West (Chris Stephens), my hon. Friend the Member for Burnley (Julie Cooper) and the Minister, for their responses.

I hope that my opening speech and the personal, passionate and informed speeches of other Members on both sides of the House have made clear that there is a robust moral, social and economic case for a change to the law to place on employers a legal obligation to make provision for employees to be trained in mental health first aid, in addition to the training they already have to provide for physical health first aid. That is the crux of the issue. If we expect and require businesses with 25 employees or more, including in the public and charitable sectors, to train at least one person in physical health first aid, an equal requirement should be extended to the provision of mental health first aid, if we are serious about the principle of equality for mental health.

Having listened closely to the remarks and representations that have been made, I appreciate that this should not be a tick-box exercise. The proposal is not going to fix the many challenges in mental health services and it is by no means a replacement for clinical professionals, who do a very important job, or the only thing that should happen in workplaces. It is an additional measure. I listened carefully to the Minister, who said that our workplaces should have a holistic culture of wellbeing; of course that should be the case, but the proposed provision should not be viewed in isolation.

I, along with the right hon. Member for North Norfolk, the hon. Member for Plymouth, Moor View, and just under 210,000 signatories to the “Where’s Your Head At” petition are asking the Government to enact this legislative change, to expand the legal responsibility of employers to make provision to train employees in mental first aid as well as physical first aid, and to make that positive and decisive step towards ensuring parity

of esteem—parity of esteem was enshrined in law seven years ago in the Health and Social Care Act 2012—between physical and mental health in this country.

I do not think that we can be seen as impatient, as it was seven years ago that that principle was put into law. I and many others see this as one step—not the only step—that we should make. It is just one of the six principles proposed in the Thriving at Work report, which was a really important piece of work that was published one year and three months ago. This is just one step in that suite of tools at the disposal of businesses and organisations to make that difference.

I say to the Minister that it was the manifesto commitment of her party to bring forward this change. Having listened carefully to what she has said today, I can say that, obviously, she has not made that commitment yet, but, going forward, I urge her to make that change in the near future as it is one thing that could really make a difference.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House notes that the UK is facing a mental health crisis; further notes that, according to the Independent Review into Mental Health in the Workplace 2017 commissioned by the Prime Minister, each year 300,000 people with long-term mental health conditions lose their job; recognises that Centre for Mental Health research shows presenteeism from mental health is estimated to cost the economy £15.1 billion per annum; acknowledges this same research shows it costs the economy £8.4 billion per annum for mental health absenteeism; considers that a recent poll by OnePoll found that 38 per cent of people reported being stressed about work; observes that the Health and Safety Act 1974 made it a legal necessity for workplaces to train someone in medical first aid; and calls on the Government to change this law via secondary legislation to provide clarity that an employer's first aid responsibilities cover both physical and mental health and to add a requirement for workplaces to train mental health first aiders.

## Children's Social Care

*[Relevant documents: First Report of the Education Committee, Fostering, HC340, and the Government Response, Cm 9662.]*

3.6 pm

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered children's social care in England.

First, let me declare my interest in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. Secondly, let me say how delighted I am that we are actually here to debate this issue—the debate has been delayed twice, so this is our third attempt—and that we have some people here to listen as well. It is wonderful, after the stressful week that we have had, that we have two excellent debates this afternoon on really worthwhile subjects that affect all of our constituents on a daily basis. This is the sort of bread and butter business that this House should be spending more time on, but I fear that we do not spend enough time on it, and that has been a characteristic, over many years, of children's issues in particular.

I am grateful to the Backbench Business Committee for allowing this debate. This is a wide-ranging subject, and I am sure that there will be contributions on many aspects from children in care, to safeguarding, early intervention and so on.

I am not overstating the case, having followed this issue in Parliament for now more than 18 years, when I say that children's social care services are currently approaching crisis point, if they are not already there in certain parts of the country. I am particularly concerned about the disparities and the differential outcomes between different authorities in different parts of the country. That forms the basis of the report "Storing Up Trouble", which was published last July and produced by the all-party children's group, of which I am Chair. The Minister very kindly contributed to that report and has spoken to our group in response to it. That followed on from the "No Good Options" report in March 2017, which really flagged up huge differentials in the way that our children are being looked after in the care system and beyond across the country. I thank the National Children's Bureau and its officers for the immense amount of work that went into that very commendable report.

However, it was not just that report in isolation. I am afraid that, over the past few months, there has been a plethora of reports and many worthy organisations flagging up concerns about the state of children's social care. Action for Children produced the report, "Revolving Door Part 2: Are we failing children at risk of abuse and neglect?", which revealed that some 23,000 children needed repeated referrals before receiving statutory support to help them with serious issues such as abuse, neglect and family dysfunction. It found a further 13,500 not getting statutory support despite multiple referrals.

**John Howell** (Henley) (Con): Is my hon. Friend as worried as I am about the patchy way in which children are brought into the decisions being made about themselves?

**Tim Loughton:** My hon. Friend raises a very good point. There is certainly differential practice and this is an important issue. In my time in the Department for Education, we were really keen, as subsequent Ministers

[Tim Loughton]

have been, that children in the care system should be at the heart of the considerations of what is best for them, but they actually have quite a good idea of what is best for them as well, so it is really important that they are brought into the decision-making process.

In my time as Minister, I made sure that every local authority in the country—with the exception of the City of London and the Isles of Scilly, where there were no children in care—had a children in care council, made up of children in the care system speaking directly to directors of children's services and councillors about their experiences. I am really pleased that the Government have decided not to do away with independent reviewing officers, who are that important link, consulting children face-to-face and feeding into their care plans.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Tim Loughton:** I am aware that I do not have long to speak, so I will take just two more interventions and then get on with it or else I shall be in trouble with the Chair.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Sir Lindsay Hoyle):** Let me help. I told the hon. Gentleman that he could speak for “around 15 minutes”, so I would not be too upset if he got to 20 minutes. What I am bothered about is when other Members are left with a very short time limit. Who is the hon. Gentleman giving way to, by the way?

**Tim Loughton:** I am giving way to the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon).

**Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP):** I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this issue forward. From my research on the matter, it seems that there are an additional 15,000 children in need in England since 2017, so it is clear that there is pressure on the system. Does the hon. Gentleman agree—perhaps the Minister could also respond to this point later—that the fact that Northern Ireland has the fewest children in care per capita in the United Kingdom indicates that a dialogue should take place with the devolved Administrations, particularly the Northern Ireland Assembly, to see just how those numbers have been achieved?

**Tim Loughton:** First, I am very grateful for your flexibility on timings, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** As ever.

**Tim Loughton:** Yes, as ever.

I entirely take the point made by the hon. Member for Strangford. In fact, one of the weaknesses of the system is that we do not share best practice enough. When I was the Minister, I tried to get together the children's Ministers from all four parts of the United Kingdom. Of course, we also have Children's Commissioners from all four parts of the United Kingdom, and we ought to meet them and see what they are all doing more often because there are some really good aspects of the care system in Northern Ireland that we could learn from in England, and vice versa.

**Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Does he agree that one of the major barriers to children and young people

exercising their rights under the UN convention on the rights of the child to be involved in decisions around their own care is difficulty in accessing the content of their personal files, and that this issue needs to be addressed across the country?

**Tim Loughton:** Gosh. I am afraid that my hon. Friend has got me on to a subject that is an issue for an entire whole-day Adjournment debate in itself, so may I say that he raises a very good point but that I have quite enough to say without straying down that important, though slightly esoteric, pathway?

There have been other reports in recent months. The Children's Society published its “Crumbling Futures” report, which highlighted that almost 60,000 children aged 16 and 17 are in receipt of support as a child in need, but that as many as 46% of those referred to children's services did not meet the threshold for support. I am particularly concerned about those who are just below that intervention threshold, who do not feature in any of these numbers and are not getting timely support when they need it.

There have been numerous reports from the Children's Commissioner, and we have had the Narey review on fostering. The Select Committee on Education has produced its own reports and we have had a Government response. My hon. Friend the Member for Telford (Lucy Allan) secured a debate on the Care Crisis Review, which was published last year and raised some concerning things about the state of the care system. In October, a report from the Education Policy Institute found that the number of referrals to specialist children's mental health services has risen by no less than 26% over the last five years, but that 24.2% of the children referred for support had been turned away.

**Ellie Reeves (Lewisham West and Penge) (Lab):** The hon. Gentleman talks about the number of reports. In 2016, Bromley's children's services were judged to be “inadequate” by Ofsted. Following an inspection in November, the council has now received “good” in all areas and “outstanding” in one area. These improvements are no doubt due to tremendous hard work, particularly by frontline staff in Bromley. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that, in the light of all these reports, children's social care needs to be supported by continuous and comprehensive funding to sustain the current levels of service?

**Tim Loughton:** I will come on to that. Obviously funding is a factor in this. I remember that in my time Bromley was always an exceptional council. I learned many interesting things about volunteering with children in Bromley. There was a pioneering service where volunteers worked alongside social workers helping children who were the subject of safeguarding plans, child protection plans—or whatever they were at that stage—to stay out of the care system. There has also been some very good work in Bromley by former employers in the Department for Education to help to bring that about. There is a combination of factors, but as I have clearly said and will restate in a minute, there is a problem with resources.

The Education Policy Institute also estimated that at least 55,800 children were turned away for treatment in 2017-18, but that is probably an understatement due to the shortage of data.

I am particularly disappointed by a report from the Institute of Health Visiting, headed by the excellent Dr Cheryl Adams CBE, which states that

“despite the health visiting mandate having been extended, it is apparent that universal services for children continue to bear the brunt of public health service cuts”

The health visiting workforce continues to experience significant reductions, with NHS posts falling from 10,309 in October 2015 to 7,982 by April 2018. The report—it is absolutely right—states:

“It is both astonishing and extremely worrying that the visionary work of David Cameron’s government to increase the number of health visitors across England by 50% between 2012 and 2015 could have been undone so quickly. Especially as the evidence for the importance of the very early years impacting on individuals’ future health and wellbeing is now so strong.”

Health visitors are experienced frontline early intervention professionals who often get into the houses of new parents at an early stage and gain their trust. They have been an early warning system for safeguarding problems as well as offering parenting support classes and other mechanisms that parents so often need. We have allowed their numbers to decline, and that is a false economy. I hope that the Minister might pick up on that. Obviously it is a dual responsibility along with the Department of Health.

As chair of the all-party parliamentary group on the first 1,001 days, which deals with perinatal mental health and the crucial first three years from conception to age two when a child’s brain is developing exponentially, I know how important it is to get that early support, particularly for parents who are lacking in some parenting skills. There are safeguarding issues, and it is a false economy not to be doing it. As our report, “Building Great Britons”, showed, the cost of getting perinatal mental health wrong is just over £8 billion a year, and the cost of child neglect in this country is over £15 billion a year. So we are spending £23 billion a year getting it wrong for new mothers and early-age children. That is a heck of an amount of money to be going on failure, frankly.

To put into perspective the importance of children’s services and the apparently relentless increase in demand, the County Councils Network recently reported that counties are responsible for 38% of England’s entire spend on children’s services, and that the councils in England alone overspent by £816 million on protecting vulnerable children just in the last financial year. The Local Government Association—I am grateful for the research that it has done—is predicting a £2 billion shortfall in children’s social care funding by 2020, as the hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves) said, and it could be as much as £3.1 billion by 2025.

There is good news. I do not want to be such a doom merchant, because the positive work by councils in helping our children and young people to have the best start in life has been illustrated by the latest Ofsted data on children’s social care. It shows that last year the proportion of council children’s services rated good or outstanding has increased, and that more children’s services departments have come out of special measures. I was delighted to hear in the past 24 hours that Birmingham, which has been problematic for so many years—I spent more of my time there than in any other local authority area—is no longer rated inadequate.

There is still a steep hill to climb but there are good signs of progress in that huge authority that has all sorts of challenges.

There is a worrying trend in a recent report from the Nuffield Foundation, “Born into care”. It found that in 2007-08 there were 1,039 babies subject to care proceedings within one week of birth, but by 2016-17 this number had more than doubled to 2,447—an increase of 136%. That suggests to me that we are failing to do enough early to prevent babies from having to be taken into care because their parents are deemed inadequate or a risk to them. If we did more earlier on, those children may be able to stay with their parents.

At this point, I want to pay tribute to the family drug and alcohol courts, which were set up by Nick Crichton, a visionary district judge who did an amazing job of providing support and sensitive intervention services to people—usually single mums—who are at risk of a child or perhaps another child going into the care system and giving them an added chance. It was a tough challenge, but the success of the FDACs more than doubled the likelihood of those children staying with their parents and, more importantly, staying permanently.

That work carries on. There are 10 FDACs around the country, and we hope the Minister will be charitable in extending some funding for the FDAC co-ordination unit at the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust. He has been very helpful in discussions there. Nick Crichton sadly died just before Christmas, but his work has affected the lives of hundreds of children, and I want to put on record our tribute to him.

The Children’s Commissioner found in one of her reports that England now spends nearly half its entire children’s services budget on the 75,420 children in the care system in England, leaving the remaining half of spending for the other 11.7 million children, which includes spend on learning disability. The LGA reports that between 2006 and 2016, the number of child protection inquiries undertaken by local authorities rose by no less than 140%, while the number of children subject to a child protection plan almost doubled. More and more children are being taken into care. As I said, there were 75,420 children in care as of March last year, which is up 4% on the previous year.

Barnardo’s found in its report that 16% of the children referred to its fostering services had suffered sexual exploitation. There is increasing evidence—it is what police, teachers and social workers are saying—that there has been an increase in the number of particularly vulnerable children in the last five years. We have more children coming into the care system, often with more complex problems and requiring more intensive support, but we do not have enough going on—we have much less going on—to intervene early to try to keep them out of the care system. I do not think what I said earlier about a potentially impending crisis is an overstatement.

Barnardo’s also found that in 2010, roughly half of children’s services budgets were spent on family support and prevention, while the other half was spent on safeguarding work and children in care. Now, just under a third is spent on family support and prevention, while the remaining two thirds goes on safeguarding and children in care. We are building up problems for the future by not acting earlier.

**Jim Shannon** *rose*—

**Tim Loughton:** Mr Deputy Speaker, you are guiding me to take a further intervention, thereby extending my speech, which I will reluctantly do for the hon. Gentleman.

**Jim Shannon:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way again; he is most gracious. Does he agree that more support should be given to families who are prepared to intervene, to help a child remain cared for by family members and prevent children being taken away from their home and support networks? Does he also agree that foster carers should not have less support and financial help simply because they are not related?

**Tim Loughton:** Again, the hon. Gentleman, who knows this subject well, makes some good points. We need to support foster carers better. We have overhauled the fostering regulations to ensure that foster carers get a better and fairer deal, as well as the foster children themselves. We have also tried to get more people to adopt and take on permanent responsibility for children.

There are also many voluntary organisations. Volunteers can work alongside vulnerable families, particularly where there is an absence of extended family members such as grandparents who, in another family, might be there to support parents or single parents through difficult times. To be fair, the Department for Education's innovation fund and other funds have supported some really good work in the voluntary sector. We all need to work together on this, and it starts at home, but if some of the things that many of us take for granted are not in place at home, there are other ways of providing them before the state has to step in and become the parent. We need to be more flexible and imaginative. I am going to race through my remaining pages before you say I am out of time, Mr Deputy Speaker, but I am delighted by the extent of interest from colleagues here today.

Crucially, there is a good deal of evidence to show that funding pressures are having a disproportionate impact on some of the most deprived areas. I want to pay tribute to Professor Paul Bywaters of the University of Huddersfield, who gave a lot of evidence to our all-party group inquiry, for the work he undertook together with Professor Brid Featherstone of the University of Huddersfield and Professor Kate Morris of the University of Sheffield. If I may quote from some of his notes to the inquiry, Professor Bywaters said:

"Children in the most deprived 20% of neighbourhoods in England...were over 8 times more likely to be either on a Child Protection Plan or be Looked After in the care system...than a child in the least deprived 20%."

That absolutely concurs with the all-party group's finding. He also said that he was worried about the paucity of data to provide solid evidence for what we need to do to address this problem. He said:

"The complete absence of any systematic national data about the socio-economic and demographic circumstances of the parents of children in contact with children's services is a key problem in analysing the factors that influence demand for children's services. Collecting such data should be an urgent priority to underpin policy, service management and practice."

That is one of the key recommendations from the all-party group report.

It is a false economy not to be investing in children's social care as early on as possible. As I have said, that starts at conception, particularly when there are vulnerable parents who have mental health problems or have had

poor parenting experiences themselves. This needs to be addressed in the comprehensive spending review. It is a classic example of investing to save—to save financially, but also to save the social consequences of children growing up and not being fully contributing members of society.

Some children are at higher risk, and disproportionately so in certain parts of the country according to deprivation and, indeed, ethnicity. We need to get the data to research those differentials and start applying the proper solution. We cannot do so until we have the proper information. We need to return to a much more preventive approach. That was why we invented the early intervention fund when this Government first came to power, but I am afraid its effects have been dissipated and the amount of funds diluted.

I ask the Minister to do his best to make sure that the troubled families programme, the funding for which comes to an end in 2020, is renewed. I want to see a pre-troubled families programme that deals with the first 1,001 days, before such families get on to the radar of local authorities, because of the problems that come with that.

We need to go back to the Munro report—I am glad to see in the Chamber my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart), who took part in that report—and to the unfinished business around early help. We need to share better practice and share research data better. We need to work smarter and more collaboratively. We also need to look after children closer to home, in familiar environments and friends groups, and use kinship care much better than we are now.

This is not just about resources, but about changing the mindset and getting this back as a Government priority. That is why I absolutely welcome the initiative launched last night in this place by Children First to have a Cabinet-level Minister for children, bringing together all these factors.

This is not just something invented in this place. I am delighted to say that, at the G20 summit in Buenos Aires last year, there was the declaration of an initiative for early childhood development. It said:

"We therefore launch the G20 Initiative for Early Childhood Development, determined to contribute to ensuring that all children—with an emphasis on their first 1,000 days"—

one day short—

"are well nourished and healthy, receive proper care, stimulation and opportunities for early learning and education, and grow up in nurturing and enabling environments, protected from all kinds of violence, abuse, neglect and conflict."

This is an international priority. We have a great tradition of looking after the welfare of our children in this country, we just need to get back to making sure that we are doing it sooner and earlier, when we can have the most effect and the maximum benefit. I am sure the Minister will want to take up those challenges.

3.29 pm

**Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab):** I wish to raise several issues today, so I hope hon. Members will bear with me. I am afraid the list got a little longer each time this debate was delayed—it is a good job it is being held today, as who knows how long I would have gone on for otherwise.

It is a pleasure to follow the excellent speech by the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), and the first part of my contribution will focus on the point he rightly highlighted about the lack of effective early intervention. Hon. Members who were in this place before 2015 may know that I have been a critic of the troubled families programme, but I sincerely believe in early intervention. Working closely with families and having a joined-up approach across different public services is the only way to go, and those were the principles that underlined the programme pioneered and implemented by the previous Labour Government before 2010. Those principles also lie behind the troubled families programme.

It is therefore concerning to know that funding for the troubled families programme and its work across our country—both the good and the bad—is set to end next year, with nothing to replace it in sight. I am sure the Government know that there is support across the House for early intervention if it is properly resourced, managed and measured. My only hope is that the looming disaster of Brexit does not distract from the creation of a replacement programme.

It is important to talk about early intervention, because funding for such programmes has fallen massively even as need is soaring. Some 72% of funding for children's services is now spent on firefighting because children and families are already in crisis, but that funding does not prevent such crises from happening. Early intervention and universal support services have been cut to the bone, with cuts of 60% in each area according to the Children's Commissioner for England. Those cuts include £1 billion from Sure Start and an additional £900 million from services that work with children and young people. Such massive cuts have meant that social workers find it much harder to work with vulnerable children and families early and effectively. Caseloads have undeniably and inexorably increased, leaving much less time available for regular contact and for building up relationships, trust and understanding with families. That exacerbates family problems, leading to poor child development, school exclusions, more children being taken into care, increases in antisocial behaviour and crime, and signs of abuse or neglect being missed until—sadly, sadly, sadly—it is just too late. Last month, Ofsted's national director of social care, Yvette Stanley, pointed out that the cuts are clearly a false economy, and that slashing non-statutory services is

“storing up problems for the future”.

Let me remind the Minister about practical early intervention services that are being cut. They include debt and financial advice services, parenting programmes to help families address the causes of disruptive behaviour—programmes that we know are effective—support for victims of domestic violence, and help for getting mums and children out of abusive situations and allowing them to recover. That now all comes out of the children's services budget, because funding from elsewhere has disappeared.

The list also includes mental health treatment and substance abuse programmes for parents. The Government cannot claim to be pro-family if they continue to remove those forms of support, and the absence of such programmes is driving more and more children into the care of the state. I always try to appeal to what the Government would see as common sense, so let me say

simply that it costs more money to take a child into care than it does to prevent them from going into care. Even with a balanced budget approach, the cuts are a massive mistake.

It is bad enough that resources have been cut so much, but demand has also been rising rapidly. Social security cuts and universal credit are undeniably increasing poverty, and poverty leads to more insecurity and massive stresses within families. Some 1.5 million people in the UK are utterly destitute and unable to afford essentials such as shelter, food, heating or clothing, and that includes 365,000 children. The stresses and strains on families' lives are getting worse because of the Government's failed and continuing austerity policy.

According to the Government's own statistics, 1.5 million more disabled people, 300,000 more pensioners, 400,000 more working-age adults and over half a million more children are in poverty than in 2010. The most shocking rise in poverty has been among children with parents in work. The Joseph Rowntree Foundation has worked out that there are 710,000 more children in poverty in working households than in 2010. In-work poverty has actually risen faster than employment in recent years. We are talking about working families, many with lone working parents. Many are working long hours and multiple jobs to get by on low pay, constantly struggling to make ends meet. That means that parents are stressed and that they have less time to spend at home and focus on their children, making sure that everything is okay and creating a family whose health is equal to their love.

The worst consequence of child poverty—child homelessness—has also increased massively. That is a huge difference from when I was a child. My family was cleared from a slum in West Silvertown in 1963. We moved into a beautiful, brand-new two-bedroom flat overlooking the dying docks in east London. It was that flat that gave me everything. It was from that flat that everything else stemmed. My mum and dad had stability. They both worked in local factories to provide for us. That home, however small I sometimes felt it was, gave me the ability to study and to grow with my community. It gave me and my sister the opportunity to thrive.

Today's working class children in the east end have it very different. One hundred and thirty thousand children were homeless over Christmas, an increase of almost 60% in just five years. Ten thousand of those children are stuck in bed and breakfast accommodation, often with a whole family in a single room. Most of the other 120,000 are in temporary accommodation, torn from schools, family and friends, the places they recognise and the support networks they rely on. They often do not even know where their local library is, because they have not been in a place long enough to be able to work it out.

I see the effects of that in my own borough, where I grew up in that secure and safe council flat. Now, appallingly to me, it has the highest level of homelessness in the country. I hear about children having to travel hours each way to school from a different part of the city; families sleeping in dirty, cold, rat-infested rooms; families who have not had a secure, safe place to call a home for year after year after year. How is a child supposed to learn to trust others and feel safe under those conditions? How is a parent supposed to muster the time and energy to engage with a social worker over

[Lyn Brown]

weeks and months, and how is that social worker supposed to create and maintain a relationship when the family is so insecure?

I believe there is a direct relationship between the crisis in children's social care and the increase in extremely serious harm caused by criminal gang exploitation in my constituency and the east of London. If the Government want to reduce serious violence, funding children's services properly is an absolute must. We know that gangs pick on vulnerable children the most. Studies show that poor emotional health at the age of seven is the best predictor of future exploitation by gangs. That means that counselling is one of the most effective ways to prevent children from being exploited. They need to develop resilience.

We know that these children often have undiagnosed special educational needs as well. We should be supporting them, but instead the children and their families are left to struggle on, often alone. Once they reach secondary school, vulnerable children are far more likely to be excluded or off-rolled, increasing the risk of exploitation even more. As we know, exclusions have sky-rocketed by 67% over the past five years. That is the research, but it is also real life. I hear about the consequences from local mums terrified of what has happened to their children. As their MP, I am their last resort. They have already tried everywhere else. I see the same things in the serious case reviews of children who have been tragically and appallingly murdered in gang-related violence. Every review I have seen tells the same story: a vulnerable child; escalating involvement in gang violence; the failure of local agencies to intervene; and opportunities to help not taken. I have absolutely no doubt that cuts to resources are part of the cause.

The case reviews are a statutory responsibility, designed so that lessons can be learned. In summing up, I hope the Minister will tell me the lessons that he and the Department are learning. I have talked about a replacement for the troubled families programme, early intervention, universal preventive services and the cuts, but let us be clear: the crisis in children's services is systemic. It is just as much about the increased stresses and struggles that families are having to go through because this economy, this social security system and this Government frankly do not work for them.

3.41 pm

**Alex Burghart** (Brentwood and Ongar) (Con): It is a real honour to be able to talk in this debate and to follow the speakers who have already contributed, particularly my very old friend, the former Children's Minister, my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton), with whom I worked between 2008 and 2010. He did not blow his own trumpet enough in his speech. While I would not want to blow his trumpet for him, I might at least acknowledge that he has a trumpet.

The work that my hon. Friend did first as shadow Children's Minister and then as Children's Minister over a long stretch, between 2004 and 2012, created a Conservative policy on children's social work where frankly one had not really existed before. During that time, children's services, particularly children's social work, were under considerable strain following the tragic death of baby P, Peter Connelly. It was clear that the systems governing children's social work were not delivering

for vulnerable families and were not enabling talented social workers on the frontline to give the care that they wanted to give to families and children in need. The work that he did exposed that and developed the idea.

My hon. Friend wrote "No More Blame Game" and, while I was working for him, he produced "Child Protection: Back to the Frontline", which introduced the idea of the Munro review of child protection. That whole-system review was brought in following the 2010 general election and was brilliantly conducted by Professor Eileen Munro from the London School of Economics. It showed how we needed to take a new approach that allowed frontline social workers to be in charge of the work they did, and not governed by central systems, such as the integrated children's system, which was put in place by the former Administration. I put on record my ongoing and continued admiration for the work that my hon. Friend did outside and inside Government. He continues with that work as chair of the all-party parliamentary group for children.

I want to focus on something slightly different from the issues my hon. Friend has run through. Having worked for him, I went to work at Barnardo's and the Office of the Children's Commissioner, the Centre for Social Justice and various places in Whitehall. I looked at fostering, children in care and the root causes of the problems that families in those situations face. It became apparent that, although a great deal of public policy had rightly focused on the needs of children who were in foster care and children who needed to be adopted—another great thing that my hon. Friend did was streamline the adoption process and rapidly increase the number of children who were going into good and loving homes—a large group of children were not in care, but were on the social services' radar. The Children Act 1989 defines them as children in need. They are numerous, they are needy and they absolutely warrant the increased attention that the Government are now giving them.

There are about 75,000 children in care at any one time, but over the course of any one year there are about 400,000 children in need. Recent work by the Department for Education has shown that in any given three-year period there will be more than 1 million children in need at one point or another. Their GCSE results and future employment prospects are extremely limited: in fact, they are often as poor as, or worse than, those of children in care, for the simple reason that children in care have been taken out of their disruptive, dysfunctional homes and—hopefully—placed in stable foster placements or stable children's homes and given a second chance, whereas children in need, many of whose families face acute problems, are left in those disruptive environments.

That group was ignored under successive Governments, which was a policy gap, but I am glad to say that this Government and this Minister have started to fill the hole. The review of children in need is starting to expose issues whose existence my preliminary research had led me to suspect, but which I had not been able to flesh out.

One of the most striking statistics is that 51% of young people who are long-term NEETs—not in education, employment or training for a year after they have left school—will have been either in care or in need at one point in their childhood. Such experiences have lasting scarring effects. If we do not deal with them effectively when we notice them, providing the early intervention services that are necessary to prevent children from

slipping into these categories, we are storing up problems for the future: problems for society, but also severe problems for those individuals.

The solutions are complex, because the reasons why children and families find themselves in such circumstances are themselves complex. The hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) made many important points, and she was right to identify the scarring effects of poverty, but there are issues besides money that are also important. Some are exacerbated by a lack of money, but some are not. Another striking statistic is that half the children in need in this country are not on free school meals.

**Lyn Brown:** Some of my constituents who are working are not entitled to free school meals for their children. They could well be poorer financially than those who are entitled to free school meals. Free school meals are no longer a proper measure of which child is in poverty. I should be happy to have a conversation with the hon. Gentleman about this over a cup of tea.

**Alex Burghart:** I should be delighted to take the hon. Lady up on that. I know that what she is saying is absolutely right. However, there are also many children in need who have one parent in work and whose other parent has severe mental health problems or an addiction. The difficulty in such families is not solely related to money; it is caused by the fact that an individual has a very severe problem that is not being adequately met by social services.

When we find a child who is in need and on the edge of care, we need to take a holistic look at that child's family. In the past, children's social care sometimes looked very narrowly at how the child was at any one time and not at the immediate environment in which they were living and what could be done to improve it. Indeed, sometimes children ended up in care without their parents being given—or even approached about—the services that were necessary in order to improve that family environment. I would much rather fix the family's problems in order to keep that family together so that the child can grow up in a stable home.

In terms of what can be done, I am glad the Minister has undertaken this work, which is starting to flush out good practice in the system and areas where more work needs to be done. I venture to suggest some things on which we need to focus. We must look at those slightly older children who are moving towards leaving school. In my experience over the years, I have found that additional professional mentoring conducted in and out of school can be highly effective. There is a wonderful programme in the east of London called ThinkForward, which gives long-term mentoring to children in disruptive homes. The presence of a stable adult to give advice, be a shoulder to cry on and be a support in a time of need is invaluable.

**Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab):** Child poverty levels in my constituency are really high. We have also had the impact of the full roll-out of universal credit recently. Will the hon. Gentleman acknowledge the impact that UC is having? It is exacerbating the problems that a lot of families are suffering from.

**Alex Burghart:** I am happy to acknowledge that, when families have less money, they can find themselves in debt, which adds to stress and can contribute to poor

mental health. I do not know about the cases the hon. Lady is talking about in her constituency, but I have seen the consequences of people being trapped in problem debt for a long time and not being given help to get out of it. That can certainly be a major problem. That issue is slightly off the subject I was talking about. I hope that, if the hon. Lady is unaware of the ThinkForward programme in the east end of London, she will visit it and promote it.

**Lyn Brown:** I agree that programmes like that in my constituency make a difference, but may I gently say to the hon. Gentleman that additional youth workers and adults for my children to talk to who enable my children to have options and ways out of gang-related activity is what is massively lacking? I made a speech about this just a few weeks ago, if he would like to look at it in *Hansard*.

**Alex Burghart:** I will happily look at it. I hope that Opposition Members will realise that they are agreeing with me and perhaps take a slightly different tone when coming back on me on this subject, because what we are all saying is that it is important for families to have the support they need and for vulnerable children to have the support they need, ideally in home but, if it is too late for that or that cannot be made available, in school.

So what needs to be done? I encourage the Government, local authorities and schools to look at long-term stable mentoring projects for those slightly older children. For other families, as has been raised by other Members, the Troubled Families programme is of profound importance. It got off to a slightly bumpy start but has come to be the mainstay of a lot of local authorities' earlier intervention plans.

When I was in a different job a couple of years ago, I went to see how Camden had completely integrated its Troubled Families programme as part of a spectrum of care running from health visiting all the way through to the most intensive work in children's homes. It would be terrible if those Troubled Families contracts were not renewed in some way, and I have every confidence that the Government will renew them. As we do it, it is important to consider what we mean by troubled families. I would venture to suggest that this group of young people, classified under the Children Act 1989 as children in need, and this large group of families who suffer from poor mental health, addiction and other such strains, are, by definition, troubled families. As I say, many local authorities already take this approach, but I think it would add a coherence to Government policy in this area if the work being done with troubled families in the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and that being done with children's social care in the Department for Education were brought together. Some local authorities are very good at merging these approaches. Some are less good. I commend those that are.

**Lyn Brown rose—**

**Alex Burghart:** I can see the hon. Lady trying to get in again. I happily give way.

**Lyn Brown:** This is the last time. As the hon. Gentleman can hear, I am actually listening to his speech. That is why I am so engaged in it. He is absolutely right about the Troubled Families programme. Many parts of the

[Lyn Brown]

country do it very well—Manchester, for example, has totally and utterly integrated its services and done it really well—but other local authorities game the money and take it elsewhere. We need to make sure that our next programme gets proper and effective results.

**Alex Burghart:** I could not agree more. The freedoms given to the Greater Manchester Combined Authority by this Administration have allowed it to become a Petri dish for new ways of doing things, breaking down silo budgets and taking a whole-area approach. I have absolute confidence that the lessons being learned in Manchester will eventually be taken and spread elsewhere. I feel that the hon. Lady made another point other than Manchester that I wanted to come back on.

**Lyn Brown:** Getting results.

**Alex Burghart:** Yes, that was it. Getting the data we need to prove effectiveness is one of those extraordinarily valuable holy grails. Successive Governments have found it very difficult to prove the efficacy of individual programmes, but there is a way forward. In New Zealand a few years ago, the Government brought together a huge amount of personal data through what was known as the integrated data initiative. They spliced together data from social services, housing, tax and so on, and then anonymised it and established ethical rules in advance, so that the data could never be used to find out whether someone had not paid their car tax, for instance. It could never be used against people and could only be used at a community level.

As a result, the New Zealand Government are capable now of effectively performing randomised control trials on all their social impact programmes. They know which programmes to give added investment to and which to wind down. Admittedly, New Zealand is a slightly smaller jurisdiction than the United Kingdom. The combining of data on that sort of scale in the UK is a bigger project, but one that would be unbelievably valuable. I have no doubt that we have the expertise in the Office for National Statistics to do it, and do it well, and I am sure the moment we have it, it will be one of those things we wish we had had long ago.

To conclude, Mr Deputy Speaker—I mean, Madam Deputy Speaker. How very nice to see you there, Madam Deputy Speaker. I was enjoying the company of the Opposition so much I did not notice that your colleague had left and you had arrived. We must consider not just the children with the most acute needs, important though they are and must remain, but young people on the edge of the system who may come in and out of that hinterland many times during their childhoods but might not qualify for the highest level of support.

Before I conclude my remarks completely, I want to dip into one more policy area that I forgot to mention earlier, and this goes back the issue that I was debating with the hon. Member for West Ham. About half of children in need are not eligible for free school meals, which means that about half of children in need do not receive the pupil premium. That has always seemed like a crazy peculiarity. It is laudable that a child whose parents were briefly unemployed six years ago receives the pupil premium, but I would question whether their

need is greater than someone who lives in an abusive home and has been in and out of contact with social services, perhaps over a prolonged period of years. I am a full supporter of the pupil premium programme that this Government introduced in 2011, but as it reaches maturity after eight years it would be worth looking at exactly how that pot is allocated. I would always like it to be a bit bigger, but we also need to consider whether some groups have an eligibility that has not been recognised and could be brought into the system.

We have to think about children who are on the edge, we must consider the needs of their families, and we need to examine the Government programmes and local authority structures that can provide for those families and those children. I have high hopes for the local government financial settlement and for the comprehensive spending review next year, and I am pleased that the Under-Secretary of State for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), is here to hear my concerns. I am sure that he will take them forward with the same energy that he has brought to the children in need review in his time in office so far.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I call Karen Lee.

4.2 pm

**Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab):** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I must admit that I had to look twice as well, because I did not notice the change in Chair—[*Laughter.*] My point is that I did not notice that one person had left and another had come in. [HON. MEMBERS: “Seamless!”] It was a seamless transition.

It is often said that the true measure of any society can be found in how it treats its most vulnerable members. If that is the case, this Government measure up poorly when it comes to the treatment of vulnerable children. This Tory Government have created an entirely avoidable crisis in children's social care. Last year saw the biggest annual increase in children in care since 2010, and councils are now starting 500 child protection investigations every day. Local authorities' inability to cope with the increase in service demand is a direct result of this Government's ideologically driven austerity programme. Since 2010, cuts to local authority funding have resulted in a 40% real-terms decrease in spending on early intervention in children's services. Research by the Local Government Association has found that local government will face a funding gap of almost £8 billion by 2025.

Vulnerable children should never have to suffer because of the unjust political priorities of the Tory party, but the cuts have a human cost. In Lincoln, my postbag is full of letters and emails from worried parents and carers—I get them all the time. The support system is being pushed to breaking point, and growing demand for support has led to 75% of councils in England overspending on their children's services budgets by over £815 million. As is always the case with Tory cuts to local authorities, councils have been forced to make cuts elsewhere and draw on reserves as a result. So, not only are children needlessly suffering from underfunded social care, but other services that people rely on are being squeezed as well. I think I mentioned earlier that Lincoln has a particularly high rate of child poverty, and that includes children of working parents, not just of those without jobs.

Budget cuts have also stripped away the capacity for early intervention, increasingly requiring child protection services to wait until a child is in crisis before intervening. LGA analysis again shows that Government funding for the early intervention grant has been cut by almost £500 million since 2013 and is projected to drop by a further £183 million by 2020. This Government are placing vulnerable children in dangerous situations that could have been avoided. I know we talk and talk about austerity, and sometimes people turn off, but this country would be a different place if this Government prioritised funding public services adequately over tax cuts for the rich and for big corporations.

It is particularly important that protection is provided for disabled children. Research by the Disabled Children's Partnership shows a £1.5 billion funding gap for services for disabled children, and in the past few weeks alone I have had four parents of autistic children contact my office with concerns that underfunded and overstretched services are not providing adequate support. I see that in my postbag all the time. On Monday mornings, before I come down to Westminster, I try to make special appointments at 8.30 and 9 o'clock so that I can see and talk to some of these people, because people in Lincoln really are struggling.

Across the board, we see this Government neglecting the services on which children rely so that they can give people tax cuts. Austerity has not only decimated the provision of children's social care but driven the rise in service demand. The strain put on parents and children is driving record numbers of young people into a social care service that this Government have cut to the bone.

It is not giving with one hand and taking with the other. When it comes to the vital public services on which working people and vulnerable people rely, this Government are taking with one hand and taking with the other, too.

I hope the Minister is actively listening to me, and I hope he can give me some reassurance. I stand up to say things in this Chamber and, sadly, all I get is empty words—party policy—quoted back to me. I would like to see some real action that actually changes something and makes it better.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing):** I do not stand to speak just so everyone can see that it is me in the Chair, and not the Chairman of Ways and Means. I have been mistaken for many people in my time, but not for the right hon. Gentleman. I suppose we have similarities—well, we both sit in the Chair.

I will try not to set a time limit, especially as the hon. Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee) was admirably brief in her remarks, but in order that there will be time for the Front Benchers to speak, it would be helpful if speeches were around eight minutes. We have four colleagues to accommodate, and around eight minutes would mean that everyone is honourable in their treatment of everyone else.

4.7 pm

**Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con):** Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee), and it is great to see such a strong Essex presence in the Chair and in the House.

The Children's Society has been looking out for our most vulnerable children for 138 years. It has a long history in Essex, and its Essex headquarters are, of course, in Chelmsford. The Children's Society, Barnardo's and other children's organisations wrote to all MPs before this debate with a helpful briefing that particularly highlighted the importance of early intervention in helping to avoid problems for children.

Early intervention is the subject of a detailed study by the Select Committee on Science and Technology, which particularly considered the issue in relation to childhood adversity and trauma. The study shows the importance of early intervention in tackling potential long-term problems. I urge the Minister to look at the report, which particularly points out that the increasing variety of early intervention programmes have been shown to improve life outcomes for those affected by childhood trauma. However, the report says that provision is fragmented and highly variable, and it encourages the Government to identify areas that are working well.

I am delighted that one area that is working exceptionally well is Essex, which is the second largest area of the country for children's services. Essex is a significant provider of children's services, and just last week it received the fantastic news of an "outstanding" rating from Ofsted for its children's services.

The Ofsted inspectors said:

"Inspirational leaders, supported by good corporate and political support and strong partnerships, are tenaciously ambitious for children."

Ofsted praises the work of the children and families hub, and the exceptional early intervention services. Ofsted says the social workers are

"passionate about securing and sustaining improvement"

in children's lives. It mentions the joined-up approach to safeguarding, and the county-wide approach to addressing homelessness, whereby children and families who are at risk of becoming homeless are identified and problems are resolved before they become homeless. Ofsted refers to the work of the gangs intervention team; the private fostering team; the adoption managers, who work to keep families together; the support given to unaccompanied asylum seeking children; and the ongoing work to support children after they have left care and grown up, as it were. This really is an exceptional piece of work. We are very proud of this work in Essex and I wish to put on the record my huge thanks and respect to everyone involved.

**Alex Burghart:** I wish to join my hon. Friend, as a fellow Essex MP, by putting on record my admiration for everyone who is working in children's services in Essex, the extraordinary journey they have been on and the remarkable results they are now achieving.

**Vicky Ford:** I thank my hon. Friend for that.

It is important to recognise that this has not always been the position; in 2010, the council's service was rated as "inadequate". At that time, its spending was £148 million a year. The turnaround in Essex has not come as a result of pouring more money into the system—quite the opposite. The performance in Essex has been turned around despite the fact that £30 million less is being spent on children's services. The turnaround whereby the second largest authority in the country for

[Vicky Ford]

children's services has gone from "requires improvement" to "outstanding" has been done despite funding coming down from £148 million to £118 million. It has been achieved because of a continual focus on early intervention and preventing children from having to go into care in the first place. In 2010, the number of children in care was 1,615, whereas the latest figure is 1,017—so 600 fewer children are in care because we are getting them support earlier. Essex is working with other councils to improve their local children's services and I particularly wish to put on the record my thanks to Councillor Dick Madden, who co-chairs the LGA taskforce in this area.

The council has just written a lengthy submission to the Select Committee's report, not only looking at what the council has achieved, but mentioning some of the challenges ahead: there is growth in demand for services; the county, like many others close to London, has experienced migration, with the children from London boroughs being moved out towards Essex; as some colleagues have mentioned, we are facing new phenomena, such as the criminal and sexual exploitation of young people by gangs via county lines; the casework the council is seeing is increasingly more complex; and of course the national shortage of social workers puts pressure on the service and on salaries. That comes on top of the pressure that many local authorities see in their budgets, partly because of the increased number of older people and then the pressure on adult social services. I hope that the Minister will look at this report that the council submitted to the Select Committee because it outlines the problems and makes detailed suggestions.

It is not only Essex's children's services that have just got an outstanding ranking. Just before Christmas the inspectors came in to look at our probation services, particularly the multi-agency youth offending team, who have also achieved an outstanding ranking. Essex social care services have just been awarded the best social worker employer of the year award.

Our children are our future. There are issues to address in children's social services. The Government will be looking at how to plan for the future. I will leave with one plea to the Minister and to any members of the Select Committee: if they would like to learn a little more about how this works in Essex, they should just pop on the train to Chelmsford—we are only an hour away from Westminster—where they will be able to see it all for themselves.

4.14 pm

**Laura Smith** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Lab): It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford). I am not usually here on a Thursday, but I must say that the Chamber is very good tempered—it's lovely.

I am going to speak briefly on the issue of social care provision in England and, specifically, how families with disabled children in my constituency face huge battles, fighting for their children to receive the care that they should be entitled to.

Many disabled children and their families rely on support from social care, such as short breaks, personal care and adaptations to their homes. However, most disabled children receive no regular support from outside

their own close family and friends. The shift in the balance of services provided by children's social care has impacted adversely on services for disabled children and their families. There has been a reduction in the number of disabled children who receive social care, despite an increase in the past 10 years in the number of disabled children in the UK by more than one third, to about 1.1 million, and their needs becoming ever more complex.

We all know that 10 years of austerity has resulted in services for disabled children coming under increasing threat due to cuts to local government funding. In fact, the Disabled Children's Partnership has identified an annual funding gap of £434 million. As the gap has grown wider, two thirds of families have, unsurprisingly, reported a decline in the services available for their loved ones. Every week my team and I talk to families who are under enormous emotional, physical and mental pressure due to the complete failure of the system to offer their children the resources needed to enable them to live their lives with dignity.

On behalf of all of those constituents I will explain exactly what they have conveyed to me, and I hope that the Minister will respond adequately at the end of the debate. First, people are struggling to access the services. The necessary interventions that these children should be entitled to simply are not there, or the wait is too long to access them. Many parents speak of their immense frustration, as they know that investment could prevent the escalation of future problems. By the time something is done, it is often too late.

Secondly, many existing services do not meet expectations. A survey by the Disability Children's Partnership shows that two thirds of family members have experienced a decline in the quality of services in recent years. Training and development of professionals, staff shortages, increased demand and poor pay can all impact on the quality of the service that people receive. When I was teaching, a referral could take months and the support was often only available for a short amount of time and subject to availability.

Thirdly, families cannot access those services easily. I have worked with a number of families who are exhausted because of the system. They are run down and on the brink due to the constant battle they face just to get what should be a human right. I have lost count of the number of people who have said to me, "The thing is, Laura, what about those who simply can't fight or who don't know how to? What happens to them?"

Finally, services do not always work together or communicate well with each other. Fragmented systems that do not join up properly to work in the best interest of the child are more often than not exasperated by chronic underfunding and undervalued and underpaid staff. Families often speak of how their social worker changes and they go back to square one.

What does all of that result in? The quality of life of, and opportunities available to, disabled children and their families is unacceptable compared with those without disabilities. Why is that? Our Government will not provide the funding required because that is the political choice that they have made. Not only is investing in the services available to these children the right thing to do from a human rights point of view; there is also a strong argument in favour of the economic value of doing so. Support can mean that costly long-term residential care

is not required and that potential cost to the NHS is reduced. Support can help not only the child, but the parents and carers as well, as there is more opportunity for parents to work if they know that their child is being cared for adequately.

I must make it clear that there are many in my constituency who are working with children with disabilities and are doing an absolutely remarkable job. Often they are doing so through a registered charity, and are unpaid or even working at their own expense. People should not have to rely on the good will of others to receive care that should be a fundamental human right. This Government are relying on the general public to pick up the pieces of their starved system.

Madam Deputy Speaker, I would like to draw your attention to the Cheshire Buddies and the Broad Street Project, two remarkable charities in my constituency of Crewe and Nantwich. I was lucky to spend time with them both over the Christmas period. Both go above and beyond to provide care and develop skills that these children desperately need. These organisations are largely staffed by volunteers. One thing that was made absolutely clear was that most of the children attending these charities receive no regular support from outside their own close family and friends and it is sheer fluke that a handful of good people are driving charities such as Cheshire Buddies and the Broad Street Project, so that these children at least receive some help, but that is simply not good enough.

If you do not mind, Madam Deputy Speaker, I will give you a typical example of what these people do: a child unable to walk with a number of disabilities started attending sessions run by Jane and her team at the Broad Street Project. They were told that the child would not walk. Jane being the determined woman that she is decided, as she has done with so many children, that she was not going to give up on this child. Against the odds, Jane taught this child to walk and to develop a number of other skills that will now remain with her for life. Without that intervention, that child could have spent her entire life in a wheelchair just because the support was not there to teach her how to walk. How many children do not get that opportunity because they do not come across people like Jane?

Before I conclude, I will touch on the issue of respite care for families—something that is probably top of the list for most of the families that I speak to. Everybody needs a break sometimes and nobody more so than someone who is caring for a loved one with complex needs. Briefly, I will mention Stephanie and her team at Cheshire Buddies whose scheme supports more than 95 local disabled children, 17 sibling carers, 27 disabled adults and more than 50 parent carers. The children have a range of needs, including learning disabilities, Down's syndrome, cerebral palsy, autism and a range of chromosomal conditions. Many of those children come from low-income families and families with a history of special educational needs. Cheshire Buddies runs holiday clubs and day trips to give families that much-needed break. It manages to exist thanks to volunteer support. Without those volunteers, many of these families would be completely isolated.

I pay tribute to Mick Roberts who sadly passed away on 28 December and who will be missed by our community. He was a proud railwayman, a Labour councillor and someone who dedicated so much time and effort to the

Seahorse Swimming Club charity in Crewe that helps and supports disabled children and adults to enjoy swimming.

These charities and many others in my constituency are constantly battling for essential funding. They are always in a process of bidding and fundraising and are always worried that their funds will disappear. What then happens to all of those people who rely so much on them? Families who have visited me in my surgery are often desperate. They do not know where else to turn. All that they are doing is fighting for their child—exactly what any one of us would do. They are experts in their children's conditions—even if they do not realise it—and they are exhausted and mentally drained. One parent said to me recently, "I am a warrior, but I just want to be a mum. What happens if something happens to me?"

I urge the Government to put in place an interim funding arrangement to stabilise the crisis in early intervention services and to prevent more children and families reaching breaking point. They must address, as a matter of urgency, the £3 billion shortfall in children's social care funding and put children at the heart of the forthcoming spending review.

4.24 pm

**Mohammad Yasin** (Bedford) (Lab): Bedford Borough Council is very concerned that there is no regulation of accommodation for vulnerable young people who are 16 years old and over—often referred to as semi-independent living or supported accommodation. In Bedford and nationwide, there is a significant shortfall in available placements for children in care or leaving care. This has resulted in an alarming number of 16 and 17-year-olds being placed in independent living accommodation.

An investigation earlier this month by *The Observer* and BBC Radio 5 Live established that there has been a 28% increase in the number of under-18s placed in independent living accommodation by councils in England in the last eight years. This accommodation lacks living and staff support, and includes unsupervised B&Bs and accommodation owned by private landlords, who have no obligations to offer appropriate care to looked-after children or those leaving care. In the report, we even heard from children who had been placed in tents.

I wrote to the Children's Minister about this issue recently and I am very disappointed by his response, which completely failed even to acknowledge the problem. The Independent Children's Homes Association has raised this issue for at least two years with many agencies including the Department for Education, Ofsted and the Children's Commissioner, but there has been no action at all.

This is a scandal. Vulnerable children are being abandoned by the state and, worse, are put at risk by being placed in unsuitable and unchecked accommodation with adults who have drug addictions or a history of criminal behaviour, including sexual assaults. How many times must these children be let down by those who should be caring for them? Charities such as Every Child Leaving Care Matters and Just For Kids Law say that there has been unprecedented growth in the number of unregistered, unregulated units of multiple accommodation for children aged 16-plus, but of course we cannot be sure of the scale of the problem because they are unregistered. This must change now.

[*Mohammad Yasin*]

We must measure the problem and understand why it is happening in order to tackle it and ensure that no 16 and 17-year-old vulnerable children are left to fend for themselves in risky, inappropriate and often unsanitary accommodation. I am pleased to hear the Children's Commissioner say in her interview with BBC Radio 5 Live and *The Observer* that she will finally be investigating the housing of vulnerable children this year; better late than never.

This is urgent. The Government must act now to introduce legislation that regulates such properties, and to reassure communities and local authorities that appropriate quality standards are achieved, in order to improve outcomes for vulnerable young people and give confidence to our communities.

4.27 pm

**Luke Pollard** (Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport) (Lab/Co-op): I rise to speak about three matters in particular, but I first thank the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) for his dogged pursuit of this debate. Waiting for it has been like a game of pass the parcel; it has been going around and around, and I am glad that we have had it today.

Contributions from both sides of the House have helped to show the seriousness of this matter. As my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) said, cuts to children's social care have reached crisis point. I have been asked to speak in this debate on behalf of the councillors on Plymouth City Council, who want to raise the seriousness of the crisis around children's social care—an area that has not always got the attention that it has deserved. Rightly, adult social care has taken the lion's share of headlines and funding in recent years, but the crisis in children's social care has been growing because of a mix of austerity, poverty, cuts and growing demand. It is a poisonous situation that has left some of the most vulnerable children in the country in the worst possible state.

As we have already heard today, analysis from the LGA shows that we need further funding of £3 billion if we are to keep children's services standing still by 2025. There are more looked-after children being cared for than ever before, and that number is only going to increase. Early intervention is so important, but funding for early intervention programmes is being cut. The expertise of our social workers and charities at a local level is being removed by slow attrition and cuts. People are losing faith and confidence that this system is one in which they want to play a part. But we need the system to work like never before. In Plymouth, as in many other councils across the country, councillors—of all political parties, to be fair—are putting more and more money into children's social care because there is more and more demand. There are more children in care in Plymouth than ever before, and that will only continue to eat up more and more council funding. Plymouth City Council has lost £350 million in revenue support since 2013, and losing 60p in the pound of funding means that the urgent care needs of our children are sometimes being neglected.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) said, we need to do more to care for the children, particularly 16 and 17-year-olds, who

frequently get left out of the system, being put in semi-supported situations where they are left to fend for themselves without the wraparound care and support that they really need. Many of those young kids are at a crossroads in their lives. If they receive the support that they deserve, there is the potential for them to lead full and productive lives. However, far too many young people who have been in care and looked-after children in semi-supported states will not go on to fulfil their potential, because of cuts. Far too many of them will enter the criminal justice system. We can stop that if we take serious steps to do so. I welcome the extension of local councils' responsibility for people who have been in care up to the age of 25. That is exactly the right thing to do, but it cannot happen unless the funding goes along with it, because having additional responsibilities without additional funding loads more and more pressure on to an already pressurised system.

I want to raise an issue that has not been spoken about so far—exceptionalism in our children's social care system. One reason why funding for Plymouth's social care system has been sunk in recent years is the exceptional costs of funding care packages for a very, very small number of children. I want to choose my words carefully, because it is really important that in discussing and debating these issues, at no stage is any blame attributed to the children who need multimillion-pound care packages. Plymouth City Council has lost legal cases about how those care packages are funded. I know that the Minister will be aware of that, and I would be grateful if he could agree to meet the council to discuss how the huge number of those exceptional cases is basically sinking our budget. It is exactly right that the children with the most complex and urgent care needs get that care, especially in a region like the south-west where complex care facilities are not our doorstep and children need to leave the area and the support networks in their locality. However, we cannot defund the needs of the many just to fund those of the few. That is really important. I fear that in a funding situation where there is more and more demand, difficult choices will need to be made. When local councils have lost so much of their funding, exceptional care packages risk really undermining the quality of care that can be given to every child. The Minister is nodding—I am grateful that he will meet to discuss that.

There are so many good people working so hard in children's social care, and they do not get the praise or the thanks that they deserve. Sometimes in this place it is not fashionable to praise local councils, but I want to thank them. I thank local councillors of all political hues, who are going the extra mile to support urgent children's social care issues. I thank the care workers and the charities that we heard about from my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith). I thank foster carers, who are the fundamental bedrock of this issue—I know that because my dad and my stepmother have been fostering children since I was at an early age. Since being a young boy, I have had around the house a constant stream of kids about yea high who have been beaten, abused, starved, neglected or ignored. We need to create a system where those children are given a chance to fulfil their potential. That can come only when the funding envelope for children's social care is adequate for the urgent needs that we have, and when sufficient political priority is put on all aspects of the children's social care debate.

There is an urgent need for us to continue this debate. I encourage the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham to secure another debate, because we need to keep this in the headlines and on the agenda. If we do not, it risks slipping off. Adult social care takes the headlines and the need. As we have an increasingly old population, adult social care will take up a bigger share of the pie, and we need to ensure that looked-after children—some of the most neglected in our society—are not ignored by this place in favour of other areas.

I want to thank all the people who work so hard on children's social care, including our local authorities, careworkers, charities and the individuals and families who are trying so hard, but we need to do better, and the best way is by funding this work properly.

4.35 pm

**Mrs Emma Lewell-Buck** (South Shields) (Lab): I refer the House to my entry in the Register of Members' Financial Interests. I thank the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) for his persistence in securing this important debate and the Backbench Business Committee for granting it.

Rarely does this House debate children's social care, but it is clear from the strength of the speeches today that not only do such debates warrant more frequency, but more importantly, Government action is needed now, before the growing number of children and families being failed by a system that does not meet their needs swells to even larger proportions.

The Minister is on record as being of the view that "good leadership", not increased resources, is the key to improving outcomes. As someone who practised as a social worker, I have to say that that is simply not true, nor does that assertion resonate with the reality that dozens of organisations, charities and trade unions and a plethora of cross-party Select Committee reports and groups across the House are repeatedly telling him about.

The scale of the neglect of our most vulnerable children is colossal: more than 400,000 children in need; the largest number of children in care since the 1980s; care proceedings up by a staggering 130% since 2008; increasingly poor outcomes for the thousands of children leaving care; falling adoption rates; social worker recruitment and retention difficulties; a falling number of foster carers; and increasingly large private sector contracts focused on profit, not care.

More than 120 national organisations wrote to the Prime Minister last year stating that this Government are ignoring children. They cited compelling evidence that the services and support that children and young people rely on are at breaking point, yet they were ignored. The Local Government Association now reports that local authorities will face a £3.1 billion funding gap in children's services by 2025, and 60% of children's social workers have said that austerity and cuts have affected their ability to do their jobs.

There is now a wealth of research that highlights the links between austerity and the rising number of children coming into contact with children's services and entering care. One study, by the Nuffield Foundation, found that deprivation was the largest contributory factor in a child's chances of being looked after. Another, by the National Children's Bureau, found that 41% of children's services are now unable to fulfil their statutory duties.

I know that the Minister is not too concerned about local authorities fulfilling their statutory duties towards children, as he recently argued that such duties are subject to local interpretation and disseminated a very dangerous myth-busting document advising local authorities to dispense with their statutory guidance in relation to the most vulnerable children.

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi)**: The hon. Lady needs to correct the record. What she said about dispensing with statutory guidance is absolutely not true, and I urge her to correct the record.

**Mrs Lewell-Buck**: I do not need to correct the record, because what I am saying is already correct.

Especially since the children's rights charity Article 39 has written to the Secretary of State threatening judicial review on the matter, I again urge the Minister to withdraw that document and cease the repeated attempts to deregulate and wipe away hard-fought-for protective legislation for children. This Government tried to do so during the passage of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, and they failed in the attempt to allow private services to take over children's services. I politely suggest to the Minister that he should instead focus on the unprecedented rate of referrals, which stand at more 1,700 children every single day. The consequence of that is a tightened threshold for intervention, meaning that, last year, 36,000 children had to be referred multiple times before they received statutory support to help them with serious issues.

Worse still, there are an estimated 140,000 further children on the fringes of social care in England who are not receiving any support at all. As my hon. Friend the Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith) said, there will be many more, because there are those who simply do not seek help or do not know where to go to for that help. That means that children in desperate need of help are being subjected to further harm because of a lack of resources and funding.

I have etched on my brain—and I wish I did not have—every single child and family I worked with prior to entering this place. I remember vividly the little boys and girls who had been so severely abused and neglected that they gouged their own skin, the children who had fled war zones who were stoic and motionless in playgrounds and completely unable to interact with their peers, and the adolescents who would severely self-harm after being subjected to sexual exploitation. Thankfully, I also remember being able to make a positive difference to those children's lives.

However, ex-colleagues now tell me that, despite their absolute best efforts, the hollowing out of local government and the decimation of wider support services, mentioned so characteristically articulately by my hon. Friends the Members for West Ham (Lyn Brown) and for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), have left many children waiting longer for help. Each hour these children wait, they are suffering significant and, for some, irreversible harm.

It is therefore not only misguided but dangerous that, against that backdrop, the Government have pressed ahead with slashing local authority early intervention grants, a point that was well made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee); closing 1,200 Sure

[Mrs Lewell-Buck]

Start centres; decreasing funding to children's centres by nearly 50%; removing funding from the very initiatives that help to keep children out of the care system, such as the family drug and alcohol court national unit; and actively implementing policies that make it almost impossible for foster carers, kinship carers and special guardians to care for children. It is little wonder that members of the Minister's own party are warning in the press that we are fast approaching another Baby P tragedy.

In the case of children in residential care, why has the Minister ignored my warnings that many homes are facing potential collapse overnight due to the overnight levy? Why has he not addressed the shameful situation whereby children in residential care are locked out of the "staying put" arrangements afforded to those in foster care? Why has he not listened to my concerns about the number of children being placed miles away from their families? Worse still, he has not acted sufficiently on the use of state-sanctioned restraint that is designed to cause physical harm to children in the secure estate. Why has he not responded sufficiently to the recent news that increasing numbers of vulnerable children are being placed on their own, with no support, in hostels, bed and breakfasts and, in some cases, tents and caravans? That point was made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin).

In 2016, the National Audit Office reported that actions taken by the Minister's Department since 2010 to improve the quality of services delivered to children had not yet resulted in improvements. Just last year, the Public Accounts Committee, after its examination of child protection, stated:

"The Department lacks a credible plan for improving the system by 2020."

It is clear to everybody except this Government that their whole approach lacks any cohesive strategy and is consumed with piecemeal, misguided measures. Measures such as the What Works centres, Partners in Practice, the discredited national assessment and accreditation system and the innovation programme are not yielding any positive changes, but have so far have cost over £200 million, with at least £60 million going from taxpayers to private companies.

Labour would do things differently. We understand the holistic nature of children's social care, which is why we are committed to looking at the care system in its entirety and giving equity to all forms of care. We are committed to stemming the tide of privatisation in the sector, because there is no profit to be made in good social care. We are committed to putting into domestic legislation the United Nations convention on the rights of the child. In short, we are committed to children. We will ensure that every child matters once again, because at the moment that belief could not be further from the reality.

4.45 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Nadhim Zahawi):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) on securing this debate, on his expertise and on his persistence in ensuring that this debate was held—third time lucky. I also thank my hon. Friends the Members

for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart) and for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford), and the hon. Members for West Ham (Lyn Brown), for Lincoln (Karen Lee), for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin), for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith), and for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard), as well as others who intervened, including my hon. Friends the Members for Henley (John Howell) and for Dudley South (Mike Wood), and the hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge (Ellie Reeves). They brought valuable—indeed sometimes invaluable—insight to this vital issue.

Nothing is more important than our work to identify vulnerable children early and to give them the support they need to keep them safe. I applaud the all-party group for children for being vocal champions of that, and I give an assurance that the Education Secretary and I share that priority. As many colleagues pointed out, the importance of children's social care too often goes unrecognised. Many colleagues said that today. It makes headlines only when things go wrong. We should value the contribution of social workers day-in, day-out in making a difference to children's lives in sometimes very challenging circumstances.

As we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar, the challenges facing children in families, communities and beyond are many and varied. As we all know from our constituencies, there can be stark differences in the demographics, economic status and social problems faced by different communities—even between one area and its neighbour. That is why children's social care is delivered locally within a national legislative framework for safeguarding and child protection in England. That long-standing principle is enshrined in the Children Act 1989 and it places on all local authorities the same duty to take decisive action wherever a child is at risk of, or suffering significant harm.

All 50 judges in the family courts must use the same law when making decisions wherever care proceedings are under way, but local authorities remain best placed to identify, assess and respond to local priorities, setting the criteria for accessing services that reflect the needs of children in their area. As my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham rightly reminded us, thresholds play an important part in allowing local authorities to do that work. Whether those thresholds are set appropriately and properly understood is scrutinised by Ofsted as part of its inspections, and factored into its independent judgment about the quality of local services.

What Ofsted tells us about quality corroborates some of the APPG's findings, which suggest that the picture across the country is far from uniform—indeed, it has been described as a postcode lottery. Although some children and families receive good and outstanding services, the majority live in areas where those services are inadequate or require improvement. Some variation is right and necessary in responding to local needs, but such inconsistency in the quality of services is not. We must recognise that Government action is needed if all children are to receive the same quality of support that every child deserves. Addressing this inconsistency is a priority for me and my Department, through our wide-ranging national social care reforms and through strong action to drive up quality where services are less than good.

We will intervene every time Ofsted judges children's services to be inadequate. Our intervention brings results: the first children's services trust in Doncaster moved

from inadequate to good in just two years. Just last week, Ofsted published an inspection report for Bromley—the hon. Member for Lewisham West and Penge is not in her place, but she rightly praised the team and the leadership in Bromley—showing that its services are no longer inadequate, but are now judged as good. Today I am delighted to say that, as my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham reminded us, after almost a decade of deeply entrenched failure, children's services in Birmingham are no longer inadequate. Ofsted published its inspection report for Birmingham this morning. It noted that the children's services trust, which we worked with the local authority to establish, has

“enabled the re-vitalisation of both practice and working culture, and, as a result, progress has been made in improving the experiences and progress of children”.

In fact, since 2010, 44 local authorities have been lifted out of intervention and not returned. The significance of that should not be underestimated. We raised the bar for Ofsted inspection in 2013 to drive up quality for children, but by May 2017 20% of authorities had not met our new standards and had been found inadequate. That has since reduced by a third, from 30 to 19 today as a result of our reforms. This is not intervention for intervention's sake, as the Labour Front-Bench team attempted to spin it, but improving the lives of children and families.

I am not complacent about the challenges. We have seen considerable improvements in some areas, but other areas, such as Wakefield, Bradford and Blackpool, have declined this year. That is why we are investing £20 million in regional improvements to get ahead of failure. As well as supporting every local authority rated inadequate, a further 26 are receiving support from a strong Partner in Practice local authority, with work under way to broker support for many more.

The number of local authorities achieving the top judgments under the new Ofsted framework is small but growing. In December, Leeds was rated as outstanding and, just last week, as we heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford, Essex received the same Ofsted judgment. I visited the hub she spoke about and I have to admire Councillor Dick Madden and his excellent director of children's services for what they have been able to achieve. That example demonstrates that this is about not just funding, but real, good practice on the frontline and strong leadership. In total, five local authorities have been rated outstanding since 2018, setting the highest ambitions and showing that even within current constraints—there are financial constraints, as the hon. Member for West Ham reminded us—local authorities can deliver outstanding children's services. My aim is that the improvements we are making continue at pace, so that by 2022 less than 10% of local authorities are rated “inadequate” by Ofsted, halving failure rates within five years and providing consistently better services for thousands of children and families across the country.

Service quality is a significant variable in what differs between local areas. Crucial to service quality is the social care workforce. The practice of staff locally, from the leadership of directors of children's services to the decision making of social workers, makes a huge difference to ensuring that the right children get the right support at the right time. That is why we have set clear professional standards for social workers, and invested significantly

in training and development to meet those standards nationally—to ensure a highly capable, highly skilled workforce that makes good decisions about what is best for children and families.

**Lyn Brown:** Will the Minister give way?

**Nadhim Zahawi:** I do not have enough time. I have a lot to get through and I am hoping to make lots of responses to colleagues.

Beyond the front door, decision making is especially critical at the high end of social care, recognising that, where children are at significant risk, these decisions can be life changing, and in both directions. Over-intervening can potentially cause as much harm as the consequences of leaving a child where they are. In most cases, children are best looked after by their families, with removal a last resort. That is paramount and it is important to strike the right balance between local support to keep families together and protecting children from dangers within their family. Where a child cannot live within their birth family, I am clear that finding the right permanent home and permanent family must be a priority, while always taking account of children's own wishes and feelings. Sometimes the best place for a child can be found within the care system. Sometimes it can be with a new family through adoption and sometimes it can be with family and friends informally or through special guardianship.

A recent sector-led review found a complexity of many overlapping factors contributing to a known rise in care proceedings and entries into care. That is why the sector, my Department, the Ministry of Justice and the recently established What Works Centre for Children's Social Care are all looking to understand better what makes a difference in supporting children to stay with their families safely and preventing them from reaching crisis point.

Some promising signs are emerging from our innovation and partners in practice programmes. We have invested almost £270 million in developing, testing and learning from new practice. From innovative projects showing real early promise, we have identified the seven features of practice that achieve impact and allow change to take hold. We continue to learn from what achieves the best outcomes for children and families and to support local authorities to adopt and adapt the programmes that successfully intervene. Early help plays a significant and important part in promoting safe and stable families. It is about intervening with the right families at the right time and, most importantly, in the right way. In doing so, the statutory guidance “Working Together to Safeguard Children” is unequivocally clear that local areas should have a comprehensive range of effective, evidence-based services in place to address needs early.

Unfortunately, I am out of time. I would just like to remind the House that my hon. Friends the Members for Brentwood and Ongar and for East Worthing and Shoreham talked about the Troubled Families programme. The three local authorities—Leeds, North Yorkshire and Hertfordshire—where we are going to scale up with the £84 million that the Chancellor backed us with at the Budget were asked how they have delivered effective children's services. They all mentioned the Troubled Families programme as being a central pillar of their work. I will leave it there. I had much to say in response to many of the contributions today. Perhaps I will write

[Nadhim Zahawi]

to colleagues on the specific points they raised. I leave a couple of minutes for my good friend, my hon. Friend the Member for East Worthing and Shoreham, to sum up.

4.58 pm

**Tim Loughton:** Madam Deputy Speaker, I have never questioned your gender. I do not think you look remotely like the right hon. Member for Chorley (Sir Lindsay Hoyle).

I thank all Members who have made this an exceedingly valuable debate. It is quite something when we almost need a time limit imposed on contributions in the last debate on a Thursday afternoon, on a subject that does not get nearly enough attention, as Members have mentioned.

I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Brentwood and Ongar (Alex Burghart). He certainly was exceedingly generous in blowing my trumpet, but he has quite a large tuba of his own in terms of his achievements—a positive cornucopia—not only in this place, but before he became a Member, as part of Barnardo's and in working for the Children's Commissioner on the Munro review. It is clear he has extensive knowledge, from the east end to New Zealand. He makes a great contribution to children's issues in this place.

I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown), who was inadvertently arguing with my hon. Friend at certain times. Actually they were agreeing over an awful lot. Many of the horrendous cases of knife crime that we have seen in her constituency can be traced back to poor attachment. The origins of those problems are exactly what we are all talking about. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee) and my hon. Friend the Member for Chelmsford (Vicky Ford). She mentioned the fantastic work being done by Councillor Dick Madden and by Dave Hill, the director of children's services, who turned around Essex when he came in in 2009. The hon. Member for Crewe and Nantwich (Laura Smith), who is no longer in the Chamber, mentioned disabled children and the hon. Member for Bedford (Mohammad Yasin) spoke about supported accommodation for vulnerable young people.

Let me end by echoing the tribute paid by the hon. Member for Plymouth, Sutton and Devonport (Luke Pollard) to the social workers, whose praises we do not sing enough, and to the councillors and council officers who work with them. I am proud to be a trustee of the Social Worker of the Year awards, which recognise those benefits.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered children's social care in England.

## Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Jeremy Quin.)*

5 pm

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): It is a shame that the Children's Minister, the hon. Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi), could not stay for the debate, because I think that it follows on very naturally from the last one.

"Babies being born brain-damaged by alcohol is a national emergency". So ran the title of a piece in today's edition of *The Times* about this debate. It is justified by a recent study conducted by Bristol University, which suggests that some 79% of women say that they drank alcohol while pregnant, and that between 6% and 17% of the 14,000 or so children covered by the study have foetal alcohol spectrum disorders. Scaled up—and this is why the term "national emergency" is not misplaced—that gives a figure of between 42,000 and 120,000 children a year.

So what is foetal alcohol spectrum disorder? It is an umbrella term for a range of effects that prenatal alcohol exposure can have on an individual. FASD is the commonest non-genetic cause of learning disability in the United Kingdom, yet it is entirely preventable. It lasts a lifetime: this is not just about babies. What does it look like? People often think that they understand the syndrome. They say to me, "Yeah, we know about that. It is a really bad problem when women have drunk heavily during pregnancy." It is true that there are often facial and physical features characteristic of children with FASD, but, relatively speaking, that applies to a very small proportion of the wider spectrum.

The impact on the brain, although usually not immediately obvious from the outside, affects language, memory, attention, processing and understanding, and creates emotional, behavioural and learning difficulties. Children often struggle with complex concepts such as time, metaphor or consequences. Rewards and sanctions mean very little to children with this kind of brain damage, and consequences do not mean very much either.

A constituent of mine adopted two children. One of them, who is 16, had no idea of the consequences of his actions, and got into trouble. He has no idea that he has done anything wrong—the idea is meaningless to him—but because of a wider lack of understanding, including a lack of understanding in our criminal justice system, he very nearly went to prison. He was spared that, more by luck than by judgment. His victims did not understand—for good reason: why would they—and I think that there was very little understanding in the system.

A 17-year-old who gave evidence to the all-party parliamentary group on foetal alcohol spectrum disorders, which I chair, described the effect on her emotions. When she gets angry, she has no control whatsoever. I know that is true of many people, but controlling anger can be harder for those with this kind of brain damage. She described to our all-party group how she sees herself from the outside, as somebody else almost; it is a sort of out-of-body experience, and she has no control over it. I have heard that repeated by a number of children and young people affected by FASD, including my own adopted daughter; I have two adopted children, both of whom are affected by this, which is why I have become aware of it and taken so much interest in it.

There are implications for society as well as individuals, because this disorder does not go away when children become adults. In Canada, they have estimated that half of their prison population has FASD; I wonder whether the situation is very different here. FASD affects people's ability to get qualifications, and I wonder how many of those who are sleeping rough or are otherwise homeless have FASD. Returning to the point I made about not understanding time or consequences, I wonder how many people who are sanctioned for not attending appointments with the Department for Work and Pensions have FASD. There is likely also to be a strong link between FASD and having difficulties with holding down a job or maintaining a stable relationship.

In the United States, a study last year estimated an annual personal cost of \$24,000, before considering the cost to the criminal justice system. That is a relatively small element of the cost for some of the people with FASD in the United States. For years in the United States they have described people with FASD as million-dollar babies, often multi-million dollar babies, because of the long-term societal costs as well as that to the individual.

We have just had a very good debate on children's social care, and I wish I had been able to take part instead of just listening to it. Population evidence to the all-party group suggested—this is a relatively low estimate—that at least a quarter of the children in the care system are affected by FASD. I have heard other adopters and people who run adoption agencies describing adoption as a family-finding service for children with FASD, because it is so common among the adopted children population. May I add to the tribute paid in the last debate to adopters, foster carers and all professionals who do what they can to support the children, young people and, indeed, adults who continue to face the challenges of FASD?

What am I asking for? I am asking for action on prevention and diagnosis, and action to cut the numbers, and for a sea change in our approach and our building of awareness among the population, including and especially among health professionals.

**Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): My hon. Friend and I have talked about this issue a number of times, and I commend him for taking it forward. I was interested to read that twins who are exposed to exactly the same amount of alcohol in the womb can have very different outcomes. It is a very complicated situation. Genetic factors are involved and we have no way of predicting in advance what the risks are. Does my hon. Friend agree that we need to understand this better, we are learning all the time, and we cannot identify anything that would make drinking safe during pregnancy?

**Bill Esterson:** I thank my hon. Friend for her intervention which prompts me to cite a recent study from the Washington State University. Its foetal alcohol syndrome diagnostic and prevention network has identified that fetuses can experience vastly different FASD outcomes despite being exposed to identical amounts of alcohol—which is what happens with twins. There is no way of predicting what will happen, and its conclusion, which I am glad to see the chief medical officer now accepts, is that the only safe amount to drink is “none at all”.

I am asking that the chief medical officer's advice and guidance, which has now been accepted by the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence as well, be

given much greater prominence and that we build awareness so that everyone understands it, especially, but not exclusively, health professionals. I am asking that we have a proper study of incidence so that we need not rely on the limited evidence of the Bristol University study. It was only able to make rough estimates, given the nature of its research, but if it is between 6% and 17%, it really does need that intervention and prevalence study.

We have to build greater understanding among health professionals and professionals right across the public sector. I have mentioned support as well. There needs to be greater support for those living with FASD—both those suffering from it and those caring for them—and those in education and elsewhere who are looking after them.

**Tim Loughton** (East Worthing and Shoreham) (Con): I commend the hon. Gentleman for all the work he has done raising the profile of this condition. He knows I support him through the all-party group, and he knows of the experiences I have had with children's homes in Denmark, which very much pioneered the work here, because of the alcohol problems among residents of Greenland and others. He is absolutely right that many of our children in the care system are directly affected by this. Does he agree that we have to get much better at giving clear advice, as we now do on smoking and its impact on lungs? We need a similar campaign to make absolutely clear to women exactly what the risks are to their unborn children if they continue to drink, as many of them will do.

**Bill Esterson:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to draw the comparison with smoking. There is no way anybody does not understand that you do not smoke when you are pregnant. We need the same cultural understanding of the effect of alcohol.

I am very pleased that the chief medical officer listened to the all-party group's advice in the inquiry that we held when we published our report at the end of 2015 and that the guidance is now right and advises women not to drink at all if they are pregnant or planning to conceive. NICE caught up last year, but many people, including some health professionals, still regard the previous guidance as relevant. There is a question mark for many. They think, “If the advice previously was one or two drinks, maybe it's still okay”. It is not, and we need to make that clear.

The country has a history in this respect going back many years. A glass of Guinness used to be thought a good idea for pregnant women because of the iron.

**Lyn Brown:** And red wine.

**Bill Esterson:** My hon. Friend says red wine too.

I described some of the symptoms to a constituent of mine in his 60s, and he said, “That's me”. That will have been a result of the culture and the advice about it being okay to drink. We need a sea change in that culture, which is so deep seated, in order to end the misapprehension. A baby's liver matures later in pregnancy than other parts of the body and so cannot process alcohol. When mum drinks, so does the baby. People have to understand this. The problem is that much of the damage is likely to be done early in pregnancy. There is a video on the internet of an embryo that is introduced to a

[Bill Esterson]

drop of alcohol. It stops moving for two hours. Goodness knows what damage is done in that time by one small drop of alcohol. People do not understand the risks they are taking. In that regard, the intervention from the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) was very welcome.

Nicola Blackwood, in a Westminster Hall debate on 2 February 2017, talked about improvements to industry labelling, and guidelines were issued in March 2017, but I am afraid it simply has not changed. It is not good enough. The labelling is not clear. It is still small. People do not understand it. We need to improve on that. That was a subject of my ten-minute rule Bill in 2015. Please can we have improvements there.

Nicola Blackwood also said in that debate:

“Health professionals are supposed to discuss it with pregnant women”.

We need to ensure that health professionals put much more emphasis on the issue and to consider the impact across the wider population. There should be greater understanding and awareness in the drinks industry. The industry makes great progress some of the time, but where are the notices in our pubs and restaurants telling people about the dangers of FASD? I want to know what happened to what the then Minister said in that debate, because we have not seen much progress. I think it was the Minister present, the Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, the hon. Member for Winchester (Steve Brine), who responded to my hon. Friend the Member for Swansea East (Carolyn Harris) just a few weeks ago about the duties of midwives and other professionals. It is great that we have the duties, but what are the outcomes? That is something that needs to change.

I want to hear the Minister’s response, but I have one or two more comments. Sadly, women sometimes consume alcohol before they know that they are pregnant, and damage may be done during that early period, but others are unwilling or unable to stop drinking alcohol while pregnant. The damage to babies, the impact on families, the long-term effect, the direct costs to the public purse, and the lost productivity from FASD sufferers and carers are real problems for this country. It is a hidden epidemic, and it is time that it was out in the open. It is time that we had the full information. I said that I want prevention and greater support, so let us get the advice out there. I am sure that the Minister can make a lot of progress in that regard.

This is too big just for good intentions. Those suffering from FASD need firm commitments and action. This country has the fourth-highest prevalence of FASD in the world. Canada has invested 1.1 million Canadian dollars just for indigenous children who suffer from FASD. We have money going into dealing with alcohol-related problems, but not directly into FASD, so perhaps the Minister will take that away and consider it. FASD is an entirely preventable problem, and it is the biggest cause of disability in the UK. Minister, your move.

5.17 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health and Social Care (Steve Brine):** Nobody has ever handed over to me that way before, but I like it. I was just saying to the Whip on duty that I should congratulate the

hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) not just on getting this debate, but on his consistent record of campaigning in this area over many years. I am sorry that that came about due to bad personal experience, but I hope that his two adoptive daughters are okay and are proudly watching him do his work in the House tonight.

I thank the hon. Gentleman for all his work to raise awareness of the condition through the all-party parliamentary group on foetal alcohol spectrum disorders. I chaired many APPGs when I was on the Back Benches, and I always say—I make no apologies for repeating it—that so much good work in this House goes on in APPGs. There is so much expertise, and they do not get enough awareness in the public or in this House, but they should. The hon. Gentleman has certainly helped with that tonight.

It is true that we do not know enough about the extent of FASD. The recent Bristol screening tool study suggests that between 6% and 17% of people in the general population could be suffering from FASD, but I suspect that that is an underestimation. The study is an important contribution but, even as its authors acknowledge, there are limitations to the data, and its prevalence estimates should be treated with caution. There is no question that the hon. Gentleman is right that more needs to be done to clarify the true prevalence of FASD, and the Department will consider future research in this area—I take the hon. Gentleman’s challenge. We do know that the impact of FASD can be severe, with the lifelong physical, behavioural and/or cognitive disabilities that he mentioned. Unfortunately, there is no cure, but we know that early intervention can help improve a child’s development and help them to lead an improved life. The hon. Gentleman made well the point that FASD does not just affect babies.

Touching on prevention, the hon. Gentleman will know that it is one of the key priorities of the new Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, which is music to my ears as the Minister for Public Health, Primary Care and Prevention. The hon. Gentleman is right that FASD is an entirely preventable condition, so that makes my ears prick. Prevention is vital, and the all-party parliamentary group has made it the fulcrum of its work to raise awareness of the dangers of drinking in pregnancy in order to protect future generations from an entirely preventable condition.

First and foremost, we need to be absolutely clear to women about the facts on alcohol so that they can make well-informed decisions. That applies both before they become pregnant and when they come into contact with the health system—in primary care we call it making every contact count. The UK chief medical officer, Professor Dame Sally Davies, with whom I work closely, published low-risk drinking guidelines in 2016, which provide very clear advice to women not to drink alcohol if they are planning for pregnancy or if they are pregnant. Public Health England, for which I have ministerial responsibility, reinforces that advice through its public health messaging, both global and targeted.

We have been very clear with the alcohol industry that we expect the guidelines to be reflected on the labelling of all alcoholic products, and we have given the industry until September 2019 to ensure that its labelling reflects the updated guidelines. The industry knows that I will be watching it like a hawk.

There is also central advice through NHS.uk and other media platforms such as our Start4Life branding to inform women of the dangers of drinking during pregnancy. Of course, all upper-tier local authorities in England are now public health authorities. As part of their local public health duties, they rightly continue to educate the public about the dangers of alcohol during pregnancy, and it is encouraging to hear about initiatives such as “Be your baby’s hero, keep alcohol to zero,” which is one of my particular favourites. In Blackpool, of all places, areas of high alcohol use in pregnancy are being targeted to stop future cases of FASD. Be your baby’s hero, keep alcohol to zero—I just like saying it.

Once women are pregnant, they generally come into contact with health services frequently, which gives many opportunities for healthcare professionals to give advice on alcohol. As I mentioned at Health and Social Care questions this week, there are many campaigns on diet and nutrition, and health professionals are very aware of the dangers of drinking. Cancer Research UK has been helpful on this issue, and it is very aware of the dangers of drinking alcohol during pregnancy. The key thing is that pregnant women are given consistent messages, delivered in a supportive, non-judgmental way. The same goes for obesity, another area for which I am responsible. Messages about being overweight should be delivered in a supportive way and alongside a call to action, and many primary care professionals find that difficult, which I understand. It is easy for us to say, “Well, they should just mention it,” but it is not quite so easy.

Midwives and health visitors have a central role in providing clear, consistent advice and early identification and support, and they are well equipped to do it supportively. We are reinforcing that role through a number of strategies. Through the maternity transformation programme, the Department is working with NHS England, Public Health England, the Royal Colleges and a range of charities such as Sands, the stillbirth and neonatal death charity. The House will be well aware of Sands, which does such good work to promote safer maternity services. This programme covers a range of initiatives, which include raising awareness of the known risk factors among pregnant women and health professionals, as the hon. Gentleman has asked for. This will ensure that women receive consistent, supportive advice on how to minimise the risk of stillbirth, including the importance of healthy eating and of not smoking—I am responsible for the tobacco control plan—or drinking alcohol during pregnancy.

The National Institute for Health and Care Excellence has updated its guidelines to reflect the CMO’s advice not to drink during pregnancy. The Department will continue to work with the Royal Colleges—I was with the head of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges last night—and various other regulatory bodies to raise the profile of the CMO’s guidelines and to recommend that they include those guidelines within their training, which the hon. Gentleman has consistently asked for.

**Bill Esterson:** I appreciate the tone and content of the Minister’s response so far. I neglected to ask him about the alcohol strategy. Will he say a few words about his intentions to include action on FASD in that strategy? That would be an extremely important and welcome step for those interested in this subject.

**Steve Brine:** I do not directly own the alcohol strategy, but obviously I am involved in it. I take the hon. Gentleman’s challenge on board, and maybe we can discuss it further. I know he has stuff he wants to feed into the strategy—he has produced it through the all-party parliamentary group—so perhaps we can discuss it further. I can then discuss it with my ministerial colleagues in the Home Office. It would make absolute sense to do so as part of the strategy, and I suggest linking it to our Green Paper on prevention, which we will be bringing out this year. His question is spot on.

I will now touch on services for affected families. We know that FASD can have a huge impact on the early years development of children and on their life chances, and the hon. Gentleman gave a number of good examples. We also know that early intervention services in this area, as in every area, can help to reduce some of the effects and, therefore, the secondary disabilities that come as a result. The responsibility for commissioning services in this space lies with the clinical commissioning groups in England, working together across all different sectors of the local health economy. We have heard of cases of long waiting times for a diagnosis. My Department will consider how we can improve access to these services and a diagnostic pathway, but we also need to learn from best practice. The Tameside and Glossop Integrated Care NHS Foundation Trust has developed the maternity alcohol management algorithm pathway—why can people not come up with something snappier, like that first one? It has introduced screening and awareness of FASD, enabling what we think is effective early intervention. Just as the long-term plan gives different examples on smoking, with the Canada example on challenging smoking rates among pregnant women, I am interested in the best practice ideas and that trust has a lot to bring in this space. The Surrey and Borders Partnership NHS Foundation Trust has a specialist centre, although sadly it is the only one in England. The trust provides a comprehensive and rapid diagnostic pathway for those with FASD and it has a lot to share from its journey and with its ideas for service delivery, and on the success it has had.

**Bill Esterson:** The Minister mentions Surrey and Borders, and I have had significant interaction with Dr Raja Mukherjee, the specialist who runs that centre. I am glad the Minister acknowledged that it is the only one in the country. May I encourage him to intervene to make sure we have such centres right across the country, as that would make a massive difference?

**Steve Brine:** The hon. Gentleman can certainly encourage me in that regard, and I will look at that in terms of the prevention paper. We would have to be guided by the clinicians and the CCGs on where they would see the greatest need for that provision to be. That is very much the spirit of the long-term plan, but it is not ideal that that centre is the only one. Surrey is near my constituency, but a long way from Sefton.

Finally, I wish to touch on the wider departmental policy engagement in this area. Our deputy chief medical officer, Gina Radford, has held roundtable meetings on the subject, which considered the future development of policy to improve prevention and support. I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman has been involved in that. These meetings were attended by experts in the field and, crucially, FASD service users. I thank

[*Steve Brine*]

NOFAS UK—the National Organisation for Foetal Alcohol Syndrome-UK—which has been helpful in supporting and contributing to these meetings, along with other charities working in this field. We are also providing wider support to children and families affected by alcohol misuse, through the children of alcoholic dependant parents programme, which I am proud of. It was one of the first things I got to announce in this job. The previous Secretary of State working as one with the current shadow Secretary of State had managed to do this, which shows that cross-party working can happen in this Parliament between the two main parties—and there were no preconditions to it.

**Lyn Brown:** That is a career-limiting comment.

**Steve Brine:** The preconditions did not come from this side; I filled it in nicely. Through that programme,

we are investing some £6 million over three years to support a vulnerable group, as part of our new alcohol strategy.

The Government take alcohol concerns, across the board, very seriously and even more so when they relate to pregnancy. We are making progress—I hope—to prevent future FASD cases, and trying to change the landscape on prevention and treatment for those affected. But there is not an ounce of complacency in us—there certainly is not in me. We will continue to work towards improvements in the area. I can promise the hon. Gentleman that and I know, given his consistent work in this space, he will make sure he holds us to that and continues to raise awareness of the dangers of drinking alcohol during pregnancy in this House and outside. I thank him for that.

*Question put and agreed to.*

5.29 pm

*House adjourned.*

# Westminster Hall

Thursday 17 January 2019

[MR NIGEL EVANS *in the Chair*]

## Rail Infrastructure Investment

1.30 pm

**Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Fourth Report of the Transport Committee, Rail infrastructure investment, HC 582, and the Government response, HC 1557.

I am delighted to lead this debate on the Transport Committee's Fourth Report of this Session, on rail infrastructure investment. I will start the debate as we started our report, by underlining the importance of the UK's railways. They are a vital part of our national transport network and make a substantial contribution to the economy. Their importance has been recognised by successive Governments of all parties, with billions of pounds invested in rail every year. The importance of our railways is not in question.

However, there are serious challenges for both rail passengers and the industry. While 1.7 billion journeys were made by rail in 2018, it was not an easy year for passengers, who faced disruption and disappointment. Planned improvements—including electrification in south Wales, the midlands and Cumbria, and the opening of Crossrail—have not been delivered, while May's timetable changes caused unprecedented chaos across the network. This year started with more unwelcome news for rail commuters, with fares increasing by an average of 3.1%.

We must work towards improving services for rail passengers and freight customers. Investment in the network is essential for enabling better services, which in turn provide new opportunities for our constituents and support the development of our towns and cities. That was the focus of our report, and today I will look at three of the main issues it raised.

First, we need to ensure that rail investment and its benefits are shared equally across the country. It is clear that many feel that rail investment is unfairly centralised in a small number of areas, and the Department for Transport has done little to respond to those concerns. Secondly, there are serious questions about what future improvements the Government's new approach to funding rail enhancements will deliver. To date, more than a year after the new system was put in place, there is a total absence of information about what proposals are even being considered. Thirdly, there remain questions about the future role that electrification will play in improving the UK's rail network, following the cancellation of the electrification of the midland main line north of Kettering to Nottingham and Sheffield, the Great Western main line to Swansea and Cardiff and the lakes line between Oxenholme and Windermere.

There is long-standing dissatisfaction about the level of investment in the rail network in different regions, and our report looked in detail at the disparity in investment across the country. We considered the issue in the context of the Government's stated intention to

rebalance the economy away from London, exemplified by the northern powerhouse and the midlands engine. From 2012 to 2017, the north-east, the east midlands, the south-west and Wales all received less than 10% of the level of rail investment that went to London. Only the north-west, the south-east and Scotland received even a fifth of the level of rail investment in our capital.

The capital's size and population mean that it is unsurprising that more is spent in London, in absolute terms, than in other regions. However, there is also a substantial disparity between spending per capita in London, at £773 a head in 2016-17, and other regions, with a low of just £70 per head in my own region, the east midlands. The Institute for Public Policy Research North analysed the Government's planned transport spending, as set out in the Government's 2016 "National Infrastructure and Construction Pipeline", stating that it showed problems not only in the past but in the future and

"a stark gap between London and the rest of the country",

with £1,900 per capita spending planned in London from 2017 onwards, compared with £400 in the north.

The sense of unfairness felt by many regions across the country has been exacerbated by continued investment in major developments that primarily benefit London. It is hardly surprising that there was real anger when, four days after the cancellation of those electrification schemes, the Secretary of State and the Mayor of London jointly announced an agreement in principle to fund Crossrail 2 at an estimated cost of £30 billion.

The Government have tried to rebut the figures about the regional disparity of investment in our railway. Their response to our report said that

"the planned spending per head figure is within 33% of the national average for all nine English regions. Moreover, the overall figure for the three Northern regions (North West, North East, Yorkshire and Humber) is £1,039 per head, compared to £1,076 per head for the Middle regions (East of England, East Midlands and West Midlands) and £1,029 per head for the Southern regions (London, South East and South West)."

However, those figures are based on a selective analysis. By aggregating regions, variations in the midlands, the north and the south are masked. For example, Yorkshire and the Humber received just £729 per head, the north-east £822 per head and the south-west £851 per head.

**Diana Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): As usual, my hon. Friend makes a powerful case for the report that her Committee has produced. She just referenced the funding for Yorkshire and the Humber. The Department for Transport seems to put its head in the sand whenever it is challenged on these regional disparities. Given that the new Rail Minister is a Yorkshire MP, does she think that we might now see a recognition that the north has not had its fair share, and that we will now start to get our fair share?

**Lilian Greenwood:** My hon. Friend has been an outstanding advocate for the north and its need for rail investment. The Minister is a newish Rail Minister, but I know that he previously served in the Department for Transport. We had discussions in the past, when he was the Minister responsible for buses, and I always found him genuinely prepared to listen. I hope that he brings the same approach to his new role.

[Lilian Greenwood]

In January 2018 IPPR North assessed the Government's analysis of regional spending and stated that it excluded spending in the pipeline for after 2020-21, meaning that the analysis omitted some £42.5 billion of planned investment, 40% of which—£19.8 billion—is earmarked for London. The Government have therefore presented, even if accurate, a rather skewed picture of how planned transport spending will be distributed across the country in the coming years.

**Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): My hon. Friend is doing an excellent job of presenting our Committee's report and explaining how the Government tried to fiddle the figures to obscure the fact that London is getting about 80% of the funding. Does she agree that this will not be rectified and made fair until the methodology for deciding on investment schemes is changed? It massively over-weights time saved, which always pushes investment towards densely populated cities such as London, rather than Newcastle, Manchester, Leeds or the other regional cities.

**Lilian Greenwood:** My hon. Friend makes an important point, which I will come to in due course. He is a long-standing, experienced and expert member of the Transport Committee, and I am delighted that he is here this afternoon.

The DFT also argues that it is difficult to break down regional spending accurately, saying that where expenditure on the railway takes place is not always an accurate reflection of where the benefits are felt. The Department also emphasises the difficulty of analysing investment annually, or even five-yearly, given that railway assets typically have a lifespan of 25 to 40 years, pointing out that there was inevitably

“a cyclical nature to replacing them that does not lend itself to an even split of funding across all regions within every 5 year control period.”

Of course, there is merit in those arguments, but I simply ask the Minister, when was there a time when investment in the north exceeded investment in the south?

While the Government's commitment to rebalancing the economy is welcome, it is clear from past experience that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Blackley and Broughton (Graham Stringer) said, current methods for making investment decisions make it much easier for highly populated, economically successful places to prove the case for schemes in their area, because the model has a bias towards schemes that exhibit strong levels of potential demand and/or high potential to relieve existing transport congestion. Witnesses to the inquiry told us that this approach inevitably drew more investment to London and unless the system could be altered to take greater account of wider economic benefits, the process would be inexorable.

Maria Machancoses, the director of Midlands Connect, told us that

“figures on the disparity of investment, no matter which formula you look at—whether by the DFT or the Treasury—they all say that outside London it is just not working.”

Her view was that this should be the starting point from which to “move forward.” However, in their response to our report, the Government did not accept the suggestion that their scheme appraisal methods did not provide a fair share of investment in rail across the UK's regions.

This completely fails to acknowledge the overwhelming feeling across the country that investment in rail is unfairly concentrated in a few small areas.

While there are undeniable complexities in accurately breaking down regional spending and identifying where the benefits of investment are felt, the Government must recognise the concerns that have been raised about the regional disparities of investment in our rail network and take action to address them. It is hard to believe that the Department will do so if it does not accept that there is a problem in the first place.

The DFT has published a rebalancing toolkit, to be used as part of the strategic assessment of future investment programmes. This was welcomed in principle by our witnesses. However, when we asked the then Rail Minister, the hon. Member for Blackpool North and Cleveleys (Paul Maynard), for examples of the toolkit's influence on DFT's transport investment decisions, he could not provide a single specific example. He told us that it was “relatively early days” for the approach. Our witnesses said that the Government needed to prove that what the rebalancing toolkit is meant to achieve will actually take place. I ask the Minister, over a year after the toolkit was introduced, how has it influenced the DFT's investment decisions?

In our report, we also called on the Government to be more specific about the economic rebalancing effects they intend to achieve. We call on them to tell the regions in need of regeneration how they can prove their cases and secure investment. We argued that people in the north-east and south-west, regions that have experienced relative under-investment in recent periods, must have a clear sense of what the Government are trying to achieve in order to be able to judge their success.

We also recommended that use of the rebalancing toolkit be mandatory and that the Department worked with Her Majesty's Treasury to explore how economic rebalancing can be made an intrinsic part of appraising transport schemes. That would put rebalancing at the heart of investment decisions, rather than it merely being an add-on. In response, the Government have told us that it would be impractical to make use of the toolkit mandatory. Why has the Department developed a toolkit that is impractical to use?

Let me turn to rail electrification. Under successive Governments since 2009, the Department has made a compelling case for widespread electrification, moving from diesel to electric traction, particularly on heavily used parts of the network, which would reduce journey times and facilitate lighter, more efficient trains, reducing long-term costs, improving environmental sustainability and enhancing capacity. The Government's decision to cancel electrification schemes in south Wales, the midlands and the Lake district were a huge disappointment for people who had been promised improvements to their network. Following the cancellation of these schemes, there are also serious questions about the Government's support for future electrification of the network.

It is clear that the plans for electrification were over-ambitious and suffered from inadequate planning and budgeting. The schemes were hampered by an unclear definition of responsibilities between the DFT, Network Rail and the Office of Rail and Road, and disappointment at their cancellation was compounded by poor communication by the Department for Transport.

Although the decision to cancel the midland main line and the lakes line schemes was taken in March 2017, it was not announced until July, on the day the House rose for its summer recess, limiting opportunities for scrutiny of the decision. The Government also presented the decision not to electrify these lines as a positive story about passenger benefits being delivered in other ways. The announcement, unsurprisingly, was met with scepticism by those who saw it as a pragmatic, cost-based response to overruns. The National Audit Office agreed with those sceptics, and concluded:

“The Department decided to cancel projects in 2017 because Network Rail’s 2014-2019 investment portfolio was no longer affordable.”

Passengers on the midland main line and Great Western main line should eventually see some improvements in capacity and journey time from other enhancements in control period 5, but the way that enhancement to these lines has been handled is far from ideal and has done nothing to create confidence in the Government’s approach to rail improvements.

**Huw Merriman** (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Lady, my friend, the Chair of the Select Committee, on securing the debate. She took us through our Select Committee report and chaired us so well. The Government rightly place great faith in the future in hybrid trains and bi-mode, but does she share my concern that we are in a bit of a hiatus? We either have electrification or technology that is not quite there. Many communities—mine in particular, with the extension of HSI—are faced with uncertainty as to whether they will ever get a better service.

**Lilian Greenwood:** The hon. Gentleman is a very valued member of the Select Committee. While new traction, hydrogen and battery potentially have a place on our railway, it is clear that they are not sufficiently developed to be a proper replacement for electrification. There is some doubt about whether they will ever be a suitable replacement for electric trains, particularly on inter-city journeys operating at higher speeds. He is right to raise concerns about the time that might be taken for parts of the country to see improvements to their services, particularly if there is a continued aspiration to use bi-mode technology. While that can provide some benefits, it undoubtedly also has a significant impact on operating costs. When passengers are very concerned about their fares raising, building in long-term costs seems a wise approach.

While it is now clear that the electrification schemes that had been planned were undeliverable, the Railway Industry Association and others were convinced that, for now, electrification remained the optimal solution to train traction. The case for electrification is particularly strong on heavily used routes, balancing significant benefits to passengers with the wider environmental benefits and long-term cost efficiency. Our report called for electrification to be delivered through a long-term rolling programme in which the Department, Network Rail and the wider industry learn the lessons of earlier schemes and strive to reduce costs. Do not throw the baby out with the bath water.

A key driver of Government investment in the rail network is their commitment to reduce carbon emissions. In February 2018, the Government called on the industry to produce a vision for how it will decarbonise with an

initial response due in September last year. The Government response to our report confirmed that an industry taskforce, led by Malcolm Brown, is taking this forward. Have the Government received this taskforce’s report on how to decarbonise the rail system? If so, what does it say and what are the Government doing with it? David Clarke, technical director of the Railway Industry Association, has said that to achieve the Government’s aim of decarbonising UK railways by 2040,

“electrification must be one of the prime options for intensively used routes”.

The Government accepted our recommendation that it should engage with RIA’s electrification cost challenge initiative. The Department committed to producing a report on cost-effective electrification by this summer, but has said that it will remain agnostic about the best means of securing rail enhancement and that it does not expect proposals for new enhancement to begin with a predefined solution such as electrification. I am afraid it is clear that the Government have no plans for the future electrification of the railways.

I ask the Minister to update us on the Government’s work to produce a report with the industry on cost-effective electrification. When we conducted our inquiry, we heard that there was considerable interest in third-party-funded electrification schemes on the midland main line. We recommended that those proposals should be fully considered as an alternative to the proposed bi-mode solution.

The Government accepted our recommendation and said that they would fully consider

“Any proposals made to government or Network Rail about private sector solutions on the Midland Mainline that could provide benefits in addition to the passenger benefits that are being secured by the Government.”

What discussions have the Government had with third parties about proposals for electrifying the midland main line, and how will the improvements for passengers of the enhancements that will be going ahead compare with the improvements that would be delivered by electrification?

Some hon. Members present represent areas of the north covered by the transpennine route. The upgrade of that route is expected to include some electrification, but those enhancements have been considerably reduced since the then Chancellor announced in 2016 that the Government were

“giving the green light to High Speed 3 between Manchester and Leeds”.—[*Official Report*, 16 March 2016; Vol. 607, c. 961.]

There are serious concerns that the upgrade will not be fit for purpose for freight trains, and that because only part of the line will be electrified, the route will need bi-mode trains, which will build in higher operating costs for years to come. Are the current proposals for the transpennine route upgrade in line with the advice from Transport for the North? If not, why not? I note the letter to the Secretary of State for Transport from the operator of Humber, Mersey and Tees ports on 7 January, which says:

“It is of increasing concern that the Department for Transport and Network Rail are undervaluing our industry in the North and undermining the economic goal and objectives of the Northern Powerhouse; it will only make the productivity gap between the North and South of England even greater and devalues further the role of Transport for the North.”

[Lilian Greenwood]

It is concerning when the industry feels that the transpennine route upgrade, as it is currently considered, will lead “to an utter dependence upon the M62 for Transpennine freight traffic for at least another generation.”

We have talked about some of the problems experienced as a result of planned railway improvements in the past five years, which have triggered successive reviews of the planning and delivery of enhancements and led to a substantial change in the way future investment in the railways will be considered and delivered. The next five-year control period will focus on operations, maintenance and renewals, the volume of which will increase substantially, not least because of the number of renewals that have been postponed from the current control period.

Following those postponements, the greater focus on maintenance and renewals in control period 6, which starts in April, is necessary and welcome, but there are long-standing concerns in the industry that investment in renewals has been lumpy, stop-start and boom and bust. We have heard that the level of uncertainty about upcoming spending could have knock-on effects on the wider industry’s confidence to invest in its workforce, skills and innovation.

In our report, we called on the Government to work with Network Rail, the regulator and the industry to look at the ways in which investment could be smoothed out from the start of control period 6, throughout that period and beyond. The Government accepted that recommendation, so I ask the Minister, how has the Department worked with the industry to smooth out investment for the upcoming control period?

Instead of forming part of the five-year control periods for Network Rail investment, future enhancements of the rail network are now subject to a separate process. The new rail network enhancements pipeline is intended to support a continuous planning approach and move away from the overly rigid five-year cycle that was linked to railway control periods.

The Government have signalled that they expect more railway enhancements to be market-led proposals brought forward by third parties. We heard that there was likely to be interest from third parties in bringing forward such proposals, but it was not clear to us that Network Rail had the structures or culture in place to support such third parties to engage and participate in the planning, delivery, funding or financing of the railway.

**Daniel Zeichner** (Cambridge) (Lab): I echo the earlier comments of my colleague on the Transport Committee, the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), about my hon. Friend’s skill in presenting her arguments and chairing the Committee. Does she share my concerns about the market-led proposals? In my part of the world, we have had some major proposals for east west rail, which has been promoted by the National Infrastructure Commission, but there is considerable confusion about whether that railway will be privately run, as the Secretary of State has suggested, or whether there is a plan B. I am not convinced that there is and I am interested in my hon. Friend’s views on that.

**Lilian Greenwood**: It is wonderful to see so many members of the Select Committee here. My hon. Friend raises an important point about what will happen if

market-led proposals do not provide the opportunities that the Department hopes. I will touch on that in a moment.

In November, the Government said that they had received 30 responses to their call for ideas for market-led proposals to enhance the railway, but that they could not make an announcement about individual schemes because the proposals had been submitted in confidence. How have those market-led proposals progressed since November, and do the Government expect any of them to be delivered, including the one referred to by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner)?

There was significant support for moving enhancements planning away from the control period process, and we support the intention behind the rail network enhancements pipeline, which should ensure that the planning mistakes made over the past five years are not repeated. However, we also found a substantial risk that the rush to deliver poorly planned and scoped schemes in the current period could be replaced by a different problem—a slowdown or interregnum in new enhancement projects.

That is why we called on the Government to provide a clear set of strategic priorities for rail infrastructure investment in each region, and to outline the specific projects likely to be available for third-party investment. The Government refused to set priorities for each region, so I ask the Minister today to set out the Government’s priorities for rail enhancements over the next five years.

We were also concerned that the process outlined by the Government did not provide the reassurance and certainty on future investment that the rail industry is looking for. We said that more transparency about the enhancements pipeline and decision-making processes in the Department was needed. That is particularly true if the potential for a substantial increase in third-party investment is to be realised. The Government accepted that recommendation and said that they are

“committed to transparent policy making and intend to make clear public statements”

as investment decisions are taken at each stage of the pipeline. So far, however, we have seen no such statements.

The Railway Industry Association has said:

“The visibility of enhancements remains a major concern for rail suppliers. There is now a lack of an obvious enhancements pipeline, with no construction-ready schemes in the Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline...published in 2018.”

Last week, I asked the Department how many rail enhancement schemes were being considered as part of the rail network enhancements pipeline, and what stage each proposal was at. Again, the Minister told me that the Government

“are committed to transparent policy making”,

but failed to answer any points of my question. That means that, almost a year after it was set up, the Department has yet to reveal a single proposal being considered as part of the pipeline. We are none the wiser about what, if any, future enhancements the Department is considering, let alone planning.

In response to my question, the Minister also said:

“Network Rail...will continue to provide public updates on the progress of enhancements in the portfolio”,

but it is not clear at what stage of the pipeline proposals will enter the portfolio. Can the Minister confirm at what stage enhancements will be included in Network

Rail's enhancements delivery plan? It seems to me that it is only those that have reached the delivery section of the pipeline that will be exposed in that way, and we will not know what is in the development and design parts. Will there be any transparency of proposals before the decision to deliver them?

Although the Government have accepted a number of our recommendations, as I have outlined, their response to our report was disappointing in several regards. It seemed to show an unwillingness to engage with some of our key conclusions and recommendations.

The Association for Consultancy and Engineering agreed with our assessment of the Government's response, telling us that the Government had

"failed to meaningfully engage with the expertise provided by industry, and the practical recommendations outlined in the report".

It told us:

"As evidence gives, it was disheartening for ACE to see the DfT and the ORR"—

that is, the Office of Rail and Road—

"pay such little attention to the solutions proposed by the committee, including dismissing some of them outright."

I have asked the Minister to respond today on some of the points where we felt that the Government's response to our report was less than satisfactory. I hope that he will take the opportunity to expand on the Government's response, for the benefit of both this House and those in the rail industry who were as frustrated as we were by the Government's response.

To conclude, although our report welcomed much about the Government's—

**Graham Stringer:** My hon. Friend is being very generous in giving way as she draws to her conclusion. She has already mentioned the fact that it took four months from the decision to cancel the electrification to a written statement to the House on the last day before the summer recess. The previous Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin), assured the Committee that there would be no change in the investment plans when the Office for National Statistics had changed the designation of Network Rail's public status so that it became part of the public expenditure. However, that has driven many of the cuts in the future investment programme.

Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government have not only failed to respond positively to our recommendations but failed to play a straight bat, in not presenting information to the Committee that would have enabled us to carry through properly our job of scrutinising the Department?

**Lilian Greenwood:** My hon. Friend makes a very important point. I do not know whether the previous Secretary of State was really unaware of the implications of that change, but certainly our experience as a Committee is that we have not always had the candour that we would have wanted from the Department. That is disappointing when we are simply trying to do the job of scrutiny that this Committee was appointed to undertake on behalf of Parliament.

As I have said, we welcome much about the Government's approach to investment in the rail network. There is no argument about the importance of investment or about the fact that the Government are investing significant

sums, but the issue is how they have gone about investing and how they ensure that that investment provides good value for money and strategic thought about the long term.

We agree with the increased focus on renewals and we agree that decisions about railway enhancements should be taken out of the five-yearly control period process. However, there are still outstanding questions that were not addressed in the Government's response to our report. How will the Government meet their commitment to rebalancing the economy when it comes to investment in rail? How do they plan to decarbonise the railway network if they have completely ruled out electrification? What future enhancements to the railway network will emerge from the new rail network enhancements pipeline? I look forward to the Minister's update on all those points.

2.2 pm

**Priti Patel (Witham) (Con):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr Evans. Out of courtesy, I must apologise to hon. Members in advance just in case—I emphasise "in case"—I need to leave before the conclusion of the debate, due to another commitment. I pay tribute to the Chair of the Transport Committee, the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), for the case that she has just put, and to all other members of the Committee for their work on "Rail infrastructure investment". I have a copy of the report and have looked at it, and it is fair to say that it covers a wide range of issues, which the hon. Lady spoke about in her very good and detailed speech.

As the Minister will know, rail infrastructure is incredibly important, not only to my constituents in Witham but to the entire east of England region. I will start by paying tribute to him, because he has recently become the Rail Minister. I had the privilege of working with him previously, in his other incarnation in the Department for Transport, so it is great to see him back there. I thank him and his officials for giving me some time recently, to discuss not only some of the issues that I will raise today, but some of my concerns, as well as the developments that are taking place on the Great Eastern main line and some of the big investment opportunities that we would like to see for the region.

The Minister will know from our recent discussions about the work of the Great Eastern main line taskforce, which I currently chair and which is putting forward the case for strategic investment in rail infrastructure. Back in 2014 we submitted to the Government a business case for a package of investments—I have it here: "exhibit A"—which I have no doubt the Minister is fully versed in, because I know he has seen copies of it. This business case from 2014 discussed the potential to deliver over £4 billion of gross value added to the economy, to support thousands of new jobs, and to help meet the transport needs of the population and housing growth in the region.

Of course, this business case was put together in 2014 by all the Members of Parliament from Essex, Suffolk and Norfolk. It received a great deal of Government interest and time, with interest shown by the former Chancellor, the former Prime Minister and various Ministers, including the former Secretary of State for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Derbyshire Dales (Sir Patrick McLoughlin).

[Priti Patel]

As we have seen in the east of England, and are still seeing, there is so much opportunity for economic growth in our area, with lower housing costs than in other areas. We are on a commuter line and we are accommodating a greater number of commuters and families who travel to London, and not only in Essex but across the eastern region. We are very proud of that. Families choose to enjoy the enormous benefits of living in the villages of my constituency and elsewhere in the region, while being able to work in London as well. I have to say that that is because of the Government's wider investment in other sectors, including education—we have some amazing schools now—and quality of life is obviously a key feature too.

Of course, Essex and the east of England are fast-growing parts of the country, and they are strategically placed to deliver new jobs and economic growth. Look at what we have going on. We have world-leading businesses and centres of innovation: the Essex knowledge gateway, the University of East Anglia, Essex University and Cambridge University. They are all great hubs of intellect, innovation, jobs, economic growth and entrepreneurship. We have a diverse range of businesses, such as financial services, logistics, manufacturing, construction, modern bio-tech and science. We also have key international transport hubs, as my hon. Friend the Minister is well aware, including the key ports in London Gateway, Tilbury, Harwich and Felixstowe, and our airports at Stansted and Southend.

In Essex we have great business voices, which were instrumental in making the case for investment in our rail back in 2014. They include the Essex chamber of commerce, which made the business case, outlined the GVA of rail investment, combined the numbers and showed the economic growth that we can deliver outside London, and the new opportunities that will come our way. The Essex economy is already touching £40 billion in GVA, and obviously since 2010 the number of entrepreneurs has risen and we see business growth getting stronger and stronger. I see how much our businesses are already doing, and the jobs and prosperity they create. I am incredibly proud to see the enterprising spirit they have shown. Like me, they look forward to a future in which we can continue to build upon their contributions. They have a positive outlook for the future, not only for Essex but for the whole region.

We know that one of the key factors for growth is strategic investment in our roads and, in particular, our rail, so that we continue to grow and secure long-term investment. Of course, such investment means work on key roads and economic corridors, such as the A12 widening scheme and the dualling of the A120, but it also means investing in our rail network. Our rail network across the east of England has suffered from severe under-investment for many years. The Chair of the Transport Committee made some very important points today. She spoke about regional disparity with regard to the north of England, but of course my taskforce in the east of England has demonstrated that even notional calculations of regional finance mask regional disparities. Commuters on the Great Eastern main line, and particularly Greater Anglia commuters, are net contributors to the Treasury through their rail fares. Of course we want to see some of that money coming back out.

The Select Committee's report quite rightly raised the whole issue of rebalancing rail investment to ensure that it is spread across the country, which I have consistently pushed for. I agree that we need to invest more widely and look at ways to support schemes in the regions and economic centres. Of course, our whole economy needs to become much more efficient, and investing in rail infrastructure across the country will help to deliver that.

However, I emphasise to the Minister that although it seems on paper that investment has been skewed towards London, partly because of the high cost of Crossrail, it is also important that we see a rebalancing exercise that does not come at the expense of excluding investment opportunities that would deliver high levels of value for money and help to drive billions of pounds back into the whole of the UK economy. Of course, we are set to benefit from approximately £2.2 billion of investment through the control period 6 process, but I stress that that investment is to cover maintenance, operations and renewal.

Paragraph 80 of the excellent report, on page 28, focuses on the historic lumpiness of renewals investment. Investment that covers maintenance, renewals, and so on goes to patch things up, and the graph on page 28 shows that the lumpiness of expenditure goes across the various control periods. We want to ensure a consistent level of investment that covers maintenance, so that we are not simply patching things up. It is a welcome commitment. From our perspective, the new refurbishment—new trains, funds for renewal, and repairs to bridges, embankments and signalling to deal with level crossings—will of course be beneficial. However, that is no substitute for a clear strategy of strategic investments in new infrastructure so that we can have a high-performing railway to support our region. That is the right thing, and it is what our commuters all want.

**Daniel Zeichner:** The right hon. Lady is making an excellent contribution on behalf of the east of England. I wonder whether she agrees that there are significant possibilities for bringing forward digitalisation of the railways. I am told that a huge amount could be done through digitalisation to better address capacity constraints, and that a relatively modest investment in global terms could be transformational in the east. My concern is that, looking ahead over these very long periods, we may well find that technology has moved much more quickly and we have not taken best advantage of those technological changes. Does the right hon. Lady share that concern?

**Priti Patel:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. I was planning to touch on the significance of digital railway. I mentioned efficiency, and the whole point is how we can use new technology to drive efficiency. Everything is part of a process, and new technology can trump things that have previously gone on. There are also new opportunities for digital signalling. For example, on the Great Eastern main line we are working with the Department for Transport and the Minister to continue to make the case for digital signalling, and part of the case that the GEML taskforce is putting forward is compelling. I know that the Minister is looking forward to receiving the business case that we are currently working on. In previous discussions and meetings he

has heard me speak about the pipeline business case that we are working on, and how we will build on the 2014 business case and enhance the numbers, the financials and the key programmes that we should be putting in place. We will revise that business case based on the latest figures for growth, the economy and business, and we will demonstrate that investing in rail in the east of England will help the Government to reach their ambitious targets, not just for housing but for economic growth and regeneration.

Those projects are going to be vast. They will include the introduction of a passing loop in the vicinity of Witham town, right through the heart of the Witham constituency; the redoubling of Haughley junction; improvements to the Trowse swing bridge; re-signalling south of Chelmsford; and improvements to Liverpool Street station. Combined, those investments will increase capacity on the network and—importantly for rail users in my constituency—reduce delays. Through the new franchise to 2025, we will benefit from a new fleet of rolling stock, and the first of those trains are due to enter service very soon. We want to make sure that when they come in we do not have disruption and can get the benefits of efficiencies. Over £1 billion of new investment has been secured following the recommendations of the GEML taskforce, which were actioned by the Government. Of course, we want that infrastructure to complement new trains and maximise the benefits, as well as include those key infrastructure projects.

As the hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) has said, service improvements on the Great Eastern main line can be delivered through digital railway technology, along with the long-awaited development of Beaulieu Park railway station—Chelmsford parkway, as some call it—with three or four tracks and platforms to facilitate future growth in service opportunities. MPs, councils, businesses and commuters across the region are united behind that vision for rail service across the east of England, and I hope that the Minister and the Department will continue to work with us and back us, working with friends in the Treasury, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy and the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government to get that vision fully funded. It is about having an integrated approach across Government to delivering improvement in our rail service and our network, which matters when it comes to wider Government funding.

The Transport Committee's report comments on the investment process and the enhancement pipeline, which was announced last year and which the hon. Member for Nottingham South spoke about. When the Minister replies, I hope that he will talk about how those schemes can go through that pipeline so that we can be efficient in getting the right kinds of decisions.

I will touch on a few other points very quickly. One—this will also interest the hon. Member for Cambridge—is investing in rail more widely in the region that covers Stansted. Stansted is the third busiest airport by passenger numbers in the country, and the second largest by freight. It has capacity for more flights, and given the capacity issues at Heathrow, we should be encouraging more travel to other airports. Of course, connectivity through the rail link from Stansted to London and further is a major barrier to growth, and our former colleague, the right hon. Sir Alan Haselhurst—now Lord Haselhurst, following his ascension to the

other place—is working on proposals to improve connectivity through the West Anglia Taskforce. I commend his work on the issue. We often talk about Crossrail 2 presenting an opportunity for connectivity in that part of the eastern region, and I would like the Minister to provide any updates he can in his concluding remarks.

I thank the Chair of the Transport Committee for the opportunity to speak today off the back of the Committee's excellent report. I also praise the Minister for his attention to rail, obviously from an east of England point of view. I ask him to bring together all the levers of Government—not just those in his Department—to catalyse funding across other Government Departments in order to unlock economic growth and opportunity across the regions of our country, so that we can use our rail much more strategically. Rail investments have been a catalyst for economic growth.

2.17 pm

**Ruth Cadbury** (Brentford and Isleworth) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I am a new member of the Select Committee on Transport, and did not serve on that Committee while this inquiry was under way; nevertheless, it raises a number of points that I want to speak about. I am also pleased to have been able to join the Transport Committee, particularly under the chairmanship of my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood). I have found her to be supportive, enthusiastic and knowledgeable, and she has made me feel welcome in that Committee in the few weeks that I have been a member, as have the Committee's other members.

Many people in this country are dependent on rail services, and when there are problems, our constituents really tell us about them. Rail travel is essential for those who are unable to drive or do not own a car for whatever reason, and for people such as me who are dependent on rail for their commute to work and for whom there is no alternative, especially when car commuting would take much longer or be too costly. Since the advent of mobile technology, the train journey means more productive working time for those required to travel long distances, or even for me on my half-hour rail commute, than driving does. One can also use the journey as an opportunity to catch up on sleep—another option that is not available when one is driving. Then, there are tourists: UK and overseas residents letting the train take the strain. For all those people and many more, good train services really matter.

It is not just about the quality of services; it is about price. The real cost of rail travel continues to rise year on year. The real cost of driving has flatlined or even fallen, but UK commuters are paying about 17% of their average wage for their season ticket—by far the highest in Europe—and the cost of rail travel continues to rise.

Rail services that are reliable, convenient, fast over long distances, affordable, comfortable and safe benefit not only passengers but the places they link up, providing more business investment, more residents—particularly in areas of declining population—and, in many places, more tourist spend.

More people travelling by rail reduces the number of cars on the roads. That then reduces congestion and associated air pollution. Walking or cycling to a station

[Ruth Cadbury]

improves a person's health, and they may be more likely to spend money during that short journey than if they were driving their own private car. Rail improvement, and investment in rail, benefits people and places.

As a London MP, I concur with colleagues' anger at the disparity between transport infrastructure investment in London and in the other regions of the country. Why does that disparity exist? I accept that the way that the calculations are done exacerbates the inequality, but frankly that is a tool of a lack of policy. The disparity is a reaction to what always happens in mature economies when there is no effective regional economic policy: the inevitable growth of population and jobs in the largest city.

The main justification for investment in Crossrail, and the longer trains and platform extensions in other rail services in and around London, is that it is a reaction to population growth in and around London. Any economist will say that unless a country has an effective, long-term regional policy, there will be an increasing suck of investment and people towards the capital.

Against that, in some outlying areas in further regions—particularly, as a colleague said yesterday in Prime Minister's questions, in the north-east—there are some ex-colliery towns where houses are lying empty. An effective regional policy would address that imbalance, which disadvantages both types of area.

The lack of regional policy, and continuous sucking into London of people and investment without any rebalancing, means that in the capital housing is overcrowded and prices are exorbitant—way beyond our children's ability to rent, let alone buy their own homes. Of course, there is also overcrowding in our transport system.

**Graham Stringer:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as a London-based MP, for her support for a sane, sensible and fair regional policy. Does she agree that not only is the unfairness a factor, but that repeated investment in London to solve transport problems is counterproductive? Investment in transport has an economic effect: it creates more jobs, more people and more pressure on housing. Investing in that way is therefore effectively investing in future congestion.

**Ruth Cadbury:** I absolutely agree. That is the other side of the coin, and it can be addressed only by a proper, serious regional policy. Since 2010, the Government have moved far away from the regional policies that we had, completely decimating the regional economic development boards, and so forth.

The only nod to a regional policy that we have had in recent years is the northern powerhouse. I have heard again and again what a token gesture the northern powerhouse has been. Even the original promises have gradually been whittled away. We have nothing more than tokenism on regional policy in this country at the moment. As the Transport Committee Chair said in the report, regional transport authorities say that

"systems of scheme appraisal currently work against regions".

In a sense, the state is exacerbating the natural pressure that always occurs without any sort of state intervention.

Market-led proposals are inadequate to deliver new projects—we see that failure around Heathrow airport. The roads around Heathrow airport, and I do not just mean in west London, but across the Thames valley, Buckinghamshire, from Surrey almost to Hertfordshire, and in the whole sub-region surrounding Heathrow airport, have some of the worst traffic in the world. The roads are dangerously overcrowded, with levels of pollution that are illegal, because we increasingly recognise air pollution as a serious health hazard. It is an economic brake on not only businesses that service Heathrow airport but the wider west London and Thames valley region. Unnecessary congestion helps no one.

In 2001, the planning inspector for the Heathrow terminal 5 inquiry said that additional rail capacity was needed. Subsequently, in the run-up to the investigation into whether there was a justification for runway 3 at Heathrow, the national policy statement said that expansion would require 50% of passengers to use public transport by 2030, rising to 55% by 2040, and 25% fewer staff car trips to work by 2030, rising to 50% fewer by 2040.

The airport policy statement said that the Government expected Heathrow to meet its public pledge to have "no greater" airport-related road traffic. Of course, since then Heathrow airport has said that it wants to double its amount of cargo traffic, yet it has not provided any explanation. If that is not additional pressure on already dangerously overcrowded motorways down to local roads I do not know what is.

Heathrow airport has made it clear that it will not fund additional rail infrastructure, except for possibly a platform or something. Network Rail says:

"Existing connectivity to Heathrow Airport from the south is currently poor, with most people choosing to drive or get a taxi."

When we were dealing with the implications of a fifth terminal when I was on Hounslow Council we looked, with a range of economic organisations around Heathrow and local authorities, at a scheme to bring in rail from the south and south-west called Airtrack. Meanwhile, colleagues to the west of Heathrow, particularly in Reading, Slough and so on, were looking at a new western rail extension, with the support of the Department for Transport.

Certainly the link from the west was going well, and was a stage ahead of the southern rail access, but last year or the year before everything ground to a halt as the Department for Transport announced that it wanted to let the private sector lead. As the Transport Committee has said, that has just not delivered. We have had a six-month or a year's hiatus on the rail infrastructure that is needed in and around Heathrow, yet nothing is happening because the private sector—quite understandably—expects the Government to direct those new roads.

Now, the Government are not going to pay for it, and Heathrow is not going to pay for it. Who is, apart from the businesses and people who depend on a smooth-running road system—and the passengers, of course, who will miss their planes because they are stuck in traffic jams? Before the Minister says, "Oh, stop worrying—we are getting Crossrail and HS2 and so on," let me remind him that Crossrail and the improvements on the Piccadilly line are to deal with existing transport pressures and the existing population increase in west London and the Thames valley. In terms of runway 3, the modal shift of

Heathrow passengers on to existing and imminent transport methods will actually be very small. The Minister will know that if he has looked at the documents that were considered by the Transport Committee in its inquiry on the airports national policy statement. We are in a complete mess with rail investment in and around Heathrow, notwithstanding the fact that expansion at Heathrow—as, again, the Department for Transport's own reports say—actually damages other regions' connectivity with international destinations and their businesses and customers.

I want to move on briefly to my concern about the Department for Transport's interference in transport in London. As anybody knows, and as most other major competitive cities do, a very large conurbation needs to be able to link up public transport, walking and cycling under a single management. I think the Government recognise that. Several Mayors, including the Mayor of the Greater Manchester region and others, have said that there should be greater devolution and control over rail policy, and so has every Mayor of London. But in London, and London alone, the Transport Secretary has openly said that he would block devolution of rail policy purely because he did not want a Labour Mayor to have control over it. He implied that if there were another Conservative Mayor after the first Conservative Mayor of London, he might have considered handing over rail responsibilities, but he was not prepared to do so. That blocking of devolution was so shocking that even the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) said that the Transport Secretary was not fit to hold office. We have real concerns that where there are opportunities to use imaginative forms of additional investment in rail in London, that option is currently blocked to London and Londoners, and to London's economy and that of the wider area.

I have touched on regional policy and the particular situation in London and at Heathrow. In my view, transport policy, of which rail is a part, should be a servant, not a driver, of other policies. I may be going beyond the remit of the report today, but it strikes me that we cannot discuss regional imbalance in rail infrastructure, or whether the decision making is at a local or national level, or whether the cost falls on the private sector investor or the passenger, without addressing the overarching issue of Government investment in the transport infrastructure, and rail in particular.

Is the funding from Government for such an important driver of the national economy and the environment enough, or even comparable with other equivalent economies? I suspect it is not, and I definitely think it is not enough. Are passengers paying too much of the cost of running rail? I believe they are. An efficient, affordable, reliable rail service drives economic growth and regeneration, cuts carbon and pollution emissions and enhances the international image of a country.

2.34 pm

**Judith Cummins** (Bradford South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) on securing this debate through the Liaison Committee. I also congratulate her and the whole of the Transport Committee on the excellent report that we are considering today. I intend to focus my remarks on section 3 of that report, which concerns

regional disparities in rail investment and their effect on economic rebalancing. I will also touch on the section relating to the next rail investment control period.

It has been a bad year for our railways in many respects. Along with other hon. Members, I recently took part in a debate on rail services in Yorkshire. The unanimous conclusion of those who took part in that debate was that passengers had been badly let down in recent months. Of course, a large part of that disruption was due to the timetable change introduced last May, but I am also convinced that historic and continuing under-investment in our regional railway infrastructure is a major cause of passenger dissatisfaction.

The report makes it clear that regions outside London and the south-east have not received a fair share of rail investment for years. That is especially true across the north of England. There has been persistent, long-standing underfunding of transport infrastructure in our region, which figures from IPPR North repeatedly show. Over the past few years, London has seen a £326 per-person increase in public spending, while the north has seen an increase of less than half the size—of just £146. Transport spending per person remains approximately twice as high in London as in the north, as it has been for the past decade. There are also significant disparities within the north. Last year, the north-west saw an average increase of £158 per person in transport spending, and yet spending in Yorkshire and the Humber fell by £18 per person—more than any other region.

As the report shows, this historic unfairness is set to continue. Analysis of the infrastructure and construction pipeline shows a stark gap between London and the rest of the country. In future spending, £1,900 per person is planned in London from 2017 onwards, compared with £400 per person in the north. The Secretary of State has attempted to brush aside that analysis, but it is clear that significant disparities are set to continue unless decisive Government action is taken.

The report also correctly describes why this regional funding gap persists. The current transport scheme appraisal method used by the Department for Transport and the Treasury will always favour London, as it prioritises congestion reduction and journey-time savings. That approach actively disadvantages less economically buoyant regions, and it must change.

I cautiously welcome the Government's rebalancing toolkit, but it is nowhere near enough. It is also disappointing that the Government have not listened to calls to make the toolkit mandatory. Regional rebalancing must not be an optional extra, but should be at the heart of any transport investment decision making. For that to happen, the Government must commit to wholly revising the way that rail investment decisions are made. I urge the Minister to work with colleagues in the Treasury to revise the investment decision-making process so that places that have had a legacy of under-investment are treated more fairly in the future, which means putting economic regeneration and regional rebalancing front and centre.

As the Committees argue elsewhere in the report, past difficulties in delivering infrastructure projects must not discourage future investment. Areas that have seen a legacy of under-investment urgently need the projects to go ahead, so as we look to the next control period, the Government must make investing in regional rail infrastructure a priority.

[*Judith Cummins*]

I turn to Northern Powerhouse Rail. Bradford, like other towns and cities across the north, urgently needs that high-speed rail link to meet growing demand and to fulfil our economic potential, and investment in NPR should include a Bradford stop in the city centre, where the benefits will be felt by the greatest number of people. The Minister may recall from our conversation his supportive disposition to a Bradford stop on the NPR line. I must re-emphasise in the strongest possible terms the importance of that being a city centre station. The city of Bradford's rail connections already operate under the disjointed legacy of two stations; adding a third station outside the city centre risks repeating the mistakes of the past. To be plain, a parkway station for the NPR outside the city centre would deliver neither the connectivity nor the economic regeneration that the city needs. It would represent an enormous missed opportunity. Independent research indicates that a Bradford city centre station would cut journey times and increase capacity. More importantly, it would add £15.5 billion to the north's economy and generate an additional 15,000 full-time jobs across the Leeds city region.

NPR is the future we need, but more must be done right now to improve the punctuality and reliability of existing services and to banish outdated rolling stock. In West Yorkshire the public performance measure for rail operators, which combines figures for punctuality and reliability as a single measure, paints a depressing picture of almost universal decline in 2018-19, compared with the previous year. Performance on the Calder Valley line, which has a station stop in my constituency, was significantly worse than the year before. In some months, performance was almost 30% worse.

The train operator Northern recently admitted that it has not yet begun withdrawing the despised Pacer trains, which helps to illustrate the point further. As everybody knows, they are basically a 1980s bus body on rails. The firm blamed last year's delays on electrification work, which contributed to the timetable and service chaos in May 2018. That is simply not good enough for my constituents or for businesses based in my constituency of Bradford South.

The Transport Committee's report must be a wake-up call to the Government. We need action to rebalance our economy, boost our regions and give places such as Bradford the transport infrastructure that is fit for the next century.

2.41 pm

**Jim McMahon** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans. I congratulate the chair of the Transport Committee, my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood), on its detailed report and on the hard work that she puts into that brief. She is what we call in Greater Manchester a grafter—where I come from, there is no higher praise than that.

Transport is really important but does not act in isolation. There is an ecosystem that supports the society, community and local economy. It has been well trailed, but we have not seen any meaningful action on even beginning to address the regional imbalances in investment that have been well rehearsed in this place. It would be

good to hear from the Minister about the practical steps being taken to invest outside London and the south-east.

We are told by the Library that overall investment in transport in London over the past five years was £33.4 billion, taking 27.6% of total transport investment. In the north-west it was £11.1 billion, taking 9.2% of the total; in the north-east it was £3.3 billion, or 2.7% of the overall transport spend. Looking specifically at rail, the gap becomes even wider. London gets 42.8% of rail investment, the north-west 9.4% and the north-east just 2%. How can that be justified, even with the difference in population? Given that the regions outside London and the south-east are seriously disadvantaged by Government investment, are we surprised that they are not realising their full potential?

The Library briefing makes it clear that the figures for the north-west and the midlands are temporarily inflated due to some of the early work on HS2. Geographical work tied to a region has been included, but the wider cost of HS2 has been pulled out of the figures, so it appears that the north-west and the midlands receive more through that project than they actually do. London is getting about half of the transport spend. How can that be right or fair, and how can it deliver a balanced UK economy in which every community can thrive?

I know Members here today are aware that there is a world of difference between our big cities and their surrounding towns. There are even bigger differences between the towns and the villages and districts. When we look at the transport ecosystem, it is really important that we are not just discounting. London is a benchmark and we discount for the cities, towns and communities, which means that most people in this country are poorly served by a transport system that does not work in the way it ought to.

We are not calling for any more or less than our fair share. I do not mind if London continues to receive the money that it has received for generations. I am not resentful if the forward view means that that continues, but I demand the same for my community. If the money can be found for London, it ought to be found for the north-west region, too—no more, but certainly no less.

We have heard about the cancellation of the electrification project in July 2017, when it was described as no longer affordable. We have seen timetable cancellations: there were a staggering 470 cancellations every single day in the summer of 2018. The Office of Rail and Road's review concluded that that was partly due to the lack of clarity on who was responsible for what. There was mass confusion in the industry, and the Transport Secretary's response was simply, "Well, I don't run the trains." If we have a Transport Secretary who refuses to acknowledge his own role in running the trains in this country and to have political accountability for that, it is little wonder that the operators get away with what they are doing. There is just no accountability, which for my community means that Northern continues to provide a completely sub-standard service on a daily basis. It not only botched the introduction of the new timetable; but is in constant disputes with staff who are at their wits' end with the management and the way they are being treated.

The latest action is on whether carriages should have guards. People in Greater Manchester might think, "Well, even if there are no guards, we just hope there are

some carriages”, because 11% of train journeys are shorted, which means that they do not have enough carriages to meet the demand from commuters. Some 5,500 journeys did not have the capacity to meet passenger demand. What is the answer? In the north-west, we have been sent trains that even the Iranian Government have decided are not fit for purpose. We have been sent more Pacer trains—from the north-east to the north-west—to make up for the fact that we have passengers who wait on platforms, without enough carriages to service them, in order to get to work and get their children to school. How can that be right? The trains were built in the 1980s and were always intended to have a shelf-life of about 20 years. They were a pragmatic and affordable way to get new stock on the lines, but they were never intended to be on the lines nearly 30 years on. That just cannot be right.

Passengers face a 3.1% increase in fares—the largest increase over the past six years—while shareholders continue to profit from a sub-standard service. We know that the Conservatives do not believe in nationalisation. Well, they do—provided it is another nation that runs our trains. Deutsche Bank, which owns and operates the trains in the north-west of England and serves Greater Manchester, is not providing an adequate service; it is making profit from that contract. Where is the accountability? We have a Transport Secretary who says, “It’s nothing to do with me, gov.” We have an operator that is taking money and creaming off the top while services are not running on time. They do not run at all in some cases—when they do turn up, often it is not possible to get on because there are not enough carriages. If the operator gets its way, pretty soon there will be no guards on carriages, and people will not feel safe. The Mayor of Greater Manchester has made it very clear that that is just not on, and he would not be comfortable with that. The truth is that it is a very raw deal.

I will talk about the wider transport ecosystem. We need to bear in mind that it is not just rail that has been hit by poor service. When the Pacer trains were brought in for their 20-year life—nearly 30 years ago now—bus travel was commonplace. It still is, but there are now 140 million fewer bus journeys in Greater Manchester than there were 30 years ago. That is a 40% decline in bus use in Greater Manchester. Why? Because there are 40 operators in Greater Manchester—we are desperately trying to get franchising off the ground, but the Government are not providing the investment required to get through the legal process and produce the business case—all with different ticketing systems, and all deciding where they are willing to operate.

Oxford Road—the university corridor in Greater Manchester—is one of the busiest bus routes in Europe, and one of the cheapest. One of the most affluent parts of Greater Manchester—the south—is the cheapest place to catch a bus. In the north, which is generally the poorer part, the fares can be 40% higher. Often the poorer a person is—depending on where they live and where the operators choose to operate from—the more they pay just to get to work. That, by the way, is if there is a bus that goes where they need to go at the time when they need to get there. Shift workers in Greater Manchester might as well give up on the buses, because they cannot get to most big employment sites, such as Manchester airport or Trafford Park, to meet shift-work patterns.

The ecosystem has been completely torn apart. Operators pick and choose what they are willing to do, the taxpayer is desperately trying to plug the gap but it is nowhere near enough, and the number of bus journeys is falling. Year after year, we see subsidised routes taken away because the money does not stretch far enough, and the same is happening with rail.

It is a raw deal for taxpayers, passengers and, critically—this is really important when we are talking about a future Britain beyond Brexit—the future of our economy. After Brexit, the country will be hugely vulnerable to the danger of financial services and the insurance market deciding to relocate and basing themselves elsewhere in Europe. That will expose how lazy this country has been in addressing the underperformance in our regions. We have relied on the City of London to keep the UK economy going, and that has allowed us to ignore the hollowing out of the economies in the regions. Transport is a key part of that. We know that investment in transport leads to growth and jobs and creates a more vibrant economy. People live better lives and can access job opportunities that they might not have been able to access previously. We need more action and Government spending.

There are different views on HS2. I am a supporter, partly because it is investment in the north, so why would we not support it? However, the Chief Secretary to the Treasury is already issuing calls for a zero-sum review of capital spend projects such as HS2. I put this down as a marker: the Government may believe that, because it is not in London or the south-east, it is an easy target to be deleted, but we are watching it very carefully. It is critical that we ensure that the UK can perform to its full potential. The routes and investment beyond HS2 to ensure that the north of England is connected are absolutely critical, too.

**Lilian Greenwood:** I wholeheartedly endorse my hon. Friend’s concerns about future investment in HS2. There are good reasons to be concerned. When the transpennine route upgrade was firmly committed to in 2015, the DFT promised that, when the work was finished, the whole route from Liverpool to Newcastle, via Manchester, Leeds and York, would be fully electrified. The recent letter from Transport for the North’s chief executive board members reported that the DFT’s plans leave a crucial part of that route unelectrified—a gap of 18 miles in the 183-mile route. Does my hon. Friend agree that the failure to electrify that 10% will mean worse reliability and higher operating costs in the north for years to come?

**Jim McMahon:** I generally think that, with these types of capital project, once the decision to invest is made, the investment has to be seen through, because the full potential of the investment is only realised when it is done to the quality, standard and specification that was set out originally. When things are chipped away towards the end of a project, it is inevitable that the full advantage and economic return on the investment will not be realised, and the original investment will be compromised.

It is critical that the Government take a long-term view. There is far too much short-termism. They are looking to the next election, the next target seat and where their core vote is, rather than to what the structure

[*Jim McMahon*]

of our economy will be in the next 10, 20 or 30 years. Greater Manchester is trying to look ahead with its 2040 strategy, but it is very difficult to do that if it does not know what funding is coming down the pipeline. We can decide what is important for our regions, but the way the Government invest makes it very difficult for our regions to plan ahead and ensure they have a joined-up transport strategy. It also makes it very difficult for UK manufacturers and engineering companies to bid for that work and plan ahead, because they do not have a forward programme that they can organise and work towards. I speak to many manufacturers in my constituency. In Oldham, they have contracts with Transport for London and the German Government, but they say consistently that it is very difficult to get a contract with the UK Government. Part of the reason why the Elizabeth Tower is shrouded in steel from all over the world, apart from Britain, is that it is easier for other countries to get contracts from our Government.

**Priti Patel:** The hon. Gentleman is making a very strong case for investment and economic growth in the regions. I agree completely that this is about long-termism. The Minister obviously heard my comments earlier. Part of the reason why the Great Eastern main line taskforce has been pretty robust in our representations is that we have been working with businesses and local enterprise partnerships. We are giving businesses the opportunity to put the long-term case to the Government. Does the hon. Gentleman feel that other regions should replicate that?

**Jim McMahon:** I agree with that approach. It is important that we have an economic view and can demonstrate the wider economic advantage and growth. Transport for the North is working to that end, and has built very good partnerships. It generally has a good relationship with the Government, although there are constant demands for the Government to plan further ahead and be more committed to finding resources. That partnership approach is extremely important.

This has been a good debate. I welcome the Select Committee's report, because it is important that we shine a light on these issues. As a north-west MP, I thank the Committee members for this piece of work. MPs outside London will, for a period, continue to ask politely for our fair share. We have been doing that for quite a long time now, but the noise will get louder. If the Government are determined to look beyond Brexit and build a Britain that can thrive, they will have to put their hand in their pocket and ensure that every region in the UK gets its fair share.

2.57 pm

**Ronnie Cowan** (Inverclyde) (SNP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Evans, and to sum up the debate on behalf of the Scottish National party. At a momentous political time, such as we have experienced this week, it is easy to forget about the many Government portfolios that require attention and scrutiny. Brexit may be dominating the headlines and the levers of government, but it should not be used as an excuse to sweep all other policy issues under the rug. It has therefore been helpful to hear hon. Members' contributions, which I shall refer to throughout my speech.

A common theme in this debate, the Transport Committee's report and wider political reporting is a clear concern about the Department for Transport's handling of the rail network. The report highlights concerns about the boom and bust investment cycles, and the failure to give the industry sufficient confidence to invest in its workforce, skills and innovation. Other evidence gathered by the Committee cast doubt on the Rail Minister's understanding of how and where emerging technology, such as battery-powered trains, is being developed. Perhaps it is forgivable for a Minister not to have a comprehensive understanding of absolutely everything covered by their Department, but it will not reassure those asking serious questions of the Department for Transport and Network Rail.

[*ANDREW ROSINDELL in the Chair*]

Certainly, the headlines will not comfort the UK Government. With news outlets talking about meltdown, appalling services and chaos, it is clear that the rail network in England is failing at the most fundamental level. Of particular interest to me—this was mentioned throughout the debate—is the disparity in transport expenditure across the UK. Unsurprisingly, the Committee's report noted that there is a massive disparity between rail investment in London and other parts of England. Although we should consider the difficulties in accurately breaking down regional funding, we cannot ignore the problematic London-centric nature of funding in the UK. Figures from the House of Commons Library show that railway spending per capita in England was up to 10 times higher in London than in other English regions. If I were a resident of the east midlands or of Yorkshire, I would ask serious questions about the levels of funding in my area.

Transport bodies in London and the UK Government will attempt to rationalise—or even justify—those disparities, but the Department for Transport's introduction of a rebalancing toolkit is a clear acknowledgment of the problem. Thankfully, in Scotland we have the Scottish Government to act in our interests. It will come as no surprise that SNP MPs support the Scottish Government's call for Network Rail to be fully devolved. Research commissioned by Abellio in 2018 found that just 30% of people support the current arrangement, with a majority supporting the full devolution of Network Rail. I also welcome the proposals from Reform Scotland and the former Labour Transport Minister, Tom Harris, for Network Rail to be fully accountable to the Scottish Government. That is a common-sense approach.

I would argue that it is completely logical to devolve those powers fully, given the Scottish Government's existing transport responsibilities. That case has been repeatedly made to the UK Government and has been repeatedly ignored. Indeed, the Secretary of State for Transport said on record that he does not believe that “the Scottish Government are capable of overseeing it properly.”—[*Official Report*, 16 May 2018; Vol. 641, c. 291.]

That is certainly a bold claim in the light of his Department's well-documented failings.

Passengers can become frustrated when their rail service does not operate as expected. In Scotland, people often become angry at ScotRail and the Scottish Government for problems that arise from Network Rail's infrastructure—a UK Government responsibility—

and given the tangle of responsibilities between devolved and reserved matters, that is an understandable confusion. The devolution of Network Rail's activities in Scotland would therefore improve accountability and allow the Scottish Government to build on the action that has already been taken to improve services.

There has been significant Scottish Government investment in the ScotRail franchise for the benefit of rail users. There will be a 23% increase in seating capacity and more than 200 new services across Scotland by the end of 2019. The Scottish Government will continue to invest £1 billion in public transport every year. According to the latest figures, that support means ScotRail's performance measure has been higher than the UK average. Importantly, the Scottish Government will use powers from the Scotland Act 2016 to allow a public sector bid for all franchises in Scotland. The facilitation of such bids ensures that the Scottish National party will deliver what was promised: a robust public sector bid for the ScotRail franchise.

In closing, I believe that the Transport Committee's report should form part of a wider review of the rail network, and the SNP welcomes the long overdue acceptance by the UK Government that a review is necessary. The Department for Transport must commit to implementing any future recommendations. I hope that the Minister can assure me that the UK Government are serious about their decentralisation agenda. If they are, I would be grateful to him if he outlined what discussions he plans to have with his Scottish Government counterpart, particularly in the light of polling that shows widespread support for the devolution of Network Rail.

3.3 pm

**Rachael Maskell** (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): The debate has been excellent. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) and to all members of the Select Committee for the excellent work done to pull the report together. We all really value the detail that the report brings to the fore. I certainly concur with all that my hon. Friend and other hon. Members have said about how important it is to get our infrastructure right and for the governance of our rail structure to be in the right place.

Clearly, there are lots of question marks over the current system, and that was really brought to the fore as a result of control period 5, where costs ran away with themselves and we saw the rescheduling of work. In fact, £3 billion-worth of renewals—let alone enhancement programmes—will be pushed into the next control period. We clearly need better governance of our system.

As hon. Members will recall, it was most astounding when the Government cancelled crucial electrification programmes as Parliament rose for the summer recess of 2017. The Oxenholme to Windermere line subsequently had a heritage railway running on it that summer just so trains could travel to the Lake district at the peak of the season—a vital part of the tourism industry. The Kettering to Sheffield stretch—the midland main line—was subject to a de-electrification announcement. Other programmes were cancelled, such as the Cardiff to Swansea line—it is absolutely vital to Swansea's economy that power is put into those lines—and, of course, we have heard

much about the transpennine route, which has been further downgraded since, meaning a downgrade of a downgrade. The crucial part of that line, between Huddersfield and Stalybridge, will not see electrification. The route will therefore not be fit for future freight, which is vital; journey times will be compromised; and reliability will be downgraded. That is crucial, especially in the light of the pain people experienced last summer on those lines. I urge the Minister to complete the whole transpennine upgrade and control period 6 programme, as has been advised by Transport for the North. That will be a game-changer for the northern economy.

The only thing that has been guaranteed is more capacity in the rolling stock, but of course, with dirty diesel bi-mode trains. It is time that we moved to using cleaner forms of transport. The Transport Committee certainly drew out the importance of that, and of the whole electrification programme and the digital rail opportunities that it would bring, which my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) also highlighted.

We have seen the reality of where lumpy, boom-and-bust scheduling leads: additional costs to the rail industry. Skills and jobs have been lost as a result of those peaks and troughs in the way that rail work has been scheduled. The Railway Industry Association highlighted in particular that a 30% saving could be made if costs and the scheduling of work were smooth. That benefits passengers with regard to the price that they pay for travel, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) brought to our attention. It is absolutely crucial, therefore, that lessons are learned and that there is a smoothing of scheduling as we move into control period 6. Our proposals for the railway would see a longer-term smoothing of scheduled work, which would fit in with the growth of the economy—as so many hon. Members have highlighted, our transport system interweaves with future economic opportunity.

We have heard about the inequality and the regional disparity across our network. If we are serious about communities outside London—the further north we head, the less spending there seems to be on our railway, which is reflected by the number of people who are able to use it—it is absolutely crucial that we get the rebalancing toolkit right, and that we ensure that it is mandatory and fully utilised, to the advantage of all communities across our country. The northern powerhouse and the links between Leeds, Manchester and Sheffield present a real opportunity to boost the economy of the north, and everything that will swing from that would be such an improvement of people's lives and social mobility, which is why we want proper rebalancing as we move forward. Hon. Members have drawn attention to that, not least my hon. Friend the Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) in his powerful contribution.

As we bring the programmes together, we need to ensure that we bring track and train together and move the silos of discussions into one integrated place, because not doing that and the changing of mind on programmes led to the catastrophic failure in the timetable that so many passengers faced in the summer. We have read the Glaister report on the impact of what happened, but we must learn lessons, and attitudes at the heart of Government must change. There must be greater accountability and the Secretary of State must take full responsibility as we move forward to enhance our railway system.

[*Rachael Maskell*]

I want to draw out one or two other points in the Select Committee report that are crucial as we look to the future of rail. First, we must ensure that we prioritise cleaner technologies in our rail enhancement programmes. We have real opportunities, but we are falling behind other nations. We must ensure that we put the environmental impact of our transport system at the heart of decision making. Transport accounts for 29% of carbon use in our country, so it will be the game-changer as we move towards ensuring a reduction in emissions. It is absolutely imperative that we have carbon budgeting across our transport system. That issue was raised in the report, but the Government response was dismissive, so it is crucial that we continue to press the issue.

Secondly, I am deeply concerned about the skills needed to deliver all that is contained within this excellent report. I ask the Chair of the Select Committee and the Minister to reflect on skills. Not only with Brexit, but with an ageing demographic across the rail industry workforce, we face real issues and challenges: we are on a cliff-edge of skills. I ask the Minister exactly what is being done to ensure that we have the opportunity to expand our railway, as we know we must.

We have heard this afternoon from hon. Members from across the regions. The opportunities for our railways are there to be grasped, whether it is putting in the full Crossrail programme for the north, or investment in the eastern region, as the right hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel) highlighted, or making greater transport connections into Heathrow, or, although not represented today, implementing the peninsula programme in the south-west. We must ensure good connectivity, which is absolutely vital, and sustained investment work all joined together.

I think these are really exciting times for the future of rail, as we move forward. Certainly I look forward—it may be very soon—to my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough (Andy McDonald) becoming the next Secretary of State for Transport. We have spent so much time with the industry. We have done the work. We do know what is needed. We will radically change the way that our rail system operates, for the benefit of all those who use it.

I thank the Transport Committee once more for its work and its ongoing focus in holding the Government to account over the way that rail is advanced in our country. Governance is absolutely crucial if we are to ensure that we have value for money, deliver for passengers and ultimately have a system that makes our economy strong yet again.

3.13 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport**

**(Andrew Jones):** It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Rosindell. I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Nottingham South (Lilian Greenwood) for her work as Chair of the Transport Committee and for her work in producing this report. I also thank her and other members of the Committee for the broader work that they do. I look forward to working with all of them over the months ahead.

I echo the words the hon. Lady started with on the importance of the rail industry to the UK economy. The Government fully recognise the importance of our nation's infrastructure, and at its heart is our rail network.

That is why we are investing record levels of rail funding—around £48 billion in the next control period between 2019 and 2024—in modernising our railway and giving passengers the reliable and punctual services they deserve. Our investment in vital railway works is aimed at what will improve performance for passengers and ensure safety and reliability. The operation, maintenance and renewal of the railway will help ensure smooth operation of the network. Our investment across the country, such as the £2.9 billion transpennine route upgrade, which I will talk about later; the ambitious works at Derby to modernise and improve the points and track there, completed on schedule in October; and the wider commitments, including dedicated funding for further improvements for freight and accessibility in the next investment period—all demonstrate how we are meeting the needs of passengers and freight users on our network.

The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth (Ruth Cadbury) mentioned fares. I am happy to point out that we are in the sixth year of capping regulated fare rises in line with inflation, and we are introducing new railcards so that anyone up to the age of 30 will have access to discounted rail fares. Our franchises support the introduction of record levels of private investment in the railway, including brand-new trains across the network.

The Labour party talks regularly about how the benefits of nationalisation will be cost-free, but the benefits of privatisation have brought investment, and nothing is more obvious than the arrival of the new rolling stock. We will see 7,000 new carriages enter service on our network over the next couple of years. The hon. Member for Oldham West and Royton (Jim McMahon) mentioned Pacer trains, and they will go this year as part of the renewal of rolling stock. It is worth pointing out that the rail franchise that dominated the north, including his and my area, was let in 2004 and expired only in 2016, and it was a no-growth franchise.

**Rachael Maskell:** Will the Minister give way?

**Andrew Jones:** Let me make a little more progress and then I will give way.

**Rachael Maskell:** It is important.

**Andrew Jones:** All right. I am always generous in giving way.

**Rachael Maskell:** Yes, I will grant the Minister that. Does he not recognise that the private sector is not investing in rolling stock? It leases the rolling stock off companies and so the amount paid has a massive premium—about a third more, as found out by Merseyrail, which has now purchased its own rolling stock.

**Andrew Jones:** How individual operating companies wish to own and run their rolling stock is up to them, but the point is that private investment and the private sector, whether it pays for a lease or for ownership, is delivering, and the public sector did not, which is why we have the long-standing Pacer trains on our network. The no-growth franchise was a significant feature. I am sure that those who let that now think that that was a mistake, because of course we have had significant growth in the north and we are playing catch-up.

It is fair to say that we had a difficult year on our rail network in 2018, as many colleagues here have said. We all know that performance declined, never more so than

around the introduction of the timetable in May. But it is also fair to say that we have seen a doubling of passengers across our rail network over the past 20 or so years, which shows it is a ringing success, demonstrating the success of the public and private sectors working together to deliver significant and sustained improvement.

**Jim McMahon:** I accept that passenger numbers have increased, but the truth is that the summer delays and the autumn cancellations were not a surprise. The timetabling was agreed by Northern. It designed it, crafted it and failed to implement it properly. The delays in the autumn were down to autumnal weather, which obviously takes everybody by surprise. It is not as though it happens every year when leaves come off the trees and fall on tracks. The basic management is poor, and surely not fit for purpose.

**Andrew Jones:** We have had autumn leaves falling since time began, and whichever rail company has been operating—including nationalised ones—they have found them quite difficult to manage. To suggest that it is suddenly a bigger problem is a mistake.

**Priti Patel:** The Minister is incredibly generous in giving way, and I thank him. Delays are the scourge of commuters on the country's train network, and of course they all get upset when trains are cancelled or delayed. Is there more the Minister can do to hold franchisee companies to account, with respect to how they communicate with customers and give compensation to rail users?

**Andrew Jones:** My right hon. Friend makes a powerful point. She gave a powerful speech, which recognised how transport investment, alongside other investments, can drive an economy. The work that she and colleagues have done on producing a business case has been highly effective. She asked whether I would work with her and of course I will, as I will work with all colleagues, to maximise the benefits of the rail investment we are putting in. As to communication, rail companies can do more. We should be looking at all digital and other means of communicating with customers to keep them informed. There are mechanisms through the franchise agreement for keeping the companies accountable. However, I also regularly meet the Rail Delivery Group, and through those and other regular meetings, with individual operating companies, I have already highlighted the issue of communication with their customers. I will continue to do so, but my right hon. Friend is right that there must be improvement on that.

I was saying a few things about how our network has played a role in the increasing economic growth of the past few years, and how that combination of the public and private sectors, working together, has delivered improvement. That includes private sector skills driving investment for passengers and rail freight. However, that success has also resulted in challenges. We have been open about facing such challenges, including in our programme of infrastructure works in the current investment period, and in the rail structures we inherited. That was very clear and it is why we have taken action and changed our approach. The work of the Select Committee has been very helpful in that respect.

In March 2018 we published our new approach to rail enhancements, called the “Rail Network Enhancements Pipeline: A New Approach for Rail Enhancements”. We have a knack of creating very difficult-to-say acronyms. In September the Secretary of State announced that he had appointed Keith Williams, a respected industry figure. He has expertise in driving customer service excellence, and therefore he is incredibly valuable as we seek to reform the rail industry to become more passenger-focused, and to lead a root and branch review of the railway. The Government's new approach to enhancements has, as Members will be aware, been a key focus for the Transport Committee. The Williams review is a really exciting moment for our industry. The structures that we have had have helped to turn around decades of decline. We have gone from many years of decline to rapid growth. As many people now use the rail network as did in the 1920s—with all the challenges that come with that, which I shall come on to. The structure has helped to achieve the growth, but it is not clear to me that it will help us take things forward for the next stage. That is what Mr Williams has been asked to consider, and it is an interesting prospect.

The approach being taken learns lessons from CP5, responding to the recommendations of the Bowe review. It is quite profound. We are replacing a once-in-five-years plan with a rolling pipeline of investment, which was a key recommendation of the Committee. I can entirely see why both the review and the Committee made that recommendation. We will be able to respond flexibly to changes in circumstances, and emerging priorities. Unlike in CP5 where certainty—I know we have talked about it—often turned out to be frankly illusory, the supply chain can be confident that once we have made a decision we will stick to it. Those concerned will know exactly how far the commitment extends, for funding and delivery. I completely agree with the principle of transparency to help people plan accordingly. We shall be transparent about the progress of individual schemes as they move through the pipeline, and throughout the control period, but the point is that we are not simply making one announcement at the start of a cycle.

The RNEP has five stages, through which enhancement schemes move from concept to delivery, with increasing levels of detail and development required at each stage. We call them “determine”, “develop”, “design”, “deliver” and “deploy”. A theme runs through them, from “determine”, where the opportunity is identified, to “deliver”, where the solution is provided. Not all projects will progress through all the stages. Each stage is preceded by a decision point, where we will decide whether the scheme is ready to advance to the next stage, whether more work is needed, or whether there is a better way of achieving things. We commit to progress only to the next stage—not all the way to completion.

**Lilian Greenwood:** I completely understand the point that just because something enters the enhancements pipeline that does not mean it will reach the end. That depends on its progressing through the gateways. However, I should be grateful if the Minister set out clearly which parts of the enhancements pipeline will be transparent to the House and the wider industry. Will we know what things are in all the stages, or will we know only about the latter stages, once something has been committed to delivery? It would help us if we could be clear on that point.

**Andrew Jones:** My intention is that we should be as transparent as we can without giving a running commentary on schemes that also present challenges in the managing of expectation. I intend to be transparent about progress as they move through the pipeline—in the phrase I just used—and that suggests each stage of the process.

**Lilian Greenwood:** So is the Minister saying that when something moves from one stage of the pipeline to another, there will be an announcement to let us know?

**Andrew Jones:** Yes, exactly. What form it will take I do not know, but as schemes progress through, from “determine” to “develop” and so on, we will be transparent about it.

The objective is to secure value for the taxpayer by progressing schemes only when we have an appropriate understanding of how much they will cost, how long they will take, and the benefits that will be delivered. That is in great contrast to CP5, where that did not happen.

**Priti Patel:** As the Minister will know, the Great Eastern main line taskforce is currently working to that very pipeline, for the next business case. Funding will be incredibly important for any project that enters the pipeline. I want to ask the Minister something on which I have previously pressed the Secretary of State. Will there be an opportunity to look at cross-Government funding that covers, for example, money from other budgets, such as local government and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy? As the Minister knows, the GEML case made in 2014, which will be made again, looked across at the economic benefits of rail investment, and considered economic growth, too. That effectively means that we must look at new funding mechanisms that go across the Treasury, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government, the Department for Transport and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, so that we bring the economic benefits that many colleagues have spoken about in the debate.

**Andrew Jones:** My right hon. Friend is as wise as ever. Once a Treasury Minister, always a Treasury Minister, I suspect. The point about bringing things together was, I think, at the heart of such things as the national productivity investment fund, which is about making sure we have, and control, the levers to drive economic productivity—productivity being at the heart of the UK’s future economic success. I see rail working alongside Departments to open up opportunity—commercial, residential, trade and so on. I see that future of collaboration as the way we will take forward some of our projects across the network.

**Daniel Zeichner:** In the interests of transparency, I am trying to understand the pipeline process. The Minister knows of the huge frustration in my region about the delays with the Ely junction. How do we find out where in the pipeline such a project stands now?

**Andrew Jones:** One simple way, of course, is to ask the Minister concerned. I will find out exactly where we are with the Ely junction and respond to the hon. Gentleman. Significant works are planned around Ely,

but there are a number of junctions around Ely—I have reviewed a map of them in the past few weeks—and I will need to remind myself specifically which one that might be.

Let me go back to the changes to CP6 from CP5, which create a direct contrast. I think it is fair to say that in CP5 we overcommitted to projects at too early a stage, meaning that later we had to change the scope or cancel altogether, increasing the uncertainty and the impact on the industry’s ability to plan for investment and delivery. The RNEP sets out the Secretary of State’s four priorities for rail enhancements across the country, and we will not progress any enhancement that cannot clearly demonstrate how it meets at least one of them. It is important that those priorities remain applicable to the whole country so that the network can be improved fairly and as a whole.

I welcome the fact that the Transport Committee’s report shared a similar approach to our own in promoting engagement with third-party proposals for rail schemes. On 20 March last year the Department published its guidance for market-led proposals and launched a call for ideas for the same. That call for ideas ran between 31 May and 31 July last year. We received 30 responses. DFT officials have assessed all of them and will now work with promoters to move their schemes forward, although I stress that they will still be market-led. We will be transparent about schemes as and when they progress into the pipeline.

The question was whether this has stalled. No, it has not. We certainly want to see new entrants into the market and ideas being brought forward. I am absolutely clear that not all ideas to drive forward our network will come from SW1—that would be silly.

**Lilian Greenwood:** I thank the Minister for confirming that 30 proposals were received by the Department. I know that he does not want to raise expectations or to give us too much information, but will he at least confirm how many of the proposals are being progressed? Of those 30, how many are the Department taking forward? When might we expect to hear more about which those are, and where in the country they might relate to?

**Andrew Jones:** I cannot remember off the top of my head. I looked at the schemes but cannot remember the answer. I will have to write to the hon. Lady with the details.

We spent a bit of time discussing electrification. The hon. Lady expressed some concern and asked whether we had ruled out electrification. Clearly the answer is no. Our railway infrastructure investment in CP6, however, is about securing positive outcomes, not necessarily specific outputs or inputs. We want to secure benefits for rail users and to do so in the best way possible, rather than simply building more railway for its own sake. Passengers expect high-quality rail services, and we are committed to electrification where it will deliver passenger benefits and value for money.

We will also take advantage of state-of-the-art new technology to improve journeys. The hon. Member for Cambridge (Daniel Zeichner) talked about digital rail. Certainly, technology has a role to play. It is one of the exciting opportunities in the sector. We are already progressing a number of digital rail schemes, using the

£450 million secured under the autumn statement 2016 to begin the roll-out of that vital technology. I agree with his points.

Our new approach is designed to provide the maximum possible certainty of investment and a sustainable pipeline for the supply chain. That will provide benefits balanced for the whole country. I met the Railway Industry Association and understand entirely its point about how unwelcome “boom and bust” is. One former Chancellor and Prime Minister talked about putting an end to boom and bust—I am not sure that he would use that phrase again—so I will be cautious in my language and instead say that we will smooth the pipeline of work so that the industry can plan appropriately—skill up and scale up.

However, I suggest that the industry should look at a £48 billion budget pipeline over the next five years and think, “Fantastic!” This Government are buying rail like no other Government in British history. We live in a bumper time for our railways, in terms of rolling stock investment, enhancements, new lines and maintenance. I would imagine—this is what we see—that a lot of people look at this and think, “I want to get some of the great work being done by the UK Government.”

Another aspect of technology to promote is how it can deliver outcomes. That includes the introduction of new bi-modal trains, which reduce disruption to passengers resulting from heavy infrastructure works. The new bi-modal trains are being delivered into service with Great Western, LNER and TransPennine, bringing modern traction technologies on to Britain’s railways.

We continue to promote the use of new technology across rail. Recent franchise competitions have included requirements for bidders to develop innovative solutions around rolling stock technology that will, among other things, reduce emissions on the network. I am keen to take forward the decarbonisation agenda, which the hon. Member for Nottingham South mentioned, and it remains an absolute priority. I will work with the industry and will publish that report—it cannot happen soon enough. I am talking about publication of the decarbonisation report and about working with different types of traction, such as hydrogen-powered trains, which I have read about. I look at the opportunities that they present to improve air quality radically, and I think, “We want some of that in the UK.” It will certainly be a priority.

**Lilian Greenwood:** The Minister is being characteristically generous in taking interventions. I welcome the news that the decarbonisation report will be published. Will he clarify whether he has received that report from Malcolm Brown, the former CEO of Angel Trains? Will the Minister tell us a little about what is in it, or when he will share that information with us?

**Andrew Jones:** We have received a further draft within the past few days. It is not the absolutely final version of the report, but I understand that we are very near it. I hope to read it, but I think that I should read it when it is finished, rather than in draft form—to be fair to Mr Brown. As soon as we have more information, I will keep the hon. Lady posted.

Regional spend has been a concern in this debate and more broadly. The hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana Johnson) kindly said that I was definitely listening—to confirm, I am definitely listening,

and definitely Yorkshire. The Government are clear that there should be a balance of rail investment across the whole network, to the benefit of the whole country. The Government and the Select Committee alike agree that capital spending in one part of the network can deliver benefits further afield.

I must stress, however, that the Department for Transport does not allocate funding on the basis of per head of population. Our railway is a network, with spending in a particular area benefiting users up and down the country.

**Jim McMahon:** Does the Minister agree that part of the problem with how schemes are assessed is that heavy consideration is given to economic return or gross value added? A mile of track in London will therefore always deliver more economic return than a mile of track in Manchester, Wales, Scotland or anywhere else, simply because of that economic assessment. Surely, to rebalance the UK, there has to be a levelling up in addition to that economic criterion.

**Andrew Jones:** I understand the hon. Gentleman’s point, and if that were the only consideration I can see how it could lead to inappropriate decisions, but that is not entirely the case. For example, the transpennine rail upgrade, which will be the biggest enhancement on our network over the next five years, would simply not be happening if we accepted his point. But I understand where he is coming from: we have to balance not only economic return and national efficiency, but the possible role in rebalancing our national geography. The lack of investment in some parts could easily be seen as a factor in economic performance.

Our decisions follow a rigorous and fair appraisal process that ensures spending goes to the projects and programmes where it is needed, delivering value for money for taxpayers and passengers. Sometimes that means that spending appears higher in some areas than in others. We cited various figures, but the numbers quoted are frequently from the IPPR. I have some reservations about the IPPR reporting, because it simply adds up future spending regardless of how far it extends. For example, its analysis includes 16 years of planned expenditure on HS2, where the most costly sections—because of land prices—are in London, but only five years of planned spending on maintenance for the other parts of our network. It includes locally funded spending by TfL, but not local, equivalently funded spending in other cities, which will result in a poor sample.

We look at data in a number of different ways. Investment in Birmingham, for example, could benefit users in Penzance, Edinburgh—anywhere across our network—and, of course, the west midlands. We look at two measures: where the investment is made and where the benefits will be felt. The numbers quoted so far on where spending is taking place largely have not taken into account where benefits are felt. However, spending figures going forward, as shown by the national infrastructure and construction pipeline, show that the Government expect to spend £248 per person in the north, compared with £236 in the south. There is an element of the phasing of schemes driving the individual spend in an area.

The rebalancing toolkit has been considered, which we have developed to support authors of strategic cases to assess how a programme or project fits with the

[Andrew Jones]

objective of spreading growth around the country. I was asked whether it is being used. It is being used in the development of the transpennine rail upgrades and the Northern Powerhouse Rail business cases. The rebalancing toolkit is designed to help with the basic planning. It includes a checklist of questions to consider and potential evidence that can be used to help describe the rebalancing case for a project or programme in its strategic case. It is an ingredient. Does it need to be used in every single case? Given the amount of money we spend and the amount of time it takes us to plan our projects, I do not think it should be mandatory everywhere, but certainly it is an ingredient in making the right decisions. The toolkit's objective is to make decision making more consistent by improving the focus, quality and transparency of the rebalancing evidence in the business case.

Let me answer some questions asked by colleagues. The transpennine rail upgrade offers the fantastic prospect of the north being the centrepiece of the next spending period. It is a £2.9 billion first phase of a scheme. Electrification will be a part of the proposals. It is phased to deliver the best benefits to passengers over the period. Freight will most certainly be considered; that is why we are also taking forward options for the development of the Skipton to Colne reconnection. It should be viewed as a phased activity.

The advice we have received from Network Rail is that if we spend any more money on that network during this period, with the amount of interventions required to deliver the schemes we will bring the northern rail network to a halt for just about every weekend over the next five years. We have taken the view that it would be an unacceptable price to pay, which would have a huge detrimental economic impact. We have listened to the industry experts and that is the advice they are giving us, so we are delivering this major project in phases. The criteria are about delivering the best benefits to passengers early, but our ambitions are not reduced at all.

**Ruth Cadbury:** Is it about merely measuring the benefit for the passengers? Are any other wider impacts assessed and measured, such as the impact on the environment and local areas, particularly where there are regeneration and economic development aspirations?

**Andrew Jones:** The wider considerations are taken into account. This is part of a broader plan. As the business case is created, it looks at economic benefits and environmental benefits. It is a wider case.

The hon. Member for Brentford and Isleworth asked about devolution. It is being considered as part of the Williams review, but the principle of devolution is a sound one. The suggestion that the Secretary of State is not supportive of Crossrail and the London Mayor is not correct. For example, TfL has run into some financial difficulties over the Crossrail cost overruns. We are helping it with a £2.1 billion credit facility, which it will pay back—it is a loan, not a grant. That is an important indication of how we are supportive of Crossrail and the London Mayor.

**Rachael Maskell:** I would like to return to the transpennine route. From meetings with officials, my understanding is that the challenge is not in the tunnel

but across three bridges. For that reason, the electrification programme has not been advanced between Huddersfield and Stalybridge, which is the real game-changer. The challenge is also to make the necessary upgrades to accommodate future freight. Will the Minister assess the advice from Transport for the North to ensure that the proper full upgrade is brought to the line? It would have a significant impact on reliability and will drive efficiencies in the system.

**Andrew Jones:** I am very keen for that line to be upgraded and will ensure that all the opportunities to progress it are considered. I want to make it absolutely clear that there is no loss of ambition, but at the same time we must be very careful when industry experts tell us that if we do any more we will bring the network to a halt for just about every weekend in five years. That is the advice from senior levels in Network Rail. On getting on with it, that cannot happen soon enough as far as I am concerned.

**Lilian Greenwood:** We still have 42 minutes left, but I do not anticipate that we will take that long. On the transpennine electrification, I accept the Minister's point that we do not want excessive disruption, but will he accept that it is better to do the right thing, which will lead to cost-effective operations, environmental benefits and reliability benefits in the longer term, even if that sometimes means that delivery of the scheme will take longer? Will he commit to talk to Rail North about how the maximum benefits can be achieved in the long term, rather than a short-term approach that could bake in disbenefits over a very long period?

**Andrew Jones:** I will continue to talk with all the different bodies across the north to maximise the benefits. We are not taking a short-term approach; a short-term approach would be to get on and do it right away. We are taking the approach to deliver it in phases to maximise the benefits. At each stage we are also future-proofing it. That principle is already being implemented.

The hon. Member for Bradford South (Judith Cummins) talked about Northern Powerhouse Rail. I am also very keen for Bradford to be well served by that. Indeed, Transport for the North is developing the proposals for Northern Powerhouse Rail. That is great—it will be from the north, for the north. I went to Transport for the North's last board meeting, at which I was going to receive the strategic outline business case. Transport for the North had to pull that business case at the last moment, but I will go up to its next board meeting; I do not criticise it in the slightest for that. The hon. Member for Nottingham South just mentioned the principle of getting things right for the longer term, and in pulling the business case, Transport for the North was making sure that it does that.

Northern Powerhouse Rail is a very exciting project. The only point I made when I said I would come back for the next board meeting was that I wanted Transport for the North to get on with the project promptly. Northern Powerhouse Rail and HS2 are linked in lots of ways, and any delays to Northern Powerhouse Rail could compromise other projects, so I urged speedy progress.

Colleagues mentioned HS2. I take the opportunity to confirm that HS2 remains a critical project for the Government.

**Jim McMahon:** In the light of the comments by the Chief Secretary to the Treasury, what representations has the Department for Transport made to reassert the case for HS2? Is the Minister confident that if there were a value-for-money review, the project would make it through?

**Andrew Jones:** I could answer that in a few ways. First, it is clearly right that the Treasury takes a view on managing the efficiency and delivery of public projects, because so much money is involved. We are spending half a billion pounds a week more on capital projects than the last Labour Government. We are catching up on investment.

What representations do we make? Of course there is regular dialogue between Ministers from all Departments, and certainly between the Department for Transport and the Treasury at both official and ministerial level. The Government remain entirely committed to HS2, which is part of the rebalancing of our national network. We need capacity on the network, and HS2 will deliver it.

**Jim McMahon:** The Minister has given way extremely generously, and I am grateful for that. Has the Treasury initiated a review of HS2, or did the Chief Secretary's comment just reflect her personal view?

**Andrew Jones:** I am not the Minister with responsibility for HS2, so the day-to-day correspondence does not come across my desk, but the Government are entirely committed to HS2. The Treasury is right to say that we will look at projects to ensure that they come in on budget and on time, and that we do not see project-creep in terms of cost. The Treasury has been sighted, for example, on the way we are re-planning our investment process to ensure that decisions are made in as informed a way as possible so that there are as few surprises as possible.

Let me be absolutely clear to everybody that HS2 is a critically important project. Work is already under way to deliver it. The hon. Gentleman made the point that the appetite for it grows the further north one goes, and I am happy to echo that entirely. HS2 presents fantastic regeneration opportunities, about which I have had conversations with Judith Blake in Leeds, Andy Burnham in Manchester and Andy Street in the West Midlands.

The hon. Gentleman also highlighted the industrial relations issues that blight some parts of our rail network. The Government are keen to see a second person on trains. Indeed, we have said that there will be no blockage from the Government if that is what everybody wants. We can make changes to any agreements. Indeed, we have gone further than that and said that we will provide financial support. I have made those comments to the unions and the company. The dispute is between those two parties, but the Government can play a role in creating an environment to help them get around the table and talk, and I think I have done that. I want to see them get around the table and talk and, as they do so, stop the strikes, which have had a detrimental impact on the economy of the north.

I have not yet addressed the comments by the hon. Member for Inverclyde (Ronnie Cowan) about devolution to Scotland. Rail is devolved to Scotland. The Scottish Government set their own high-level output specification.

The statement of funds available is above the Barnett formula for CP6. Off the top of my head, having discussed Scottish rail issues with colleagues in the Adjournment debate on Monday night—that was very late, so I understand that not everyone will have been present—I think it is £4.85 billion. There is significant funding available for the Scottish rail network, and the Scottish Government have control over rail.

**Ronnie Cowan:** This is not just about funding; it is also about control and management. When ScotRail is run by the Scottish Government and Network Rail is run by the UK Government, that can obviously fall between two stools. That is what we seek to address. We want the responsibility to go with the railway.

**Andrew Jones:** I just point out that decisions about what happens are taken north of the border. We have a national rail network, which cuts across all the nations of the United Kingdom, but decisions are made north of the border. I have had conversations with the Scottish Transport Minister, and I fully understand where his responsibilities start and mine finish.

We have accepted many of the Transport Committee's recommendations, and I hope I have made it clear that our new approach through the RNEP is clear, logical and fair, and makes sense. We want that approach to lead to better outcomes for passengers, certainty for the supply chain and the industry, and a much more balanced portfolio of investment. I know that colleagues are hungry for investment. We are catching up on decades of under-investment in our rail network and other modes of transport by Governments of all colours. It is clear that we all agree that rail plays a huge role in our national economy, and that is why we are investing in it at record levels. I look forward to keeping the House and the Committee updated on our progress.

3.57 pm

**Lilian Greenwood:** We have had an excellent debate. I thank all those who took part, including my Select Committee colleagues and Members from across the House. I particularly thank the Minister for his willingness to engage so constructively. He can be in no doubt about the strength of feeling across the country—from Essex to Yorkshire, Lancashire, Cambridgeshire and Sussex—about the need for rail investment to be shared more fairly. Members, their constituents and businesses want to hear not only that the Government are listening, but that they will respond. Of course, this is not only about fairness. Failure properly to invest will hold our country and its people back. Effective rail networks and transport networks in general are key to tackling poor productivity.

I am pleased that the Minister has received the rail industry's decarbonisation report, even if it is only a draft. I look forward very much to hearing what it says and what the Government intend to do in response. I hope he listened to the concerns a number of us raised about the transpennine route upgrade. It is important that the Government deliver on the promise of a wholly electrified line, which would benefit passengers, freight, the economy and the environment.

I welcome the Minister's comments about the transparency of the enhancements pipeline. We look forward to receiving from the Department more information

*[Lilian Greenwood]*

about which schemes are progressing through the pipeline and further details of the market-led proposals that are in development, which have the potential to improve our rail network and provide much-wanted work for rail companies up and down the country. Of course, enhancement work tends to be quite different from day-to-day maintenance and renewal.

We are in agreement about the level of investment that is going into our network, whether through the money committed in CP6 or through some of the major projects, including HS2. On that we can agree, but I have no doubt that the Committee will continue to scrutinise the work of the Department, to make sure that the investment goes in and to ensure that when new services are developed to benefit from that investment,

they are delivered effectively. That has not been the case in the previous year. We all regret the problems with the delivery of the new timetable. There has to be learning from that and we have to move on, particularly so that passengers feel the benefits that they know they have been paying for, for some time. We look forward to future debates, in Westminster Hall and on the Floor of the House, on this matter.

*Question put and agreed to.*

*Resolved,*

That this House has considered the Fourth Report of the Transport Committee, Rail infrastructure investment, HC 582, and the Government response, HC 1557.

4 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*

# Written Statements

Thursday 17 January 2019

## DEFENCE

### No-deal EU Exit Contingency Planning: Call-out Order

#### **The Minister for the Armed Forces (Mark Lancaster):**

A new order has been made under section 56(1B) of the Reserve Forces Act 1996 to enable reservists to be called into permanent service in support of the HMG contingency planning for a no-deal EU exit scenario.

Defence is committed to assisting the Cabinet Office co-ordinated work programme to ensure that there are effective and proportionate contingency plans in place to mitigate the potential immediate impacts leaving the EU, under a no-deal scenario, might have on the welfare, health and security of UK citizens and economic stability of the UK.

Reserve forces will be on standby to deliver a range of defence outputs such as: reinforcement of regular sub-units, liaison officer roles and the provision of specialist skills. A particularly important role may be the planned reinforcement of regional points of command, to enable their 24/7 operation and resilience. We would also expect reserves to be drawn upon to support the implementation of contingency plans developed by other Government Departments.

The order shall take effect from the beginning of 10 February 2019 and shall cease to have effect at the end of 9 February 2020.

[HCWS1254]

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Environment Council

#### **The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Dr Thérèse Coffey):**

I attended the EU Environment Council on 20 December in Brussels. Mairi Gougeon MSP, the Scottish Minister for Rural Affairs and Natural Environment, also attended. I wish to update the House on the matters discussed.

#### *CO<sub>2</sub> emission standards for heavy-duty vehicles regulation—general approach*

Council reached an agreed position (“general approach”) on the regulation on CO<sub>2</sub> emission standards for heavy-duty vehicles. The European Commission had proposed an indicative 30% reduction in emissions by 2030, with a 15% reduction by 2025.

A full roundtable heard Ministers set out their respective positions. The UK intervened calling for greater ambition for 2030 and stressing the need to agree a strong overall package of measures. The presidency presented a revised proposal; the key element being a binding 2030 target, which was sufficient to achieve a general approach. One member state abstained.

#### *Regulation on LIFE—partial general approach*

The presidency introduced its compromise text for a partial general approach of the LIFE programme (the EU’s financial instrument supporting environmental,

nature conservation and climate action projects throughout the EU), to run from 2021-27. In this revised text, the presidency reintroduced the role of the LIFE committee and placed greater emphasis on geographical balance; member states welcomed the adoption of the partial general approach. While all could support the agreement, a number of member states intervened to restate their preference for higher co-financing rates.

#### *“A Clean Planet for All”: a long-term strategy for EU greenhouse gas emissions reductions—exchange of views*

The Commission introduced its long-term strategy on climate, which was published on 28 November 2018, which recommends that the EU aims for net-zero greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, following which the Council held its first exchange of views. The Council agreed that the strategy should be discussed in multiple council formations in the coming months. Interventions focused on the aim for net zero-emissions, the importance of just transition, the recognition of specific national and regional circumstances, the contribution of technology to decarbonisation, and the role of national long-term strategies.

The UK intervened to highlight that the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) special report on 1.5 degrees underscored the urgency of tackling climate change, and welcomed the strategy as a serious response that also underlines the benefits of taking action, and stresses the need to ensure that no one is left behind in the transition. The UK highlighted the action being taken across the UK to tackle climate change, and the role of clean growth in the domestic industrial strategy. The UK welcomed the focus in the strategy on carbon capture usage and storage (CCUS), given its vital importance in reducing the costs of decarbonisation and the need for collaboration to scale up CCUS, and also highlighted the need to consider nature-based solutions.

#### *AOB items*

The following items were also discussed under any other business.

#### *1. Report on recent international meetings: United Nations framework convention on climate change 24th session of the conference of the parties*

The presidency, Commission, and Poland, which held the presidency of the 24th session of the conference to the parties (COP) to the United Nations framework convention on climate change (UNFCCC), presented on COP24, which took place in Katowice, Poland, on 2 to 14 December 2018. The agreement of the rulebook underpinning the Paris agreement was welcomed as a significant achievement.

#### *2. Report on the implementation of the EU strategy on adaptation to climate change*

Council noted the information from the presidency.

#### *3. The “Graz Declaration”—Starting a new era: Clean, safe and affordable mobility for Europe*

Council noted the presidency presentation on the Graz declaration, which was agreed at October informal Environment Council (29 and 30 October).

#### *4. Measures at EU level to create the conditions for discontinuing the use of the environmentally problematic substances contained in plant protection products*

Council noted the information from the Belgian delegation on plant protection products.

5. *Intermediary sessions of the meeting of the parties to the convention on environmental impact assessment in a transboundary context (Espoo convention) and the protocol on strategic environmental assessment (SEA)*

Lithuania, supported by Luxembourg, presented information concerning the draft recommendations of the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) Espoo Convention Implementation Committee regarding the Ostrovetz new nuclear project in Belarus. These recommendations will be tabled for possible endorsement by the intermediary session of the meeting of the parties to the convention in February 2019.

6. *Current legislative proposals*

The presidency and the Commission provided an update on current environmental legislative proposals: regulation on taxonomy; directive on single-use plastics; the regulation on persistent organic pollutants (POPs) (recast); the regulation on environmental reporting; the directive on drinking water (recast); and the regulation on CO<sub>2</sub> from cars and vans.

Several member states welcomed the proposals, in particular the progress on the single-use plastics directive. On the recast of the drinking water directive the Commission urged all member states to show flexibility and work together to make swift progress. The UK intervened to welcome the progress on single-use plastics, and outlined the work being done across the UK to tackle plastic waste. On drinking water, the UK noted the recent progress towards a compromise on materials in contact with drinking water, but indicated that there were still outstanding concerns, and on persistent organic pollutants (POPs), the UK intervened to support the Council position on Decabromodiphenyl ether (a flame retardant) and the existing approach for updating the annexes.

7. *Report on recent international meeting—convention on biological diversity (CBD) and update from the UK on the London illegal wildlife conference*

The Commission and presidency reported back on the recent international meeting on the convention on biological diversity (CBD), in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt on 17 to 29 November. The UK intervened to welcome progress so far and to highlight the commitment that needs to be shown from Governments, civil society and business in order to develop an ambitious post-2020 biodiversity framework.

Following this, the UK gave a short update on the outcomes of the London illegal wildlife trade (IWT) conference held on 11 and 12 October 2018, outlining the importance of member states continuing to work together to tackle this important issue, and the need to treat IWT as a serious organised crime.

8. *The future of European environment policy—Towards an 8th EU environment action programme*

Council noted the information from the presidency on plans to develop an eighth EU environment action programme.

9. *Environmental and climate ambition of the future CAP*

Council noted the information from the German delegation, supported by the Luxembourg delegation.

## 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 21 January. It will be chaired by the high representative of the European Union (EU) for foreign affairs and security policy (HRVP), Federica Mogherini and will take place in Brussels.

#### *Current affairs*

The HRVP is expected to cover Venezuela, the Democratic Republic of Congo and may also raise Syria.

#### *Disinformation*

Ministers will discuss implementation of the EU joint action plan on countering disinformation that was approved at the December European Council. We will be pushing for adequate funding to allow for full implementation and a robust process of review to ensure that the plan achieves its objectives. We will also seek to highlight our leadership on this issue and willingness to collaborate with EU partners after March 2019. Russian state disinformation was a pre-cursor to conflict in Georgia in 2008, the invasion and illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014 and has been used across EU countries since. We have successfully countered a disinformation campaign targeted against UK interests across Europe following the Salisbury attack.

#### *EU-LAS*

Ministers will discuss the EU-League of Arab States (LAS) summit that will take place in February in Egypt. The summit is the first of its kind and offers an opportunity to deepen the EU's relationship with members of the League of Arab States. The UK will support the EU's ambition for the summit to cover a range of priority topics including migration, Yemen and Syria. We are expecting that the FAC will discuss the decision by some members of the LAS to re-establish diplomatic relations with Syria. The UK will be clear we have no plans to do so.

#### *EU-ASEAN*

The FAC will discuss regional issues and the future of the EU-ASEAN relationship ahead of the EU-ASEAN ministerial on the same day.

#### *Council conclusions*

The Council is expected to adopt conclusions on Nicaragua, ASEAN and possibly Yemen. With the French and Germans, we are also seeking approval of conclusions on Iran that should reaffirm the EU's continued commitment to the JCPOA whilst also highlighting our concerns about Iran's regional and ballistic missile activity.

[HCWS1252]

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill

**The Minister for Security and Economic Crime (Mr Ben Wallace):** I am today placing in the Library of the House the Home Office's analysis on the application of Standing Order 830 of the Standing Orders of the House of Commons relating to public business in respect of the Lords amendments to the Counter-Terrorism and Border Security Bill.

[HCWS1251]

[HCWS1253]

# Ministerial Correction

*Thursday 17 January 2019*

## TREASURY

### Money Laundering and Transfer of Funds etc Regulations 2018

*The following are extracts from the debate on the Money Laundering and Transfer of Funds (Information) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018 on 8 January 2018.*

**John Glen:** There has been an 80% reduction in Scottish limited partnerships.

*[Official Report, Second Delegated Legislation Committee, 8 January 2019; c. 10.]*

**John Glen:** Work is being done across the Treasury, the Home Office and the MOJ to look at how we can refine that.

*[Official Report, Second Delegated Legislation Committee, 8 January 2019; c. 11.]*

*Letter of correction from The Economic Secretary to the Treasury:*

Errors have been identified in my contribution to the debate on the Money Laundering and Transfer of Funds (Information) (Amendment) (EU Exit) Regulations 2018.

The correct statements should have been:

**John Glen:** There has been an 80% reduction in **new registrations of** Scottish limited partnerships.

**John Glen:** Work is being done across the Treasury, the Home Office, **the NCA and law enforcement agencies** to look at how we can refine that.



# ORAL ANSWERS

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**not later than  
Thursday 24 January 2019**

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**Written Answers to Questions [The written answers can now be found at <http://www.parliament.uk/writtenanswers>]**

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