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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Wednesday 17 July 2019

House of Commons

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The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Climate Change

1. **Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): What support his Department provides to help developing countries manage the effects of climate change. [911986]

5. **Alex Chalk** (Cheltenham) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to prioritise (a) tackling the effects of climate change and (b) protecting the environment in developing countries. [911991]

10. **Rachel Maclean** (Redditch) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to prioritise (a) tackling the effects of climate change and (b) protecting the environment in developing countries. [911996]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Rory Stewart): The distinction traditionally made between development, environment and climate is a false distinction. Unless we tackle climate change, there will be 100 million more people living in poverty in the next 15 years. I returned this morning from New York, where I have been discussing with the Secretary-General of the United Nations our commitment to greening our development spending to ensure that everything that we spend is Paris-compliant, to double the amount the Department for International Development will spend on environment and climate, and to double the effort we are putting into this subject.

Neil Gray: I thank the International Development Secretary for his answer and appreciate his focus on the importance of tackling climate change, but does he accept that it needs to be in addition to traditional development support? To that end, will he examine the Scottish Government's climate justice fund, which seeks to support those who have done the least to cause climate change but who are to be hit first and hardest by its effects?

Rory Stewart: It is clearly true that many of the people who are suffering most are from some of the poorest countries in the world that emit very little carbon, which is why a great deal of our emphasis is on

the question of resilience. I have just returned from Kenya, for example, where we are working with pastoralists whose grassland is being eliminated and with people in Lamu who are losing mangrove swamps. Such countries are not emitting carbon but are suffering from its effects.

Alex Chalk: On that precise issue, what is being done to improve resilience in water security, to ensure that that does not become a source of conflict, or indeed disease, in future?

Rory Stewart: The question of water security is absolutely central. It poses the danger of conflict, for example in the Indus valley and along the headwaters of the rivers that flow into Egypt on the Nile. It is also an area where technology can help, however. We have become much better at preventing water waste. In many developing countries, 50% of the water is wasted; technology is part of the answer to this problem.

Rachel Maclean: My right hon. Friend has made it clear that some of the poorest countries in the world will be the most affected by climate change. I hope to visit Bangladesh in September as part of a delegation; what will his Department be doing to help countries such as Bangladesh mitigate the effects of severe weather, including the monsoon season?

Rory Stewart: The Department for International Development has partnered the Government of Bangladesh for many years, particularly because of the very severe impacts of flooding. We should pay tribute to the improvements in Bangladesh. In floods in the 1970s, more than 100,000 people could be killed in a single event; a similar event today would kill only a few hundreds. That is a huge tribute to Bangladesh's improvement in resilience and also in emergency management.

Dr Rosena Allin-Khan (Tooting) (Lab): I have worked with flood victims in refugee camps around the world; the despair is palpable and tragic, and it is simply inhumane that these same people will be hit the hardest by further extreme weather conditions. This House declared a climate change emergency; will the Government today outline how they will financially support the world's most vulnerable and plan for dealing with future tragedies?

Rory Stewart: We will be doubling the overseas development fund, which will be spent particularly on climate resilience, and Britain will be co-hosting with Egypt the UN summit on climate resilience in September. That was the focus of my discussions with the UN Secretary-General yesterday, and indeed at the Abu Dhabi summit two weeks ago.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Secretary of State agree that if we are truly to tackle climate change, we need to ensure that the money that we give—the vital money that we give—goes to the right place where it matters? Will he look at innovations such as digital currencies, especially blockchain, which enables the money to be tracked to make sure that it does not go into a dictator's slush fund or to train Spice Girls in Nigeria?

Rory Stewart: Blockchain technology has very interesting potential. I recently saw in World Food Programme distribution in camps in Jordan how blockchain is dropping the price by tens of millions of dollars a year. However, there are still some risks attached to such technology.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman is perhaps the most diligent and committed Secretary of State for International Development that I and my hon. Friend the Member for Dundee West (Chris Law), who is still in New York with the Select Committee, have had the opportunity to question at the Dispatch Box. What steps is the right hon. Gentleman taking to solidify and embed the new priority of climate change in his Department? Will he commission a Green Paper or a White Paper to keep the Department moving in that direction, irrespective of what happens under a new Prime Minister in the coming weeks?

Rory Stewart: There are three things that we hope will embed the priority. First, this is a whole of Government approach. The Prime Minister announced at Osaka that we would be the first major international development agency to be fully Paris-compliant. Secondly, we have now announced from this Dispatch Box and inserted into our planning that we will double our spend on climate and the environment. The third thing is to ensure that we have the experts on the ground. In Kenya, for example, the focus is on environmental experts, and in Ethiopia it is on forestry experts. It will be funding, Government strategy and staffing that will make the difference.

Sir Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that agricultural practice and land use are key to mitigating the effects of climate change? Will he say something about the training programmes that DFID pays for and that are doing such good work in helping people to understand the way forward?

Rory Stewart: DFID is doing an increasing amount of work on that issue. For example, its agricultural extension work is helping farmers to work out how to produce crops without depleting the soil or using excessive water. Perhaps the biggest challenge in agriculture is the relationship between pastoralists, particularly people herding cattle and oxen, and sedentary communities right the way across Africa, where climate change and agricultural practices are leading to conflict from Nigeria to South Sudan.

Dan Carden (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): The UK is the largest contributor to the World Bank's climate investment funds, yet civil society groups say that, compared with UN funds, those funds are undemocratic, opaque and dominated by donor countries. The Secretary of State has committed to doubling DFID's climate spending, but does he think that the World Bank's climate investment funds are fit for purpose?

Rory Stewart: The shadow Secretary of State is absolutely right to say that there have been significant issues around some of the climate funds. We feel that a lot of progress is being made, and the most important thing is to find real investable projects on the ground. A lot of that relates to issues of governance.

Dan Carden: I am grateful to the Secretary of State for that answer, but the truth is that the World Bank knows that it was supposed to phase out its climate investment funds once the United Nations green climate fund was up and running. Labour is clear: we believe in climate justice and we are committed to withdrawing the UK's support for the World Bank's climate investment funds and to redirecting climate finance to the UN green climate fund, in which developing countries get a real say. Will the Government now do the same?

Rory Stewart: No, we will not. The reason is that there are issues of capacity in both the World Bank and the UN. The key point here is not the ideological choice of the channel through which we pass the money but the capacity to manage these projects responsibly.

Malnutrition

2. **Greg Hands** (Chelsea and Fulham) (Con): What steps his Department is taking to help to achieve sustainable development goal 2.2 on ending all forms of malnutrition. [911987]

The Minister for Africa (Harriett Baldwin): The UK Government are working closely with the Government of Japan to ensure that next year's summit secures meaningful and transformational commitments from Governments. We have invested £2.6 billion in this area since the last summit, and we are considering what offer the UK Government will make to next year's summit.

Greg Hands: Last year, I travelled with Results UK to Zambia, where 40% of under-fives are stunted. That has an astonishing lifelong impact on their social and economic development. Will the Minister go into a little more detail about next year's summit and about how we will show our commitment to really tackling deficiencies in nutrition on a worldwide scale?

Harriett Baldwin: My right hon. Friend is right to highlight this important issue. I am pleased to be able to tell him that, since his visit, the work we have been doing in Zambia specifically, which has reached more than 1 million people, has reduced the level of stunting to 35%, but clearly that still leaves a lot more to be done.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): We will meet the malnutrition targets only through a strong partnership with the aid community—the voluntary community. Will the Minister update us on what progress she has made on reforms within that community, in the light of the exposés of the past 18 months?

Harriett Baldwin: I think that the hon. Gentleman is referring to the safeguarding issues. He will be aware of the leadership that the UK has shown in this area and the rigorous way in which we have scrutinised all our suppliers. With regard to the most recent story in the media, we have confirmed that no DFID funding was involved.

Alex Norris (Nottingham North) (Lab/Co-op): The new UN food security report says that global hunger has risen for the third year running, but when the UK should be setting an example by reporting on our own SDG process, the Government's voluntary national review

report to the UN was found by the International Development Committee yesterday to be “gravely flawed”—food banks ignored, inadequate stakeholder engagement, cherry-picked data. The Government were allowed to mark their own homework, but they could not even do that properly. What are Ministers doing to ensure that their colleagues in other Departments start taking the SDGs seriously?

Harriett Baldwin: The UK was very proud to present its voluntary national review at the UN yesterday—[HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] It is a strong document and was warmly received. It clearly outlines where we have made enormous amounts of progress and where there is more progress to be made, including further cross-governmental working.

Yemen

3. **Clive Lewis** (Norwich South) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the humanitarian situation in Yemen. [911988]

4. **Alison Thewliss** (Glasgow Central) (SNP): What recent assessment his Department has made of the effect of restricted humanitarian space on the work of NGOs in Yemen. [911990]

The Minister for the Middle East (Dr Andrew Murrison): Yemen remains the world’s largest humanitarian crisis, with 80% of the population requiring humanitarian assistance, which is not helped by the fact that the operating environment for humanitarian organisations is exceptionally difficult. We call on both parties to the conflict to comply with UN Security Council resolution 2451 by facilitating safe, rapid and unhindered humanitarian access.

Clive Lewis: Last month’s ruling by the Court of Appeal that the Government’s continued licensing of the exporting of military equipment to Saudi Arabia is unlawful offers real hope to the people of Yemen—despite the Government’s hypocrisy in calling for peace while selling arms to the Saudis to bomb and to kill, hampering the work of aid agencies on the ground. What representations will the Secretary of State make in Cabinet finally to end that shameful conduct?

Dr Murrison: The hon. Gentleman will know that our checks and balances on the export of arms are among the world’s finest—he must know that. He also knows that we apply the EU consolidated criteria rigorously. He will also, I hope, have noted the Divisional Court’s view that our process was “rigorous, robust, multi-layered” and that those advising Ministers were “keenly alive” to the possible violation of international humanitarian law. He will also know that the UK Government intend to appeal against the judgment.

Alison Thewliss: Women and children have been disproportionately affected by the conflict, so what is the Minister doing to involve women in the process? Further, what work is he doing with organisations such as the Mothers of Abductees Association, which points out that 1,496 people in Yemen have been forcibly disappeared, which causes people huge concern about the whereabouts of their relatives?

Dr Murrison: The hon. Lady is absolutely right to be concerned about those who have disappeared. Along with multilateral organisations, the United Kingdom is at the forefront of mechanisms geared towards ensuring that we know where crimes are potentially being committed and, in the fullness of time, that we are able to follow up on that. I hope that she will approve of the level of support that this country is giving as the penholder and as a major financial contributor to the humanitarian situation in Yemen.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): What action is my right hon. Friend taking to ensure that humanitarian aid actually reaches the people who need it and is not being held back by the warring factions in Yemen?

Dr Murrison: My hon. Friend will probably be aware that we have had discussions on that with the World Food Programme, which is a major operator in the situation in Yemen. We support the intent of the World Food Programme, in particular its director David Beasley, to ensure that aid gets to where it is supposed to go, rather than into the pockets of Houthis and others. That process is in its early stages, but it looks like it is being successful and will restore the full effect of the World Food Programme to Sana’a and other areas as soon as possible.

Mr Speaker: The House wishes to hear the Minister’s mellifluous tones, so if he could face the House, that would be excellent.

Public Services: Developing Countries

6. **Alex Cunningham** (Stockton North) (Lab): What plans his Department has to help develop public services in developing countries. [911992]

11. **Chris Elmore** (Ogmore) (Lab): What plans his Department has to help develop public services in developing countries. [911997]

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin): The UK is committed to supporting countries to achieve the global goals, including through the development of strong public services. We are working with low-income countries to raise and manage public revenues and to invest in education and health systems to provide essential public services for all.

Alex Cunningham: I am grateful for that answer. Building strong public services is crucial to achieving the UN’s sustainable development goals, but countries in the global south are losing out on billions of pounds of revenue each year due to tax avoidance—money that could be spent on building up those services, which are needed by their citizens. What practical steps is the Minister taking to ensure that countries in the global south are supported to ensure that multinational corporations and others who should be paying taxes actually do so?

Harriett Baldwin: I am very pleased to say that we have taken probably the most powerful practical step of all by setting up a specialist tax department—the hon. Gentleman rightly highlights the issue—within the

Department for International Development. We are spending £47 million to help low-income countries increase their tax revenues, and every £1 we put in has raised revenues by £100.

Chris Elmore: Shockingly, 16 million girls aged 15 to 19 give birth each year in developing regions. Complications during pregnancy and childbirth are a leading cause of death in this age group globally. Therefore, what urgent steps is the Minister taking to ensure that developing countries have better reproductive healthcare services for girls and young women to improve their rights, chances and opportunities internationally?

Harriett Baldwin: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to raise this important issue, and we continue to work in countries where we can help with some of the sexual and reproductive health interventions he describes. In addition, he will be aware that the Girls' Education Challenge is helping 1.5 million adolescent girls, who have often had children at a very young age, to stay in education and get the education that will help to improve their lifetime earnings.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Children's health is also a key issue, and I thank the Department for International Development for its work to fight polio across the world. Will the Minister rise to the challenge set by members of the Chelmsford rotary club, and by rotary clubs across the UK, and confirm that this Government remain committed to ending polio forever?

Harriett Baldwin: I always welcome the opportunity to thank rotary clubs not only here in the UK but around the world for their fundraising. We are nearly there. We have nearly eradicated polio from this planet, and we should thank every Rotarian for their contribution.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): Good public services need an effective civil service to supervise them. What discussions has the Minister had with the Cabinet Office and my noble Friend Lord Maude about the provision of an effective civil service in developing countries?

Harriett Baldwin: My hon. Friend will be aware that the UK has long-standing partnerships with a range of developing countries. Indeed, it forms part of our work when we award Chevening scholarships, for example, through the Foreign and Commonwealth Office; scholars have to commit to going back and helping to deliver services in their country.

Several hon. Members *rose—*

Mr Speaker: The hon. Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) is such a happy and uncomplaining fellow that the temptation to call him is irresistible.

Mr Gregory Campbell (East Londonderry) (DUP): Does the Minister accept that one of the best ways to support public services, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, is to support the non-governmental organisations that provide clean drinking water in many of the townships across that part of Africa?

Harriett Baldwin: I am glad the hon. Gentleman got to ask his question because, of course, clean drinking water is crucial. We take it so much for granted, and I am pleased that, working with NGOs, DFID has supported over 51 million poor people in Africa and Asia to have access to drinking water supplies or toilets for the first time.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): Public services in all countries benefit from the quality of governance and, above all, from democracy, which is why the Westminster Foundation for Democracy is keen for a democracy fund to be established. Following the very useful meeting with the Minister, does she agree it is important that it is taken forward in time for the autumn spending review?

Harriett Baldwin: I welcome my hon. Friend's bid, and I can commit to him that these are exactly the sorts of issues that will be discussed in the future spending review.

Topical Questions

T1. [912001] **Stephen Doughty (Cardiff South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op):** If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Rory Stewart): The central challenge in international development going forward will be the quality, expertise and number of our permanent staff on the ground. As international development becomes more complex, with conflict and climate, as we have to work more closely with other Departments and, above all, in a world in which developing countries are looking not for money, but for expertise, over the next 15 years we will have to increase the expertise, the quality and, above all, the number of civil servants, moving away from short-term consultants to having British experts on the ground.

Stephen Doughty: I am sure the Secretary of State will be aware that Birmingham this week joined Cardiff, Sheffield and Tower Hamlets in calling for the recognition of Somaliland. Does he agree that diaspora communities here in the UK play a crucial role, not only in Somaliland, but in many other contexts, in providing not only direct assistance, but the type of trading, business and expert links that can help development in so many countries?

Rory Stewart: We are immensely fortunate in the UK with our diaspora communities because they provide both powerful advocacy, for example, with Somaliland on female genital mutilation, and expertise—linguistic, deep country expertise—to ensure that our programmes on the ground are of the requisite quality.

T2. [912002] **James Duddridge (Rochford and Southend East) (Con):** Mindful of recent Ebola outbreaks, what lessons have been learnt to help countries become more resistant to Ebola, particularly in the health sector?

Rory Stewart: I am lucky enough to have just returned from the Congo, where I was looking at Ebola in Beni and Butembo. The situation of Ebola in the Congo is serious; we now have—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The Secretary of State is a cerebral and intellectual fellow, of prodigious brain power, and he deserves a more respectful audience than he is being accorded. Let us hear the words, digest them and learn from them.

Rory Stewart: What needs to be heard is not my cerebral power, but the issue of Ebola in the Congo. The House needs to be serious about that. There is an Ebola outbreak now in the Congo, which has already crossed the border into Uganda. On Sunday, we had an outbreak in Goma, a city of 2 million people. If we do not get this under control, this Ebola outbreak, which is already the second biggest in history, will cause devastating problems for the region. We must invest much more in the World Health Organisation, in developing the public health services in the neighbouring countries. Above all, we must step up to the challenge and be serious as a nation about this deadly disease.

T3. [912003] **David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): One in 10 of the world's population still do not have access to clean, decent water supplies. I know the Government are trying hard to rectify that, but will the Secretary of State look at the article today by the chief executive of WaterAid calling for greater support in this area?

Rory Stewart: The provision of water and sanitation is central. It is vital for health. It is also vital in schools, for ensuring that girls remain in school, and it is vital for tackling any kind of water-borne disease. So good investment in water, which DFID prioritises, needs to be one of the three fundamental pillars of development, along with education and health.

T4. [912004] **Henry Smith** (Crawley) (Con): What assistance is being provided to the Turks and Caicos Islands, which are seeking to cope with Haitian migrants making a hazardous sea crossing and settling in that British overseas territory?

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Dr Andrew Murrison): My hon. Friend is right to highlight this, and I am pleased to say that the conflict, stability and security fund has been used to help the Turks and Caicos repair its radar, so that it is able to detect boats that may be carrying people trying to access the islands. He may be aware that early in 2018 the Royal Fleet Auxiliary vessel *Mounts Bay* was also deployed in order to provide a deterrent to those who wish to make that perilous crossing. We will consider other ways of using the CSSF in this region in the future.

T6. [912006] **Paul Blomfield** (Sheffield Central) (Lab): July is set to be the hottest month ever recorded on Earth. Areas such as the Lake Chad basin, where more than 4.5 million people are already displaced, are the most vulnerable to these temperatures. The Secretary of State's ambition to double spending in the long term is admirable, but what more does he think could be done now to support those countries that are in the frontline of the climate emergency?

Rory Stewart: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: the issue of climate is now driving conflict. In the Lake Chad basin there simply is not enough ground for

people to feed their oxen or plant crops. We need to invest in climate-resilience projects, which means looking not only at the crops but at the reasons why there are now conflicts, from the Chad Basin and Nigeria right the way across east Africa, between people with oxen and people who are planting. In particular, Sahel is central to DFID's new initiative. We are opening embassies in Mauritania, Niger and Chad, and much more of our investment is now going to go into the Sahel region.

T5. [912005] **Fiona Bruce** (Congleton) (Con): The recommendations in the report by the Bishop of Truro that was launched this week—the Foreign Secretary requested the review of Foreign and Commonwealth Office support for persecuted Christians worldwide—will be implemented effectively only with cross-departmental engagement and support. Will DFID provide that support?

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Harriett Baldwin): I am pleased to add my voice of welcome for the report commissioned by the Foreign Secretary. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to highlight some of the important points made in the report. She will be aware that, in addition to freedom of religion and belief, the UK is, as we heard from the Secretary of State, helping communities with their adaptation to some of the other drivers of conflict highlighted in the excellent report.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [912009] **Lilian Greenwood** (Nottingham South) (Lab): If she will list her official engagements for Wednesday 17 July.

The Prime Minister (Mrs Theresa May): I am sure Members will want to congratulate all those who took part in what was a great weekend of sport. In particular, we congratulate Lewis Hamilton on his record sixth win in the British grand prix. On Monday, I was able to welcome England's cricket team to Downing Street, following their brilliant performance in winning the cricket world cup. As I said to them, they are a team that reflects the very best of modern Britain and a team that plays like no other in the world.

I am sure the House will want to join me in wishing all the best to the home nations taking part in the netball world cup in Liverpool.

This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others. In addition to my duties in this House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Lilian Greenwood: I join the Prime Minister in offering our congratulations, particularly to the England team that won the cricket world cup. We were proud to host some of the games at Trent Bridge in Nottingham. I also extend our best wishes to the netball team.

Notts County, the world's oldest professional football club, is facing the very real threat of extinction. Under chairman Alan Hardy, the club has reached a financial

crisis and could be liquidated before the start of the coming season. Players and staff have not been paid in weeks, and the club is set to make its fourth appearance in the High Court later this month to face a winding-up petition. Will the Prime Minister and the whole House join me in calling on the Football Association, the Football League and the National League to investigate the current situation and help to secure the future of this truly historic club?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Lady for raising this issue. Football clubs up and down the country are obviously of great importance to their local communities. Overall, the financial state of football clubs is better now than at any time, but the Government are certainly not complacent. The hon. Lady referred to various football authorities; we will continue to hold the football authorities to account for ensuring that there is transparency around the ownership of clubs, that sufficient inquiries into the suitability of owners are made, and that financially clubs continue to live within their means. I am sure the whole House will join the hon. Lady in hoping that, as the world's oldest professional football club, Notts County resolves its situation soon.

Q3. [912011] **Sir Peter Bottomley** (Worthing West) (Con): I thank the Prime Minister and her chief of staff Gavin Barwell for all that they have done, with the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government, on residential leasehold reform; there is now a prospect of ending unfairness and exploitation.

In respect of another legacy, may I refer the Prime Minister to the book “Legacy” by Michael Gillard on the legacy of the Olympics? It is about Gillard's investigation into the criminals involved. I am not suggesting that she reads it before next week, but those who do look at it will see how the Directorate of Professional Standards in the Met overturned the police officer who was investigating the criminals.

When doing that, they should also look at “Behind The Blue Line” by Gurpal Viridi, which is about how he was investigated when the DPS did not interview the officers who were known to have been involved in the arrests of the complainant, and charged him with an offence with a weapon that was not available until eight years after the alleged offence.

The Prime Minister: I recognise the way in which my hon. Friend has championed a number of cases—he has referenced one of them—over the years in this House. Indeed, I had a number of meetings with him when I was Home Secretary in relation to that case. It is important that our police are able to operate to the highest professional standards. They have operational independence as to who they investigate and how they conduct those investigations, but I am sure the whole House would want to say that we expect our police to conduct those investigations properly and fairly, and to ensure that, when a crime is committed, they are investigating that crime.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): I agree with the Prime Minister's congratulations to Lewis Hamilton on winning on Sunday and to the fantastic cricket team, which ended up winning the world cup. I also thank New Zealand—what a brilliant final it was, and what a great advertisement for the wonderful game of cricket.

“Time is running out” on climate change—that is what the Environment Secretary said yesterday. Why did the all-party Environmental Audit Committee accuse the Government of “coasting” on climate change?

The Prime Minister: The Government have a fine record on climate change, including our recent legislation on net zero emissions, but there is an issue that needs to be addressed in this House. Before the right hon. Gentleman stands up and parades himself as the champion of climate change, the champion of the people or the defender of equality and fairness, he needs to apologise for his failure to deal with racism in the Labour party.

Just today, 60 distinguished members of the Labour party have written in the newspapers:

“The Labour party welcomes everyone*...(*except, it seems, Jews)...This is your legacy Mr Corbyn...You still haven't opened your eyes...You still haven't told the whole truth...You still haven't accepted your responsibility...You have failed...the test of leadership.”

Apologise now.

Jeremy Corbyn rose—[*Interruption.*]

Mr Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman will be heard. Attempts to shout him down are downmarket, low grade, regarded with contempt by the public and, above all, will not work. Be quiet.

Jeremy Corbyn: This party was the first to introduce anti-racist legislation into law in Britain. This party totally opposes racism in any form whatsoever. Antisemitism has no place in our society, no place in any of our parties and no place in any of our dialogues. Neither does any other form of racism.

Some 60% of Tory party members think Islam is a threat to western civilisation. The Prime Minister has said that she will act on Islamophobia within her own party. I hope she does. I look forward to seeing that being dealt with, as we will deal with any racism that occurs within our own party as well.

Last week, the Committee on Climate Change published its annual report, which described the Government's efforts on climate change not a bit like what the Prime Minister just said; it described them as being run like “Dad's Army”. The Government's target is to reduce carbon emissions by 57% by 2030. Can the Prime Minister tell us how much progress has been made on that?

The Prime Minister: On the climate change issue, the chairman of that committee said:

“The UK is the first major economy to set a net-zero emissions target and intends to host the world's leaders at next year's landmark climate conference (COP26). These are historic steps forward and position the UK at the forefront of the global low-carbon transition.”

The right hon. Gentleman, I note, did not apologise in response to my first questions. We deal with Islamophobia in the Conservative party. Any allegations of Islamophobia are dealt with, unlike his way in the Labour party where he is failing to deal with antisemitism. He can stand up and say all he likes about the Labour party introducing anti-racism legislation. Just last week, Trevor Phillips, the former chairman of the Equality and Human Rights Commission, said the following:

“Labour today presents like a textbook case of institutional racism.”

Jeremy Corbyn: This party opposes racism in any form whatsoever in our society. And coming from a Prime Minister who encouraged the hostile environment, sent “go home” vans around London, and deported British citizens, which she has now had to compensate them for, I think that she might look to her own party and her own Government’s record as well.

The issue of climate change is obviously crucial, and we support the zero emissions target. The latest figures, however, released in April show that the Government are going to miss that target by 10%—the gap is widening. At the current rate, they will not meet their 2050 target until 2099, and, at that point, it will be too late for our planet and our children. Clean energy investment has fallen three years in a row. Why does the Prime Minister think that that is the case?

The Prime Minister: Still no apology, I note, from the right hon. Gentleman.

We have outperformed in our first and second carbon budgets, and we are on track to meet the third. We have taken the historic step of legislating for net zero emissions by 2050. We have yet to see all the policies and proposals in our clean growth strategy coming into play and having an effect on our target. This is a party that is acting on climate change; this is a party that is delivering for the people of this country; this is a party that is dealing with the issues that matter to people day to day. The right hon. Gentleman needs to start dealing with the issues that matter to the members of his Labour party, as shown in the newspapers this morning.

Jeremy Corbyn: It was a Labour Government who introduced the Climate Change Act 2008. It is the Labour party that is committed to dealing with the issues of climate change. Let me give the Prime Minister a few suggestions on why renewable investment is falling: her Government scrapped the feed-in tariff; they failed to invest in the Swansea tidal lagoon; and they slashed investment in onshore wind. If we are serious about tackling this climate emergency, we need to fully acknowledge the scale of the problem. Labour is committed to measuring total UK emissions—not just what we make here, but what we buy from abroad also—so that we have an accurate figure of what the emissions really are by consumption in this country. Will the Prime Minister match that commitment?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman knows that we measure our targets according to the international definitions of those targets, and that is exactly the right thing for us to do. He talks about renewables. Let us just look at the record on renewables: last year, renewables generated a record amount of electricity in this country—33%; and over the past year, we have generated record levels of solar and offshore wind energy. He talks about what the Labour Government did, but 99% of solar power deployed in the UK has been deployed under Conservative Governments.

Jeremy Corbyn: I think that we are actually hiding the scale of the problem by passing the buck to other countries as well. If all emissions are counted, the figures would actually be 69% higher in this country.

Every year, air pollution kills 40,000 in this country. In 2017, the Conservative manifesto promised to take action against poor air quality in urban areas. What actions have been taken?

The Prime Minister: Air pollution has reduced significantly since 2010 under the Conservatives in government. Our clean air strategy is the most ambitious air quality strategy in a generation, described by the World Health Organisation as

“an example for the rest of the world to follow.”

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington North) (Lab): Those are wonderful words, they truly are. The only problem is, air pollution levels breach legal limits in 37 of 43 areas of this country. Two thirds of our children are growing up in an area where pollution breaches legal limits. This crisis is literally suffocating our children and damaging their health. Once again, this Government are dodging their responsibility while Labour leads the way. For example, the Mayor of London is leading the way on better air quality in the capital city.

The Tories promised the greenest Government ever. They have failed on carbon emissions. They have failed on air pollution. They have failed on solar. The Prime Minister says that she wants action, but she supports fracking and has effectively banned onshore wind. The climate emergency simply cannot be left to the market. We all need to take responsibility to secure our common future. Labour led the call to declare a climate emergency and has pledged a green industrial revolution with new jobs. When will this Conservative Government face up to the situation, get a grip on this crisis and deal with it?

The Prime Minister: We have already seen over 400,000 new jobs in the area of renewables and clean growth, and we expect to see up to 2 million more. I am not going to take any lectures from the Labour party on this issue, when the last Labour Government ignored advice that diesel fumes would damage our environment and incentivised diesel cars through the tax system.

The right hon. Gentleman talks about dodging responsibility. The person who has been dodging his responsibility during this PMQs is the right hon. Gentleman. The real disgrace is his handling of racism in the Labour part. Activists protesting, MPs leaving and staff resigning—what would his great heroes Attlee, Bevan and Benn think? Look what he has done to their party. We will never let him do it to our country.

Q6. [912014] **Sir Oliver Heald** (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): The Prime Minister has repeatedly made animal welfare a priority during her time in office. Britain leads the World Animal Protection animal protection index. I thank her and the Secretary of State for supporting Finn’s law—the Animal Welfare (Service Animals) Act 2019—and for bringing forward the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill, which is a key measure for a nation such as ours that loves animals. That legislation will increase the maximum sentence for animal cruelty to five years’ imprisonment. Will the Prime Minister do whatever more she can to secure its speedy passage?

The Prime Minister: I know my right hon. and learned Friend has also been working on this issue for some time, and I thank him for highlighting the work that has been done. There is no place for animal cruelty in this country. When the Animal Welfare (Sentencing) Bill, to which he alludes, is passed, those who mistreat or abuse animals, or are involved in animal fighting, will rightly

face one of the toughest penalties available anywhere in the world. That will cement our place as a world leader on animal welfare. The new maximum penalty will soon also apply to those who attack our brave service animals such as Finn the police dog, through Finn's law. I pay tribute to supporters, and to organisations such as Battersea Dogs and Cats Home and the RSPCA, for championing these changes. I wish the sentencing Bill a speedy passage through this House and the other place.

Ian Blackford (Ross, Skye and Lochaber) (SNP): This week the Prime Minister finally did the right thing. When Donald Trump told women that they should "go home", she called it out as unacceptable. Let me be clear that Donald Trump's actions are textbook racism; they are repugnant and diplomatic politeness should never stop us saying so. Will the Prime Minister now, on reflection, also take the opportunity to call out and condemn the racism of the "Go Home" vans that she created in the coalition Government with the Liberal Democrats?

The Prime Minister: I said at the time that that was too blunt an instrument. There is an important issue, which is that the public expect us to have a fair immigration system that deals with those who are here illegally. That is what we need to do. The right hon. Gentleman referred to the comments made by President Trump. As he alluded to, I have strongly condemned those comments.

Ian Blackford: When the Prime Minister implemented the hostile environment policy, her party stayed silent. When she delivered the racist "Go Home" vans, the Tories remained silent. When asylum seekers are deported to places where their lives are at risk, the Tories stay silent, and when faced with the racist columns written by the former Foreign Secretary, they stay silent. Is the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb) not correct when he warns that the Tories are "appealing to the type of nationalism that has seen UKIP grow"? While the Tory party shares more with the extremes of Donald Trump and Nigel Farage, is it any wonder that Scotland looks on in horror?

The Prime Minister: The Conservative party is a party for the whole of the United Kingdom, and the only party in this House that is appealing to blatant nationalism is the party that wants to take Scotland out of the UK.

Q10. [912018] **Daniel Kawczynski** (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): In Shropshire, 300 doctors, surgeons and clinicians have been at the forefront of major reconfiguration and modernisation proposals for A&E provision in our county. We have secured £320 million for those vital changes, yet Labour-controlled Telford and Wrekin Council—an organisation bereft of any medical expertise—has repeatedly prevented them from taking place. Will the Prime Minister update the House on when this long-running saga will finally come to an end, so that my doctors and clinicians can get back to their day jobs?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising what is obviously a very important issue for him and his constituents. I recognise that there are concerns

about the Future Fit programme and services in Shropshire. I understand that my right hon. Friend the Health Secretary has referred the programme to the Independent Reconfiguration Panel, and the Department of Health and Social Care will study that advice carefully before making a decision. We have the simple view that clinicians should take these decisions, because it is clinicians who know best the services that should be available for his constituents and others.

Q2. [912010] **Steve McCabe** (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I often disagree with the Prime Minister, but I respect the fact that many of her intentions are honest and decent. When she raised the hopes of millions of carers by promising them statutory leave entitlement, they were thrilled. So far, we have had reference to a committee. Is that a failed promise, or does the fact that it is a manifesto pledge mean she is assured that the honest and decent thing for her successor to do is deliver it?

The Prime Minister: The issue of carer's leave is one on which we have been consulting. That is in the system, and I have every expectation that whoever succeeds me will take that forward.

Sir Roger Gale (North Thanet) (Con): It has been remarked upon that my right hon. Friend is one of only three Prime Ministers upon whose watch a world cup has been brought home. She and her husband were fortunate enough to be present to watch that wonderful team effort. In the final week of her premiership, will she allow herself the luxury of considering that history is likely to treat her captaincy rather more kindly than it will treat those who have campaigned against her?

The Prime Minister: I thank my right hon. Friend for those comments and for the support he has shown me and the Government in our work. I was very pleased to be there for the whole world cup final on Sunday. It was nerve-racking and nail-biting, but our team brought it home, and many congratulations once again to them.

Q4. [912012] **Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): When the Prime Minister made her first speech in Downing Street, she said she would fight against the burning injustices of inequality. Three years on, nothing has changed. As schools wind down for the summer holidays, many children will be excited about the fun and the joy to come, but thousands of families whose children receive free school meals will be worried about how they are even going to feed their children, let alone take them on holiday. If she wants a meaningful, lasting legacy, will she extend the holiday activity funding to ensure that all children who receive a free school meal during term time are fed in the holidays?

The Prime Minister: We had a successful £2 million programme in the summer of 2018, and this year we are more than quadrupling this funding. About 50,000 disadvantaged children in 11 local authority areas will be offered free meals and activities over the summer holidays. That is going to be funded by £9 million from the Department for Education. We had a good programme last year, and we are expanding that programme this year because we want to help children, wherever they are, receive the right support in school and out.

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): In the week when we celebrate the anniversary of man first walking on the moon, may I draw the Prime Minister's attention to the amazing space cluster that exists at Harwell in my constituency, with amazing companies such as Open Cosmos and Oxford Space Systems? In the last week of her premiership, could she have a conversation with the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy? If we can accelerate the decommissioning of the land at Harwell, we can really accelerate the success of this cluster? I will personally invite her back to inaugurate Theresa May Way, when this is done.

Mr Speaker: I am sure the Prime Minister is just beyond excited.

The Prime Minister: I was going to say, Mr Speaker, such temptation has been dangled before me, and I thank my right hon. Friend for it.

First, we are very pleased with the cluster in my right hon. Friend's constituency and the important role that that plays in our economy, in our research and our science development. The Business Secretary is in the Chamber and has heard the points my right hon. Friend has made about accelerating this process, and I am sure that the Business Department will look carefully at his request.

Q5. [912013] **Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab):** Passengers across the north of England are wondering which has been delayed the longest—the northern powerhouse, or their next train. Will the Prime Minister and her legendary Transport Secretary use their last few days in office to justify our endless waits for relic Pacer trains, while the “Northern Fail” franchise rewards incompetent bosses with £2 million pay packets, or will she finally agree with our plans to renationalise the railways and run them for the public good?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady talks about the northern powerhouse. The northern powerhouse is there: we are operating, we are putting in development and we are putting in funding to the northern powerhouse, including record levels of funding for transport across the north of England. That is the commitment this Government have made. We are not just using words; we are actually putting the money in. We are seeing a difference, and we are making a difference.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): Will the Prime Minister join me in congratulating Ian Jukes and our local community in Redditch for raising nearly £500,000 for the Rory the Robot appeal to fund the prostate surgery robot in Worcestershire? However, despite all the hard work by the Worcestershire Acute Hospitals NHS Trust, the specialist commissioners have not approved the business case yet. Will she use her legacy, in her last week, to help us sort this problem out?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend. I am very happy to congratulate Ian Jukes and all those who have been responsible for raising the money for—as I understand it—Rory the Robot. I am sitting two steps away from the International Development Secretary,

but I gather the reference my hon. Friend has made is to medical equipment. Obviously, I will look carefully at the point she has raised about the business case.

Q7. [912015] **Mr Virendra Sharma (Ealing, Southall) (Lab):** For the entirety of the Prime Minister's term of office, the UK has held to its 0.7% international aid commitment. Is the Prime Minister proud of this record, and will she use her powers and influence to ensure that the next Government hold not just to the letter but to the spirit of this commitment?

The Prime Minister: I thank the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue. I am indeed proud of the development aid the United Kingdom spends across the world and the role we play not just in helping some of the most vulnerable and poorest people around the world, but in dealing with issues as they arise, such as the Ebola outbreak in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The 0.7% of gross national income target is now in legislation and there was a commitment in the Conservative election manifesto to maintain it, so I am sure it will continue and that it will continue to be an important sign of what the Conservative party believes we should be doing: helping some of the most vulnerable and poorest people around the world.

Robert Halfon (Harlow) (Con): On Saturday, I met a group of residents in Harlow, many of them on Government Help to Buy schemes, who moved into homes built by Persimmon Homes that are shoddily built with severe damp and crumbling walls. In the eyes of my residents, Persimmon are crooks, cowboys and con artists. Will my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister hold the company to account, ensure that residents receive proper compensation, and urge the chief executive to come to Harlow to meet the families who have suffered so much? Persimmon Homes should not behave in this way.

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend raises a very important issue. As we increase the housing supply, it is important that the quality of new build homes continues to improve. We set out in our housing White Paper an ambition and a target of a housing market that works for everyone. We expect developers to deliver good-quality housing. We have already announced our intention for a new homes ombudsman to protect the rights of homebuyers and to hold developers to account. We expect all developers to build their homes to a good quality standard. These are homes that people will be living in for many years. They deserve those standards.

Q8. [912016] **John Spellar (Warley) (Lab):** All the major European industrial nations insist that ships for their navies are built in their own yards. As part of the Prime Minister's legacy, may I urge her to be a good European and follow their example, and instruct the Ministry of Defence to build its new support vessels in British yards, securing British jobs and using British steel?

The Prime Minister: As the right hon. Gentleman knows, this Government brought forward our shipbuilding strategy to ensure that we support and encourage shipbuilding around the United Kingdom. On the Royal Navy, I understand that the issue he raises relates to support ships. The MOD is looking at future provision and the building of those support ships. We maintain our position on building the ships of the Royal Navy.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): This weekend our sporting heroes, winners and losers, inspired a new generation. Science can also inspire. Sixty years ago, JFK electrified the world and united a divided and fearful nation with the inspiring Apollo moonshot programme, which also helped to defeat the Soviet Union and laid the foundations for US technology leadership. Will my right hon. Friend join me in saluting our pioneering scientist astronauts, Helen Sharman and Tim Peake, and agree with me that Brexit can and must be a moonshot moment for British science innovation to tackle global challenges?

The Prime Minister: I thank my hon. Friend for raising this issue. I am very happy to congratulate and salute our pioneering UK astronauts, Helen Sharman and Tim Peake. One of the first receptions I held in No. 10 Downing Street when I became Prime Minister was for Tim Peake, and it was inspiring to see how what he had done in space had encouraged young people in particular to develop an interest in space and science. We are global leader in science and innovation, and that will continue once we leave the European Union. Leaving the EU will open up opportunities for UK science and innovation to tackle global challenges.

Q9. [912017] **Chris Stephens** (Glasgow South West) (SNP): Tonight, campaigners will be meeting in Govan to discuss direct action against the Home Office contractor Serco, which intends to make 300 vulnerable asylum seekers homeless through its lock-change eviction programme. Many of those asylum seekers have outstanding claims and, as the Prime Minister will know, the Home Office can take 37 days to process section 4 support. Will she intervene, stop the evictions, prevent a homelessness crisis in Glasgow and respect live legal proceedings, so that the law can be clarified in this regard?

The Prime Minister: We are committed to providing asylum accommodation that is safe and secure. We take the wellbeing of asylum seekers and the local communities in which they live very seriously. Asylum seekers who would otherwise be destitute are provided with free, fully furnished accommodation while their applications are considered. We cover utility costs and provide a cash allowance to cover other essential living needs, but once a person's asylum claim is fully determined, their entitlement to that support will end. What I understand has been happening is that Serco has been providing accommodation at its own expense to over 300 people who are no longer eligible for such accommodation, either because they have been refused asylum or because they have been granted leave to remain and should move on to mainstream benefits and housing.

Jeremy Lefroy (Stafford) (Con): Last week, I had the honour of visiting the world's best transformer factory in Stafford, run by General Electric. It was constructing the first of 72 transformers to go to Iraq, and it is only able to do that through the support of UK Export Finance. Will my right hon. Friend congratulate me—[HON. MEMBERS: "Hear, hear!"] The last thing she should do is that, but will she congratulate UK Export Finance on backing British business?

The Prime Minister: I am very happy to congratulate my hon. Friend on all the work that he has done for his constituency and more widely. He is absolutely right:

UK Export Finance is an essential part of the Government support that can be provided to exporters. I am very pleased that the Department for International Trade has changed the rules to enable UK Export Finance to provide support for some smaller exporters, which has encouraged them. UKEF provides a vital role in our economy and our exporting around the world, and I am happy to congratulate it on the work that it does.

Mr Speaker: I am always happy to congratulate the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy), as others will, for one very good reason that the public should know: he invariably plays the ball rather than the man or the woman. He sticks to the arguments, and that is why he is respected not only by his constituents, but across the House.

11. [912019] **Patrick Grady** (Glasgow North) (SNP): On 26 June, this House agreed a Scottish National party resolution regretting that the Prime Minister's legacy will be the hostile environment. Yesterday, the all-party groups on Africa and Malawi published a report showing that structural failures in the visa system are continuing to perpetuate that hostile environment. How can her Government spend millions of pounds on a global marketing campaign saying that Britain is great when, for so many academics, artists and traders from Africa, Britain is closed?

The Prime Minister: Entry clearance officers consider applications for visitor visas with the utmost rigour, because our visas are an important way of securing our border and an effective tool for us in reducing illegal immigration, tackling organised crime and protecting national security. The hon. Gentleman references visas for people coming from the countries of Africa. The percentage of African nationals who saw their application granted is up by 4% on what it was 10 years ago and is only slightly below the average rate of the past 10 years. Visa applications from African nationals are at their highest level since 2013.

Mr Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): Three weeks ago, I was in New York for WorldPride—a celebration of equality and love, with 150,000 people marching down Fifth Avenue, cheered on by millions of people. Then we had Pride in London, and we will have lots of other Prides in towns and cities throughout the UK and Europe, but it is such a different story in so many other countries, where millions of people live in fear of prosecution and persecution. Commonwealth countries blame British legacy legislation. What message does the Prime Minister have for them to say that they can change their laws progressively and that everybody in their countries can live in equality, harmony and love?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. People will have seen a wonderful Pride parade here in London. I am only sorry that I was not able to be present at the Pride reception in No. 10 Downing Street, but I was pleased that people were hosted in No. 10 once again this year. He raises an important issue. It is one that I raised at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting last year, when I made it clear to countries in the Commonwealth that we want to see them introducing those progressive laws and changes in their legislation and, more than that, that we are willing to help them, provide support to them and

show them the legislation that we have used, so that they can adopt it and people can indeed live in true equality.

12. [912021] **Kirsty Blackman** (Aberdeen North) (SNP): The Prime Minister claims to care about people whose lives have been destroyed by modern slavery, and she claims that her work in this area will be part of her legacy. It is a legacy to be ashamed of, as *BuzzFeed News* has uncovered Home Office data showing that only 16 of 326 child victims of modern slavery had their discretionary leave visas approved in the 20 months to December 2018—refusing child trafficking victims safety. This cruel and callous hostile environment is the Prime Minister's legacy. Will she apologise or hang her head in shame?

The Prime Minister: We constantly look at how we can improve our response to modern slavery. I am very pleased that I had a meeting only a few days ago where I met many people involved in organisations that support victims of modern slavery; I met people involved in the prosecution of perpetrators of modern slavery; and I met parliamentarians who have been involved in the independent review of the Modern Slavery Act 2015. We are going to take on board most of the recommendations from that review. I make no apology for introducing the Modern Slavery Act. It was a Conservative Government who dealt with this issue, and we continue to deal with it. We took it seriously when other parties were not willing to do so.

Tom Pursglove (Corby) (Con): As a distinctly average cricketer who is fully aware of his limitations, I grew up dreaming of an England side lifting the cricket world cup in a Lord's final in front of a home crowd. How does my right hon. Friend believe we can maximise the opportunity of Sunday's incredible success to encourage the next generation to get involved and pick up a bat and ball?

The Prime Minister: So many people around the country have been engaged by and taken inspiration from the England cricket team's success. Crucially, a very significant number of children have also been introduced to the basics of cricket through the work on cricket in the streets. I want to cite a figure that I heard yesterday, but I do so with care: I think something like 1 million children have now seen cricket and been introduced to cricket as a result of the world cup tournament here in the UK. We must build on that for the future.

13. [912022] **Neil Gray** (Airdrie and Shotts) (SNP): Yesterday in Parliament, a young man named Adam, who has learning difficulties, spoke at the launch of a report from the Disability Benefits Consortium entitled "Has welfare become unfair". Adam told us about how, as a result of cuts to his benefit support, he has had to choose between paying to travel to his appointments and buying milk. What does the Prime Minister say to Adam, and how does she respond to the report, which says that disability benefits have been cut four times faster than others in the nine years for which she has been in government?

The Prime Minister: The Secretary of State has heard the specific case that the hon. Gentleman raises. The support that we have given to disabled people and people

with health conditions is at a record high, and spending on disability benefits will be higher in every year to 2023 than in 2010. We have also provided support for disabled people to get into the workplace, and we continue to do so. The number of disabled people in work has increased by almost 950,000 over the past five years.

Maggie Throup (Erewash) (Con): This year, the school sports premium is worth about half a million pounds to primary schools across my constituency. It has been a key driver in helping more children to establish healthier lifestyles, which we hope they will continue into adulthood. Will my right hon. Friend join me in encouraging the Government to look closely at extending this funding beyond 2020 to help even more children to become healthier for life and to inspire some of those young people to become our world cup winners of the future?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has raised an important issue. We all recognise the importance of sport in schools, and the sport action plan has an aspiration for every child to get 60 minutes of sport and activity a day. That is why on Monday we published a cross-government school sport action plan, which will be taken forward. This is an issue that Conservatives in government have taken very seriously. We have put in the PE and sport premium, which will continue in the 2019-20 academic year. Future questions about spending will be for the spending review, but I think she can take it that Conservatives in government will continue their commitment to ensuring that young people in this country have a healthy lifestyle.

14. [912023] **John Mc Nally** (Falkirk) (SNP): May I ask the Prime Minister about some day-to-day post-Brexit issues? Scotland's seafood industry fears that transport delays, new tariffs and taxes will put it on an uneven playing field in relation to its European counterparts. Can the Prime Minister tell us how the UK Government will support and protect this high-value industry when it faces product loss, owing to delays that will certainly lead to soaring insurance premiums and thresholds?

The Prime Minister: I can tell the hon. Gentleman that we take industry throughout the United Kingdom very seriously. He has referred to the issue of Brexit and leaving the European Union. A deal was negotiated that would have protected jobs and industry across the UK, but, sadly, he and others in the House chose not to support it. I continue to believe that the best way forward for industries in his constituency and throughout the UK is for us to leave the European Union, and to do so with a good deal.

Jack Brereton (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Con): Figures published yesterday show that wages are rising faster than inflation, which means that there is more money in the pockets of hard-working people in Stoke-on-Trent. May I thank my right hon. Friend for the actions that her Government have been taking to help families with the cost of living—reducing taxes on income, increasing the national living wage and extending the fuel duty freeze?

The Prime Minister: That is indeed good news. Yesterday's employment figures were also good news, showing that more people are in work than ever before. I am pleased that we have been able to help working people with their

finances. We have done that through the national living wage; we have done it by cutting taxes; and we have done it by freezing fuel duty. For the lowest paid, the national living wage and the cuts in taxes mean that they take home £4,500 more than they did under the last Labour Government.

Kerry McCarthy (Bristol East) (Lab): At Prime Minister's Questions on 26 June, I was pleased to hear the Prime Minister express sympathy for my 18-year-old constituent Jake Ogborne, who has spinal muscular atrophy. In May, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence posted a press release saying that the drug Spinraza would be made available to SMA patients—the clear implication was that it would be made available to them all—only for Jake to have his hopes cruelly dashed when

he was told that he was just outside the hitherto unmentioned eligibility criteria. This is a young man whose future is at stake. The Prime Minister said on that occasion that she would follow up the case. May I ask her if she has yet managed to do so?

The Prime Minister: I do not have a response to the specific case that the hon. Lady has raised again today, but I will ensure that she receives a response before I leave office.

Rachel Maclean (Redditch) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: Points of order come after urgent questions, of which there are three.

Police Surveillance of Journalists

12.48 pm

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department to make a statement on the Home Office's policy on police surveillance of journalists.

The Minister for Policing and the Fire Service (Mr Nick Hurd): It cannot be said often enough that the Government are committed to protecting the free press and freedom of expression in this country. The Government agree—indeed, they forcefully advocate—that confidential journalistic material and journalists' interaction with their sources must be protected. However, that does not mean that journalists should receive blanket protection from legitimate investigation simply because of their chosen profession. Our security and intelligence and law enforcement agencies will, in very limited circumstances, have a legitimate need to investigate a journalist or that journalist's source, but there need to be protections in that regard.

We believe that the Investigatory Powers Act 2016 provides strong protections in relation to the use of investigatory powers for the purpose of identifying or confirming a journalistic source and for the obtaining of confidential journalistic information. This ensures that protections are applied where they are required and that those who commit a crime or pose a threat to national security can be investigated regardless of their chosen profession, and it does so in a way that is compatible with all our ECHR obligations.

For example, where a targeted communications data authorisation under part 3 of the Act is made with the purpose of identifying or confirming a source of journalistic information, section 77 of the Act requires that, other than in threat-to-life situations, the authorisation must be approved by a judicial commissioner before it can take effect. In deciding whether to approve such an authorisation the judicial commissioner must have regard to the public interest in protecting the sources of journalistic information and the need for there to be another overriding public interest before a relevant public authority seeks to identify a source.

The codes of practice under the Act provide detailed and extensive guidance to public authorities when applying the powers in the Act, including extensive guidance on when those safeguards should be applied.

Mr Davis: One of the worst things a Government can do to damage democracy is to undermine the freedom of the press. In the past week, there have been numerous press reports of the police using

“the full force of the state”

to pin down the source of the recent leak of diplomatic telegrams. According to the reports this includes analysing mobile phone data in journalists' phones, including location data showing everywhere they had been in the previous weeks. If true, this would be an astonishing intrusion on press freedom, because it puts at risk every confidential source they have, not just the one the police might be looking for.

Since the successful court case brought by the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Tom Watson) and myself against the Government, the Data Retention

and Investigatory Powers Act 2014 has been tightened up. Journalists get particular protection under it, and there are only two ways such intrusive surveillance could be legally carried out. One is for the police to have obtained a warrant on national security grounds, in effect. Given the fact that the Government did not even use the DA, or defence advisory notice, procedure to stop publication of the telegram—they did not even use the procedure available to them—it is very unlikely that such a warrant would have been granted or such an agreement have been given by a commissioner. The other way is for one of the state agencies—the secret agencies—to have obtained the data. Given that the leak was embarrassing, but not a threat to national security, this also seems unlikely.

So can the Minister reassure the House that these intrusive surveillance techniques were not used against journalists in this case and that they would never be used unless there was either a serious crime or a real and serious threat to national security?

Mr Hurd: My right hon. Friend is a long-standing champion of civil liberties and press freedom; in fact, there is probably no greater one in this House, and I am grateful to him for the UQ and the opportunity to place on record again—because, as I said, this cannot be said often enough—the Government's absolute commitment to protect the freedom of the press. That is a cornerstone of our democratic processes, and he has heard that from the Prime Minister, the two men who want to be the next Prime Minister, the Home Secretary and anyone else at a microphone; that is entirely sincere.

My right hon. Friend is also quite right to point out that the Investigatory Powers Act has been subject to a tightening-up process, in large part stimulated by the promptings of himself and colleagues. The point I was trying to stress in my remarks is that we do believe—although this is being challenged and will continue to be challenged by people who take a different view—that the safeguards and protections in place and what our security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies are required to go through in terms of, for example, seeking a targeted communications data authorisation are extremely stringent.

As my right hon. Friend said, authorisations in this case need to be approved by a judicial commissioner. A Government of any colour need to be subject to scrutiny and challenge on the robustness of these approaches. I am not going to comment on the specific case; I am here simply to set out the process in relation to the protections that my right hon. Friend and others quite rightly seek to be reassured by, and I hope that I have done so.

Afzal Khan (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): Press freedom is an integral part of democracy. We do not have too much freedom of the press in this country; we have too little. Can it be right that the press is threatened for publishing material that is in the public interest? The illegality in leaking the British ambassador to Washington's thoughts may be tested in the courts, so I shall be cautious about any remarks on that, but surely it cannot be illegal to publish those remarks simply because they are the cause of embarrassment to the Government. Surely, it cannot be right that scanning technology is being used against journalists to investigate the leak. Is it open to the Home Secretary to issue guidance to

[Afzal Khan]

police forces on this matter, to ensure that there is not now or in the future this trawling of journalists' phones, laptops and other devices?

In another case earlier this month, the Belfast High Court declared that the warrants authorising the search and arrest of two documentary filmmakers were unlawful and that everything seized from the filmmakers must be returned. The filmmakers had previously released a documentary about a mass killing in Northern Ireland for which no one has ever been charged, "No Stone Unturned." The Belfast High Court was surely right, but this case highlights the need for greater judicial oversight of the police and the security services, especially in their dealings with the press.

Mr Hurd: I am sure the hon. Gentleman will want to make it clear on behalf of the Opposition that they entirely support the police having the ability to get on with their work and identify the leaker. The police certainly have our full support on that, because those leaks should not have happened and they have been damaging. I am sure everyone wants to see the leaker identified.

The hon. Gentleman will also I am sure, having done his homework, be aware of what the Official Secrets Act 1989 says, in particular section 5, and that is how the law stands at the moment, but what is critical—I am delighted to come to the House again to make this clear—is that in going about their business on our behalf, the security, intelligence and law enforcement agencies need to jump through some very significant hoops and go through very robust processes, including, as I have stated, when they seek a targeted communications data authorisation approval by a judicial commissioner before it can take effect. We are satisfied—but this must always be open to challenge—that those processes, safeguards and checks and balances are robust.

We operate in a vibrant democracy, and we in this place always in my experience have vigorous debates about these balances and the need for safeguards. We have debates about pushing back the powers of our law enforcement agencies—whereas in other countries those debates do not take place—and that is a symbol and sign of the health of our democracy. I am sure that at the end of this UQ, we and the watching public will be in no doubt about this House's commitment to the freedom of the press.

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): I commend the Government on the organisation of last week's excellent global media freedom conference, but does the Minister agree that the UK needs to do a lot more to improve on our present ranking of 33 in the world press freedom index? Does he also recognise that the concerns expressed by my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) make that harder to achieve and that these concerns risk being exploited by other countries who do not protect media freedom and are only too keen to lock up journalists?

Mr Hurd: I accept all that, coming from the authority of a highly distinguished former Secretary of State. I am entirely sincere, as are my colleagues, in taking this opportunity to reassert the importance of the freedom

of the press and the protection of media freedoms, but we cannot in that process allow any sense that there is a blanket protection for legitimate investigation simply because of someone's chosen profession. The processes need to be robust and open to criticism and debate, but the primacy of the free press and freedom of expression in this country is absolutely central to our democratic processes.

Joanna Cherry (Edinburgh South West) (SNP): I congratulate the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) on securing this question. It is indeed ironic that we are discussing these matters the week after the British Government hosted the first global conference on media freedom. The Foreign Secretary has spoken about convening a panel of experts to advise countries on how to strengthen the legal protection of journalists. On the evidence of some of the statements made over the past few days, the convener of that panel might be best advised to start close to home.

The Scottish National party has made it clear that we deplore diplomatic leaks as unacceptable and that they should be investigated. However, in times of crisis we need to remember that we must uphold human rights, and particularly press freedom. I wonder whether there were any official secrets in the ambassador's leaked comments. After all, it is hardly a secret that Donald Trump is inept, and the police really ought to understand that the Official Secrets Act 1989 is not there to protect the Government from embarrassment. I am sure that they do understand that, but if they do not, I am sure that they will be reminded by those who give them legal advice. Will the Minister tell the House who escalated these investigations to the police, and why? Was it Downing Street, as some newspapers have reported? If an offence has been committed and the police are to be involved, would they not be better employed catching the leaker rather than shooting the messenger?

Mr Hurd: The hon. and learned Lady is right to echo what my right hon. Friend the Member for Haltemprice and Howden said earlier, and it is something to be proud of that a British Foreign Secretary has chosen the championing of media freedom as one of his core campaigns and chosen to take that message around the world. The Official Secrets Act is not there to protect the Government from embarrassment; it is there for all the reasons that we know. My desire is for the police to be able to get on with their job and identify the leaker. That is their primary objective.

Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con): May I add a little more to the point that has just been made? Why were the police brought in? As a former journalist of some 17 years, I know that journalists rely on sources to give the news to the public. Let us face it, there have been leaks before and there will be leaks in the future, and this leak was embarrassing but it was nothing to do with the defence of our country. If the police are to be called in every time there is a leak, every journalist in the country is going to fear that their newsroom will be full of officers in blue every time a story with the potential to hurt someone in power is published.

Mr Hurd: I understand the point my hon. Friend is making, and I understand that the comments from the Met have generated ripples, but this was a serious leak

and it is entirely appropriate that the police should look at it seriously. I hope he will support me in wishing them every success in doing their job, which is to find the leaker. I do not interpret what has been said as anything other than a clarification of the law as it stands, and I hope that he will join me in my determination to identify the source of this damaging leak.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): There is a big difference between the targeted collection of evidence in the pursuit of serious criminal offences and a fishing expedition in which Government embarrassment is a factor. This seems rather too near to the second of those. Never mind journalists—the general public are concerned about the way in which the state and other agencies are now able to collect data on them. Should we not be on the public's side? Should not the Government be publishing information, in readable and accessible form, on people's rights to privacy and on the right of the state to intrude on them?

Mr Hurd: I am all for more transparency, and I hope we are all on the side of upholding the law. What I have been trying to set out, in what I hope is a reassuring way, is that there are robust safeguards in place for when our law enforcement agencies seek specific powers. The guidance and the codes around that are explicit and extensive in regard to protecting journalists.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): I thank my right hon. Friend for the answers he has given thus far. The balance between the duties of the police and the freedom of the press is clearly vital, but can he reassure the House that the police are not interpreting their role in a widespread manner and therefore snooping on journalists who have nothing whatsoever to do with the investigation of this particular leak?

Mr Hurd: I thank my hon. Friend and parliamentary neighbour for his question. I have absolutely no evidence to suggest that what he fears is the case. I wholly endorse the very focused police effort in this specific investigation to identify the leaker.

Peter Kyle (Hove) (Lab): I was on the Investigatory Powers Bill Committee, and one of the most contentious areas of debate in that period was public interest. When the Judicial Commissioner makes a judgment based on public interest, what do the Minister and his Department do to ensure that that interpretation is the correct one and that it is appropriate to the time and accountable to this House?

Mr Hurd: There is a great deal of guidance around this subject, but the hon. Gentleman is right and I thank him for his work on that scrutiny. I am happy to repeat the point that, in deciding whether to approve an authorisation—for example, a targeted communications data authorisation—the Judicial Commissioner must have regard to

“the public interest in protecting a source of journalistic information, and...the need for there to be another overriding public interest before a relevant public authority seeks to identify or confirm a source of journalistic information.”

That is explicit.

Chi Onwurah (Newcastle upon Tyne Central) (Lab): The Minister must surely agree that part of the problem is the application of technology, particularly automation, to police powers without appropriate protections or even public debate. We might understand the need for a particular warrant for specific documents in the case of criminal activity, but the automated blanket trawling of all emails, locations and conversations for all journalists is clearly inappropriate. It is not only journalists who could be targeted; the rest of us also deserve protection from digital surveillance, video and voice recognition. Does the Minister agree that we need a charter of digital rights for all of us, as Labour is advocating?

Mr Hurd: If the hon. Lady is talking specifically about the examination of data under a bulk acquisition warrant, I would again point to the whole set of codes, guidance, processes and safeguards that relate to that. If she is talking about the broader issue around the application of technology and artificial intelligence to the working of our law enforcement agencies, she is entirely right to suggest that, as we stand on the brink of a revolution in what technology can enable our law enforcement agencies to do, we as citizens need to feel comfortable and confident with that, and that we need to have the appropriate legal and regulatory environment for it, which is what we believe we have.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Mr Newlands, I thought you were seeking to take part in the debate.

Gavin Newlands (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (SNP): I would be delighted to take part, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: You are on my list as someone who was interested in doing so, but perhaps you were resting your knee muscles.

Gavin Newlands: I certainly was, Mr Speaker, but I was going to bob up again in a second. I am grateful for your observation.

I was also on the Investigatory Powers Bill Committee. During the progress of that Bill, the then Solicitor General, the hon. and learned Member for South Swindon (Robert Buckland), said:

“We are absolutely committed to the preservation and protection of a free press and freedom of expression in our democratic society. That includes the ability of sources to provide anonymous information to journalists, which is absolutely vital if we are to have throughput of important information that needs to be in the public domain.”—[*Official Report, Investigatory Powers Public Bill Committee*, 12 April 2016; c. 193.]

Given the events of recent days, can the Minister tell me what has changed in Government policy?

Mr Hurd: I hope the hon. Gentleman's knees are all right.

I honestly do not think that there has been a change in policy, and I have set out the processes around the Investigatory Powers Act, which he and other colleagues helped to shape and toughen. He will know better than me that those processes are now robust, and the police are complying with them.

Christine Jardine (Edinburgh West) (LD): I thank the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) for bringing this vital matter to the House's attention. The Minister has said on more than one occasion that, while he values press freedom, an individual should not have protection from legitimate inquiry simply because of the profession they chose. However, the very purpose of the journalistic profession is to scrutinise Government and to ensure that human rights are adhered to and that Government procedures are followed. Does the Minister therefore accept that we need something from the Government to ensure that, given advances in scanning and tracking technology, journalists are protected when providing that valuable public service?

Mr Hurd: Journalists provide an incredibly important service in our democracy, and I have been entirely sincere in everything that I have said. I am sure that the hon. Lady is not suggesting that someone should be above the law or receive blanket protection from legitimate investigation in limited circumstances simply because they are a journalist. The right processes, safeguards and checks and balances need to be in place. Frankly, we need the right challenge on law enforcement agencies when they seek authorisations to pursue investigations. I have set out what is in the Investigatory Powers Act, which I believe is a robust process.

Peter Grant (Glenrothes) (SNP): The problem is that the police and security services were given these powers to allow them to prevent and detect serious crime, but there is absolutely no suggestion that those now being put under random widespread surveillance committed a crime. If a crime has been committed, it was committed either by a civil servant or a Member of Parliament. We obviously cannot know for certain whether the reports referred to by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis) have any accuracy to them, but if they do, they point to the police using their powers not to prevent serious crime, but to intimidate and harass journalists, whose job it is to hold the police and us to account. Will the Minister undertake to carry out a review, reporting in Privy Council terms if necessary, into the Met Police's actions, so that this Parliament can be the final arbiter of whether the powers that we agreed to give to the police are being abused?

Mr Hurd: It is wrong for the House, and certainly for Ministers, to speculate on the outcome of this particular investigation. We need to let the police get on with their work, but they and others will have heard clearly the House's messages of concern. I return to the fact that this Parliament has set up a robust process of checks and balances on the police.

Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe

1.12 pm

Tulip Siddiq (Hampstead and Kilburn) (Lab): To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs to provide an update on the case of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe.

The Minister for the Middle East (Dr Andrew Murrison): Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe's family have told us that she was admitted to a psychiatric ward in the Imam Khomeini public hospital on Monday. Her family have yet to be allowed to visit her or to make a phone call. We are lobbying the Iranian authorities to ensure that her family are able to visit as soon as possible, as well as continuing to lobby for consular access, so that we can check on her care as a matter of urgency. We remain in close contact with her family in Tehran and with Richard Ratcliffe in London.

The Foreign Secretary spoke to the Iranian Foreign Minister on Saturday 13 July and raised Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe's case and those of other dual nationals detained in Iran. The Foreign Secretary made it clear, as he has in public, that innocent people in prison must not be used as diplomatic leverage and called for their release. I also raised the case on a recent visit to Iran. The Foreign Secretary exercised diplomatic protection in March 2019, and we will continue to do all we can to reunite Nazanin and her family. The Government lobby strongly on the behalf of all our dual national cases, including Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe, at the highest levels. The welfare of British nationals in detention is a high priority for us. We have made it clear that Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe must be treated humanely and in line with international standards and norms.

If I can say something on a personal note as a parent, this case has rightly gripped the hearts of the British people. I hope that this development is the first step towards a brighter future for Nazanin and her family. I hope that Iran will be generous and humane in their approach to this family, who have been separated for far too long, that we can rely on elements within Iran that we know are decent and civilised, that they will apply international norms and behaviours in respect of this sad case, and that Nazanin and her family can be brought together as soon as possible.

Tulip Siddiq: Mr Speaker, thank you for granting this urgent question and for taking the time to visit Richard Ratcliffe, Nazanin's husband, while he was on hunger strike outside the Iranian embassy two weeks ago. Indeed, I thank the more than 100 Members of this House who visited Richard, sending a strong message to Iran that while it may continue to abuse Nazanin's human rights, we will be listening and protecting her. I am pleased to say that Richard is in the Gallery today.

I sought this urgent question because my constituent's plight is urgent and desperate. On Monday, handcuffed and shackled at the ankles, Nazanin was taken from her cell in Evin prison to a psychiatric ward in the Imam Khomeini hospital in Tehran. The reason for the move has not been made clear to her family or her lawyers. She has not been allowed to update her family by phone or by visit, and we have no idea how she is being treated. Her family have been shut out, her ward sealed off, and

the Iranian Revolutionary Guards are not allowing any human contact. The family fear that she is being drugged or tortured and may be forced to sign a confession to unnamed crimes.

Nazanin is a young mother from West Hampstead. She was on holiday in Iran when she was abducted and illegally imprisoned, spending many months in solitary confinement before her family was allowed to visit. She has lost three years of her life to this hell, and with her sentence having been increased due to extra charges brought against her, her future seems bleak.

With all that in mind, what urgent steps are the Government taking to establish what treatment Nazanin is receiving? What protests have the Government made regarding the fact that Nazanin was shackled like a caged animal on her way to receiving urgent medical care? The Government have offered Nazanin diplomatic protection—the first such case in 100 years—and have escalated her case to a country-to-country dispute, for which we and her family are grateful. What further steps have the Government taken to secure Nazanin's freedom?

Finally, a week ago, the Royal Marines impounded the Iranian tanker *Grace 1* off the coast of Gibraltar. What is the Minister's assessment of the Iranian Supreme Leader comments that Iran's

"committed forces will not leave this evil without a response"?

Does he share my concern that that retribution may be targeted at Nazanin? I ask those questions not because I doubt the current Foreign Secretary's sincerity when he says that he cares about my constituent's freedom—I know that he has made time to meet Nazanin's husband and family and has spoken to me as well—but because the time for sentiment is over. This situation has gone on for too long, and we need decisive action right now.

Dr Murrison: The hon. Lady's question and the way in which she has put her remarks today do her great credit, and the work she does for her constituent is admirable.

We are, of course, seeking consular access. We have sought consular access from the beginning of this case. We believe that, as circumstances have changed, consular access now needs to be granted urgently. More importantly, we want to ensure that Nazanin gets access to her family. The hon. Lady will be in contact with the family, as are we, and it is the best way we have of determining Nazanin's status right now. Indeed, it would be cruel to deny this lady, in a psychiatric ward of a public hospital, access to her family, which must happen immediately.

I deplore the maltreatment of prisoners, wherever it occurs. The hon. Lady's description is completely unacceptable, and it is completely contrary to any international norms. She will understand that the Iranian system is multifarious, and we are concerned about exactly who is controlling the situation as far as Nazanin is concerned. I appeal to the better nature of people in Tehran to do what is right for Nazanin—that is vital.

The hon. Lady touches on *Grace 1*, and she will anticipate my answer, which is that this is primarily a matter for the Gibraltar authorities, who are exercising a matter of law under EU sanctions. I do not believe the two cases are directly linked. However, we certainly need to ensure there is de-escalation in relation to our interaction with Iran, in Gibraltar and in the Gulf.

When I visited Tehran recently, de-escalation was absolutely my message. Were we to approach something that looks like normality in relation to our access to this particular piece, all sorts of things would be possible.

I sincerely urge our interlocutors in Tehran to approach this on the basis of decency and humanity so that Nazanin can be given the treatment that she undoubtedly requires, but in a proper setting and using proper norms and practices.

Bob Blackman (Harrow East) (Con): Two weeks ago I was humbled to host a conference on human rights in Iran, and Richard Ratcliffe was one of the speakers. He said that all he wanted was for his wife to be returned so they can be a family again. We also heard from the UN rapporteur on human rights in Iran, who talked about the widespread human rights abuses in Iran. This weekend I was at a conference where I heard at first hand the human rights abuses that many people have suffered in Iran.

Can my right hon. Friend therefore outline the action we can take, as a country, to restore Nazanin to her family? The reality is that the Iranians only understand one thing, which is firmness, and we are currently seen not to be taking a firm enough stance.

Dr Murrison: My hon. Friend will understand that the tools in our toolbox are somewhat limited. Iran is an independent and proud nation that has its own view of its place in the world, and it requires us to show some respect, but we need to deplore the things it is doing in respect of the victims of human rights abuses, which are particularly acute in Iran.

The UK Government clearly use every opportunity to impress upon Iran how unsatisfactory we regard its approach to human rights to be. However, we also need to ensure that Nazanin comes home, which is our principal priority in this matter. I appeal to Iran, not least because its reputation in this country is being severely damaged, to do the decent thing.

Iran must look at this in a sympathetic light and do what is right, proper and humane in respect of Nazanin, particularly as she has now been moved to the Imam Khomeini Hospital, where she is being treated. We want to know how she is being treated, and whether she is being given the right treatment and in what context. Above all, she must have access to her family, but she must also have consular access, through which we will be able to make a better judgment on where we are.

Emily Thornberry (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. I not only congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) on securing it, but join the Minister in applauding and thanking her on behalf of the whole House for the outstanding passion and persistence she has brought to the fight for Nazanin's freedom—she is an outstanding Back Bencher.

For all of us who have taken part in this fight, and for all of us who visited Richard Ratcliffe during his recent hunger strike outside the Iranian embassy, the developments we have seen over the past 24 hours are deeply troubling. The fact that Nazanin is back under the control of the Revolutionary Guard, being held in isolation and denied

[Emily Thornberry]

access to consular staff and to her father, has rightly raised concern that she may be being pressed to sign a false confession.

We all know that the hard-line theocrats around Khamenei who have been responsible for Nazanin's arrest and detention, and her appalling treatment in custody, do not care about the truth of Nazanin's case, the reality of her innocence or the mental and physical cruelty that has been inflicted on her. They care only about exploiting her and lying about her to support their doctrine of embattlement and isolationism, and to undermine the Rouhani Government's strategy of engagement. They are the same individuals who have revelled in the collapse of the Iranian nuclear deal, and who are wilfully risking conflict with their actions in the Strait of Hormuz. On a practical level, can the Minister tell us today what is being done to engage with the figures around Khamenei, not just the Rouhani Government, on Nazanin's case?

Finally, on a wider level, does the Minister agree with the veteran BBC correspondent John Simpson, a man with better insight than most of us put together on matters of diplomacy and foreign policy, that there are two villains in this terrible situation? As John tweeted this morning, Nazanin is both

"the victim of a campaign by political extremists in Iran, and of the carelessness of @BorisJohnson as foreign secretary."

Does the Minister agree with that verdict, and will he condemn the former Foreign Secretary—our next Prime Minister—for handing Iran's hard-liners their biggest excuse, their biggest piece of propaganda, to justify this horrific injustice to one of our own citizens?

Dr Murrison: The right hon. Lady has elegantly dissected the Iranian state in a very few minutes, and she probably puts her finger on it. Of course, anybody with any experience of Iran will know that there are many Irans, as I touched on in my opening remarks.

We are, of course, concerned by any access that the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps has to this particular case. I would say, though, that the IRGC does care about its reputation. It certainly cares about its country's reputation, and so does the supreme leader. That reputation hangs in the balance.

The generosity and humanity with which Iran has historically been associated would be amply demonstrated if Iran were to do the right thing in respect of Nazanin. I urge it to do that, if not on Nazanin's behalf, on behalf of Iran's reputation, which is rightly important to it.

The right hon. Lady asks how close we are to the supreme leader and, again, she well knows, because she is a student of these things, that access to the supreme leader is exceptionally difficult. We have spoken to President Rouhani, and we routinely engage with our ministerial interlocutors, Minister Zarif and, in my case, Minister Araghchi, and we will continue to do so.

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Iran, of course, is somewhat separate from the IRGC, and it is important to reiterate that we are ensuring the IRGC gets the message that the eyes of the world are on Iran in respect of this case and, if it continues to behave in this way, it will trample all over the good opinion that international observers might have, even now, of Iran—it will do Iran and its people no good at all.

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): I, too, congratulate the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn on securing the urgent question and you on granting it, Mr Speaker. She and the family will know that they have the full support and solidarity of Scottish National party Members. It was indeed a privilege when I met Richard when he was campaigning outside the Iranian embassy, as did many of my colleagues, including our leader, my right hon. Friend the Member for Ross, Skye and Lochaber (Ian Blackford).

This move into hospital is a worrying turn of events, which raises serious questions about Nazanin's wellbeing and a particular concern about the risk of her being forced into signing some kind of false confession. So, as other Members are asking, are the UK Government satisfied that they are exhausting every possible avenue to rectify this situation? What is the point of diplomatic protection if it cannot prevent this kind of development? Will the Minister state unequivocally that the UK Government's commitment to freeing Nazanin goes beyond any particular set of personnel or Ministers, and that freeing Nazanin must be a top priority for the next Prime Minister, whoever that might be?

Dr Murrison: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that. Nazanin has been transferred to a public hospital. Nazanin certainly does need medical treatment, and we have been calling for that for a very long time. If she does not get the treatment she requires, if she is abused in hospital or if the purpose of transferring her to hospital is to abuse her further than has been the case already, that would be a cause for utter condemnation, as would any forced confession. We have flagged that up pretty well today. In the event that a confession is obtained from Nazanin, the international community is perfectly entitled to question it, to put it mildly.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to establish the top priorities of the incoming Prime Minister. He can be sure that, one way or the other, Nazanin will be at the forefront of the mind of whoever is successful in this contest next week.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr Speaker: Order. Further exchanges will unfold, but at this point I would like to say that all Members who visited you, Richard, when you were outside the Iranian embassy on your hunger strike will have regarded it as a great personal privilege and honour to have done so. Although people tend courteously to say, "It is good of this Member or that Member to find the time in a busy schedule", I do not think we view it in those terms. As I say, we saw it as an honour to visit you. I am going to say to you very publicly what I have said to others and what I said to you: I was struck by your extraordinary stoicism and forbearance, a standard to which, in such circumstances, any of us could aspire but, I suspect, none of us would attain. It really was a very humbling experience. In my case, of course, I had the pleasure of not only meeting and engaging with you for the first time, but meeting your sister and your mum to boot. I want you and all of your family, and your precious daughter, to know that you will never be forgotten. The Minister has treated of these matters already in the most sensitive terms, as have other colleagues. For as long as it is necessary for this matter to be raised, as it

has been by the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn, with persistence and passion, it will be raised. This matter, the Iranians need to know, will not go away until mother and daughter, mother and wife and husband, are reconciled so that they can live as one.

I also want to mention what I have just been told by the hon. Member for Neath (Christina Rees), which is that 13 of her constituents, 13 wonderful women, who, it is said, wholly implausibly to me, are of an average age of 80—I cannot see any such people in the Gallery—have made a special visit to the House today to observe our proceedings. They, together with everybody else, should be warmly welcomed. I hope you are witnessing the House at its best, treating of an extremely serious matter, on a cross-party basis, because it is not about party politics; it is about humanity and the requirement for the display of humanity in the conduct of public affairs.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): First, I congratulate the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn on securing this urgent question and on the powerful way in which she has been an advocate for Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, her constituent. I thank the Minister for his efforts and those of the current Foreign Secretary in trying to secure Nazanin's release. We can only imagine the anguish caused by the way in which this mother is separated from her daughter, and we hope this can be swiftly resolved so that the family can be reunited. What can the Minister do to bring that about? I also want to ask him about the wider issue of the disturbing trend of Iran arresting people on trumped up charges, with them effectively becoming hostages to geopolitical disputes they have nothing to do with. That behaviour is entirely unacceptable as a tactic. As the Minister says, it risks huge reputational damage to the state, so what more can this Government, perhaps through the auspices of the United Nations, do to raise that wider issue, and to crystallise to the Iranian state and any others that wish to undertake this tactic that it is counterproductive and not acceptable?

Dr Murrison: We have made it very clear that this is not acceptable, to put it mildly. I do not think the international community can be left in any doubt as to the importance we place on this and the views of like-minded countries in respect of it. I appeal to Iran just to consider what this is doing to its reputation. Nazanin has been wrongly imprisoned. She has been maltreated in an extremely serious way, as have her family. The right thing to do now is to reunite her with her family, as a minimum, to ensure that they have immediate access to Nazanin and that they are able to make phone calls to her, so that we can try to get to the bottom of exactly what is happening and whether she is getting the treatment we have long been calling for. Of course, other issues prey on the minds of those in the UN right now in respect of Iran, and its behaviour and destabilising actions in the wider Gulf region, and I rather suspect that in further questioning this morning we might return to those.

Catherine West (Hornsey and Wood Green) (Lab): I thank the Minister in advance of tomorrow's meeting with me on behalf of a constituent who is in a similar position to Nazanin. On the wider implications question, is there any movement on the issue of the deal and the

notion that the European Union could help with the INSTEX—Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges—approach in providing some kind of outlet for some of this frustration, so that there is a way for Iran to fix some of its economic problems and therefore have more of a dialogue with countries such as the UK?

Dr Murrison: I thank the hon. Lady for her question and I look forward to meeting her tomorrow. I hope that the JCPOA—Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action—is capable of being advanced; I hope that we are not seeing the end of it. It is a credible mechanism for encouraging Iran to trade properly with the west, and a lot falls from that. She will know that the special purpose vehicle, INSTEX, created by the E3, which was discussed by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary with our interlocutors at the Foreign Affairs Council on Monday, is about to go live. I discussed it when I was in Tehran recently with my interlocutors. They have a sense of frustration in respect of this needing to be up and running, so that we can start doing business through it and they can get some of what they want, based around the necessities of daily life, which people in Iran at the moment are being deprived of because of sanctions. I am hopeful that this will work and that in the next few days and very few weeks INSTEX will be up and running. Iran will therefore see that good behaviour can be rewarded and in the fullness of time this can be used to perhaps reintroduce, in a small way, Iran to a proper international discourse and dialogue, which at the moment I am afraid is severely bruised.

Richard Graham (Gloucester) (Con): I think you, Mr Speaker, spoke for many of us, if not all, who visited Richard Ratcliffe during his hunger strike and met possibly even more of his family than you did—I think his brother was there on the day I was there. I thank the Minister for the tone he has adopted in tackling this issue, and I obviously congratulate Nazanin's Member of Parliament, the hon. Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq), on raising the issue again.

Surely the difficulty is that this case is wrapped up in a complicated scenario that involves so many different things that have nothing to do with the particular issues that Mrs Ratcliffe's case involves. My right hon. Friend the Minister will of course know that she is not the only British prisoner currently in Iran, nor are there only British prisoners in Iranian jails. Will he confirm that, in respect of the widest possible issue, the way in which some elements in Iran appear to be damaging that country's reputation—not just with us but with other countries—by using hostages as a sort of political weapon is very sadly letting down Iran's reputation around the world?

Dr Murrison: I entirely agree with my hon. Friend. He refers to other dual nationals whom we are concerned about; we have to be a little careful, because not all the families of those dual nationals seek to advance cases publicly, and we must be led by them and their desires in how we approach this issue. It is a sensitive and individual matter, and we need to ensure that our approach to each of those cases is bespoke. That is what we will continue to do.

On Iran's overall reputation not only in this country but in other countries, because this will involve other countries, too, I would say that now is the time to take a different approach to this particular case. It is very

[*Dr Murrison*]

high-profile—much more so than the other cases we are currently dealing with—and if Iran can make progress with this case in the way I have described, its reputation, which is sadly not great among the international community at the moment, will improve significantly. It can do itself a whole lot of good by adopting a far more positive and humane approach to this particular case, and I urge it to do so.

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): Occasionally, people say, “What do MPs actually do for the money we spend on them?” May I say that this is exactly what MPs should be doing? I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) on continually raising this case. I, too, had the privilege of spending time with Richard and his mum and sister. After speaking to them, I can only understand that every hour that goes by when your child is separated from you, undergoing who knows what, must feel like a week.

The Minister has given a reasoned and determined reply to the urgent question. Will he reassure us that the changes at the very top—in respect of the Prime Minister—will not affect his Department’s determination? Will he reassure us that, with the long recess approaching, work will continue at the pace at which he wishes it to?

Dr Murrison: I thank the hon. Lady for her comments. I do not anticipate moving—touch wood—and she can be absolutely sure that this issue is right at the top of my list of priorities. Like the Vicar of Bray, come what may I hope very much that I will be here ensuring that this remains absolutely top priority, along with other dual national cases. For the reasons I have described, this case has particular poignancy, and the hon. Lady can be sure that I will continue to do what I can with my Iranian interlocutors to bring it to a satisfactory conclusion.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I am not sure that the Vicar of Bray is the right person to cite, because he changed his religion whenever the regime changed, as I remember it, and the Minister has proved himself so far to be remarkably measured and sensible in everything he has said today.

Despite all the human rights abuses in Iran, the truth is that Islam at its best can be a religion of phenomenal humanity, generosity and magnanimity, and I think that is what we are hoping for at the moment, is it not? I just wonder whether there are not other envoys that we might send from this country—perhaps from the Church or on an interfaith basis—who might be able to speak of that humanity, compassion and magnanimity and be able to bring about the result that we all earnestly hope for.

Dr Murrison: The hon. Gentleman is far better qualified to talk about the Vicar of Bray than I am—

Chris Bryant: I’m sure that’s a compliment.

Dr Murrison: Believe me, it is a compliment; I am paying the hon. Gentleman a compliment, noting his previous occupation. He makes a serious suggestion that is worth considering by all involved in this case. We

have lost no opportunity to raise these dual national cases with those to whom we have been given access, at ministerial level and other levels, over the course of this sorry saga, and we will continue to do so. Of course, people need to articulate their concerns, and that is not confined to Ministers. National leaders of various sorts have commented on this case, and if they used any influence they can with their contacts in Tehran, that would be a very positive thing. I welcome the hon. Gentleman’s suggestion.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): The Minister might not know that I am a man of faith—I have personal faith, and in days gone by I have been the parliamentary churchwarden, a lay canon at Wakefield cathedral and an active member of Christians in Parliament. I do not want to say anything that would give Nazanin any more problems than she has. I snuck into the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) the other day, and I just stood, as a silent vigil, outside the Iranian embassy. I found that useful for me, but I would like other Members of Parliament to join me and go back to do that regularly, in a quiet, respectful way, just to keep it going after the hunger strike has finished.

We must appeal to the Iranians in terms of faith. Why do we not persuade the Archbishop of Canterbury to lead an all-faith group to Iran, to appeal to the better natures of very religious people to see that this is a travesty of faith and a travesty of justice?

Dr Murrison: I hope very much that the Archbishop of Canterbury is listening to the hon. Gentleman, and that perhaps he might consider whether he or other faith leaders have a role to play in this matter. I am not sure whether the established Church is the best vehicle, but it is universally recognised as being positive and capable of talking to people of all faiths and none. My view on this matter is that dialogue is necessary, notwithstanding the nature of the individuals who we know are intimately connected with this case in Tehran and who have not in the past shown themselves to be the masters of dialogue.

Diana Johnson (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): I commend my hon. Friend the Member for Hampstead and Kilburn (Tulip Siddiq) for securing this urgent question and for the way she champions her constituent’s case.

My hon. Friends the Members for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) both made a really important point about looking at other ways of trying to put pressure on the Iranian authorities. The Minister is a very good Minister, but what more can the Foreign and Commonwealth Office do to co-ordinate not just the diplomatic pressure that needs to be applied, but the wider pressure that can come from society, the Churches and other faiths? Why is the Foreign and Commonwealth Office not doing that? From the answer that the Minister just gave, it sounded like that co-ordination was not under way.

Dr Murrison: I am always open to suggestion; however, having considered the matter in respect of the Church of England in the few minutes I have had to do so, I think we need to be a little bit careful, because Iran is

inherently suspicious of this country. If the hon. Lady doubts that, perhaps she might like to refer to Jack Straw's excellent book that has just been published; I commend it to all right hon. and hon. Members who take an interest in these matters. There is a long-standing suspicion of this country in Tehran, and there will be a suspicion of any initiative that is prompted or engineered by the UK Government. It would certainly be open to organisations that are held in some esteem in Tehran to speak to any interlocutors they are able to identify and have access to in Iran, in order to put pressure on where they can and to bring their good counsel to bear in respect of this case and other cases relating to dual nationals.

Rachael Maskell (York Central) (Lab/Co-op): This case is clearly of deep concern to the whole country, particularly the developments we have heard about in the last 24 hours. It is particularly heartbreaking for Richard Ratcliffe and his family. I can describe Richard only as a very gracious individual after meeting him. I ask the Minister not just what his office is doing, but how the Prime Minister's office is responding. She has just one week left in office. Will she mobilise all the forces of her office, including, if necessary and if possible, making a diplomatic visit to Iran in the time that she has left, and make it her priority to see the release of this mother and wife?

Dr Murrison: I am confident that the issue has been a high priority for the Prime Minister. She has spoken to President Rouhani about it. It is a high priority for my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary, who is frequently in touch with his interlocutors in the matter. It is also, and will continue to be, a high priority for me, as I have explained.

Often, the issue with Iran is getting access. It cannot be taken for granted that access will be automatically welcomed, or indeed provided. I very much hope, however, that we will continue to be able to press the case with those who are in a position to influence the outcome. I have described how it is sometimes difficult to identify those who are in a position to make a decision or determination on the matter. It is not as if one were approaching a western liberal democracy; I fear things operate very differently in Tehran.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): I send my solidarity, and that of my constituents, who contact me regularly about the issue, to Nazanin and her family. I have a number of constituents who are Iranian nationals awaiting decisions from the Home Office on asylum and other issues. I ask whether the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has given any updated advice to the Minister's colleagues in the Home Office about how those cases should be treated, in the light of the serious situation emerging in Iran. I would not want any of my constituents to be returned to Iran by the Home Office to face a situation similar to the one that Nazanin and others have faced. If he has not, I ask him to speak to his colleagues in the Home Office to make sure that something is in place to protect everybody in those circumstances.

Dr Murrison: As the hon. Lady will know, each asylum case is treated on its own merits in the light of prevailing circumstances, so I obviously cannot comment,

because I do not know the individual cases to which she refers. I do know, however, that each one is treated individually by the Home Office and that a determination is made according to the perceived risk that they face, which will clearly alter with time.

Paula Sherriff (Dewsbury) (Lab): I, too, thank the Minister for his tone this afternoon, but may I press him to agree, no ifs or buts, that when the incoming Prime Minister joins us, he must make Nazanin's release an absolute priority? I ask, gently and genuinely, should that Prime Minister be the right hon. Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson), how we can ensure that he is appropriately briefed on Nazanin's situation. I hope the Minister agrees that it is imperative that we avoid any repeat of earlier blunders.

Dr Murrison: I know that my right hon. Friends the Members for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) and for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt) are greatly exercised by this case. I assure the hon. Lady that they are extremely well read into it now. I am absolutely confident that, whatever the outcome next week, the Prime Minister will treat the case with the priority that I think it deserves. I reassure her, however, that I shall be there, inshallah, prompting them to ensure that the matter has the highest priority.

Ruth Jones (Newport West) (Lab): I, too, stand in solidarity with Richard and his family, and all hon. Members in the House today, to say that we need Nazanin home now.

When Nazanin's father rushed to see his daughter in her hospital bed, his access was blocked by the revolutionary guard, which is a shocking turn of events that has affected us all. All of Nazanin's family, including her sister-in-law Rebecca, who lives in my constituency, are going through hell as her situation deteriorates. When will the Government explore new ways to get Nazanin home safely as quickly as possible?

Dr Murrison: I share the hon. Lady's frustration—I really do. I want this brought to a conclusion as soon as possible. She has to appreciate, though, that the United Kingdom has a limited number of tools in its toolbox, which is part of our frustration. I would love to be able to resolve it tomorrow, but all we can do is what we do diplomatically, which is to put pressure on our interlocutors and try to explain to them what the benefits are, not only for the individuals concerned, but for the country concerned, of bringing it to a satisfactory resolution. It is truly a win-win situation—it is clearly a win for Nazanin and her family that she should be released as soon as possible, and it is a win for the reputation of Iran.

Mr Philip Dunne (Ludlow) (Con): I congratulate the Minister on the manner in which he has conducted his response to the urgent question. There is widespread support across the House for the humanitarian challenge that is before us, and particularly before the Ratcliffe family.

Does the Minister agree that this is not the time or place for any attempts across the House, however gently put, to seek party political advantage or division as a result of the changes to the Conservative leadership?

[Mr Philip Dunne]

We should all focus on ensuring that Nazanin can be returned to this country and on doing whatever we can to make representations to the right people in Iran to secure her release, irrespective of other political events surrounding our relationship with Iran.

Dr Murrison: Of course I agree with my right hon. Friend. I recall the remarks that you made a few minutes ago, Mr Speaker, about how this sort of issue sees the House is acting at its best, that we are not being partisan and that we are clearly focused on the interests of Nazanin and other dual nationals. That is where we need to be focused. I urge right hon. and hon. Members to approach these matters in that light and in the manner to which you rightly alluded, Mr Speaker.

Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): It is good to know that the Minister feels secure in his post. With all respect to him, however, Nazanin's fate has been tied to the person of the Foreign Secretary, current and previous, for good or ill. I am not asking him to predict who will be the Foreign Secretary in a week's time, but will he assure us that all eventualities are being planned for in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office so that the matter remains at the top of the agenda and we do not have any more confusion and delay?

Dr Murrison: I am not sure I would associate myself with the sense of security to which the hon. Gentleman refers, but I assure him that the matter is right at the top of the priorities of the Department that I have the honour of being a Minister in. That will endure. I have sought to explain to the House that, whatever the outcome next week, I am confident that it will continue to be a high priority for No. 10.

Tulip Siddiq: On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You have already indulged me today, so I hope you will indulge me a little further while I read out a message from Richard Ratcliffe, my constituent. He says:

"On behalf of Nazanin's whole family, I want to thank the Speaker and the House from the bottom of my heart for the support, compassion and empathy that you have shown us in these troubled times. We won't stop fighting for her release, and I hope the House won't stop either."

Mr Speaker: It was unsolicited, but it is greatly appreciated. We won't let go. I think there is a pact between us on this matter.

ROYAL ASSENT

Mr Speaker: I have to notify the House, in accordance with the Royal Assent Act 1967, that the Queen has signified her Royal Assent to the following Act:

Supply and Appropriation (Main Estimates) (No.3) Act 2019.

Immigration Detention: Victims of Modern Slavery

1.59 pm

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney North and Stoke Newington) (Lab) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on immigration detention and victims of modern slavery.

The Minister for Immigration (Caroline Nokes): Modern slavery is an abhorrent crime, and the Government are determined to stamp it out. In my role as Immigration Minister, I am especially aware of the shocking exploitation of vulnerable individuals from overseas who are duped by the promise of a better life in the UK, only to be trafficked and sold into modern slavery. Identifying and protecting victims of such crimes is a priority. In October 2017, we announced an ambitious package of reforms to the national referral mechanism. As well as improving the support on offer, these reforms are intended to provide quicker and more certain decision making, in which victims can have confidence.

I must make it clear, however, that being recognised as a victim of modern slavery does not automatically result in being granted immigration status in the UK. There may be victims of modern slavery who have no lawful basis to remain and for whom support is available to leave the UK voluntarily. It is important that we recognise the important role of our immigration policies. Although we are committed to supporting individuals to leave voluntarily, including with reintegration support, there may be occasions when they have exhausted all options and are refusing to leave, and we are faced with the difficult decision of detaining people to secure their return.

I want to reassure the House that we do not take these decisions lightly, but it may be necessary to detain individuals, even if they are vulnerable, to effect their removal. When that is the case, we seek to keep the period of detention as short as possible and place their welfare and safeguarding at the heart of what we do. The Home Secretary made clear his commitment to going further and faster with reforms to immigration detention, including by reducing the number of people we detain, increasing the number of voluntary returns and working with partners on alternatives to detention. We have made real progress in delivering these commitments. A number of women who would otherwise have been detained are now being managed in the community. Other pilots will begin later this year.

As we approach the first anniversary of Stephen Shaw's second independent review of immigration detention, it is important to take stock of how far we have come, while acknowledging that there is much more to do to ensure that our approach to immigration detention is fair and humane.

Ms Abbott: Thank you, Mr Speaker, for granting this urgent question. On 19 June this year, the Immigration Minister provided a written answer on the possible immigration detention of persons who are in fact victims of slavery. The written answer read as follows:

"there is no central record"

of such persons, and

"The Home Office therefore does not collate or publish the data requested".

However, we now learn from a freedom of information request by *The Independent* that that is not the case: 500 victims of enslavement or trafficking were held in immigration detention. I have myself visited Yarl's Wood detention centre and met such persons.

In response to an earlier written question on 20 December last year, the Immigration Minister said:

"in cases in which it has been found that there are reasonable grounds to believe that an individual may be a victim of trafficking or modern slavery, the appropriateness of their being detained, or of their detention continuing, is governed by the Home Office's modern slavery policy. This means that such individuals will not be detained".

How many people who are victims of trafficking or modern slavery have been held in previous years? How many such people are currently held? Are the Government not in breach of their own stated policy on detention? How many of the 400 detainees were assessed as being a threat to public order and on what grounds? Does the Minister accept that when she responded to the written question saying that no data was available, she was in fact misleading the House?

Caroline Nokes: I reassure the right hon. Lady that I certainly was not misleading the House: there is no central record of those who have received a positive, conclusive grounds decision and are detained under immigration powers. While that information may be obtainable from the live Home Office case information database, otherwise referred to as CID, the information would be for internal management only. For example, some data may be incomplete and freedom of information requests are heavily caveated as such.

Releases of data from CID are always caveated and sometimes it is possible the data is not always accurate; there may be instances where individuals are counted twice. It is standard practice in parliamentary questions that we do not provide information that does not form part of published statistics. CID will show only those individuals who have been referred into the NRM from immigration teams and would not cover those referred to the NRM from other first responders, such as the police, social services or, potentially, medical practitioners.

The right hon. Lady asks specifically about the 507 individuals referred to in the After Exploitation report. I want to be very clear on this point: those were not 507 individuals detained after getting a positive reasonable grounds. As stated very clearly in the freedom of information response, the figure relates to people who had a positive reasonable grounds when entering detention or while in detention.

Further analysis of the figures shows that, of the 507 people in question, 479 received the positive reasonable grounds decision during a detention period—and of those, 328, or 68%, were released within two days of the decision and in total 422 were released within a week. Of the 57 detained for eight days or more following a positive reasonable grounds decision, 81% were foreign national offenders.

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): What is particularly terrible about immigration detention is its indeterminate nature and the fact that detainees have so little information about their own cases and, indeed, about their rights. Habeas corpus is still one of our fundamental principles, isn't it?

Caroline Nokes: Individuals in immigration detention are entitled to a free legal advice surgery of 30 minutes within the first 24 hours of their detention and to have as many of those surgeries thereafter. As part of the Shaw re-review of last year, we piloted automatic bail referrals after two months instead of four months, as previously.

I must correct my right hon. Friend: it is not lawful to detain individuals indefinitely. They may be detained only when there are realistic grounds for removal within a reasonable timescale.

Stuart C. McDonald (Cumbernauld, Kilsyth and Kirkintilloch East) (SNP): Immigration detention is a hellish thing to inflict on anybody; that is especially true of victims of modern slavery and trafficking. Will the Government accept that the supposed safeguards, particularly the gatekeeping process, are just not working? Signs of trafficking and enslavement are not being picked up, as those 507 cases show. Even when they are, immigration enforcement factors are given greater priority.

What will be done to improve the malfunctioning gatekeeping process and when will an overhaul of the rule 35 process be completed? More fundamentally, for as long as we continue to detain people indefinitely in these awful institutions, should not decisions on whether to detain any individual and on who should be released be made entirely independently of the Home Office? At the very least, we need much stronger and faster independent judicial oversight.

Caroline Nokes: The Government are committed to ensuring that the rule 35 process operates effectively. In March this year, we launched our targeted consultation on the overhaul of the detention centre rules within which the operation of rule 35 is a key element; of course it is closely linked into the operation of the "adults at risk" policy. We continue to keep the detention gatekeeper function under close review, but I certainly think that it has shown an improvement on the situation before its introduction.

Vicky Ford (Chelmsford) (Con): Many victims of modern-day slavery are young and many are women. What support is given to such victims if they are identified as victims of modern-day slavery in a detention centre?

Caroline Nokes: As my hon. Friend will know, it is through the national referral mechanism that potential victims of modern slavery will be referred, and then support will be available to them. She is absolutely right to point out that many victims of modern slavery are young and many are women. I am sure that she will be pleased with our introduction of the pilot scheme currently operating in Newcastle; we have released women, who would otherwise be detained at Yarl's Wood, to be supported in the community. I am very much looking forward to the possibility of introducing further pilots later this year. They will include not just women but men.

Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Ind): Is there not something shocking about the Minister's reply today? You may remember, Mr Speaker, that you allowed me a point of order on the factual inaccuracies that the Minister gave in a parliamentary answer when she said that she had

[Frank Field]

no idea of the number of people who had escaped slavery and were now in detention centres. If it were not for After Exploitation, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Hackney North and Stoke Newington (Ms Abbott) said, we would have no idea what those numbers were. Since those parliamentary interventions, it is quite clear that the Minister has now been briefed on what is happening. Given that, in her answer to my right hon. Friend, she said that large numbers of people were now not in detention centres, may I ask her where they are, because when these people, largely women, are released like this, without any help, they are often scooped up by the slave owners.

Caroline Nokes: The right hon. Gentleman will know that, at any one time, 95% of those liable to detention are actually in the community and not in immigration removal centres at all. It is important to emphasise that a freedom of information request will elicit different data to that which is available in parliamentary questions. I reiterate the point that no central record is held and that the information from the FOI has been collated from a variety of sources and may well give an inaccurate picture. If there is one thing that one learns as a Home Office Minister it is to be very wary of numbers at all times and not to seek to give numbers that may be inaccurate.

Henry Smith (Crawley) (Con): In my constituency, there are two immigration detention centres: Tinsley House and Brook House. May I seek assurances from the Minister that the staff who operate those centres receive correct and adequate training to ensure that they are identifying and detecting those who may have been victims of modern slavery?

Caroline Nokes: It is still very much the case that it is the Home Office and Home Office staff in the widest sense who identify the greatest number of victims of modern slavery. Training is provided, and it is important that training is not only provided, but refreshed and is an ongoing process. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has made her commitment clear on this issue, and it has been a driving force in the Home Office to support her in the mission to stamp out this terrible crime, to identify the victims and to ensure that they are given the help that they need as victims.

Wera Hobhouse (Bath) (LD): The Government's refusal to put a firewall between the police and labour inspection agencies and the Home Office for immigration purposes means that victims of modern slavery will continue to be at risk of detention and deportation. That is wrong, and it will deter victims from coming forward, which means that slavers and traffickers will get away with what they are doing. Will the Minister finally accept that data sharing for immigration enforcement must stop?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Lady is simply wrong to suggest that data sharing is always bad. In fact, in many instances, data sharing between the Home Office and the police can identify people who need to be safeguarded, and it is crucial that we have systems that will enable people to be correctly identified and then referred through

the appropriate mechanisms. As I said in response to an earlier question, it is still the Home Office that identifies the highest number of victims of modern slavery.

Thangam Debbonaire (Bristol West) (Lab): Further to the question asked by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Frank Field), is it not the case that keeping numbers centrally might be a good idea? I understand that the Minister said that that number is not kept centrally, but part of my right hon. Friend's point was that, perhaps, it should be.

Frank Field *indicated assent.*

Thangam Debbonaire: May I ask the Minister if she will reconsider the possibility of keeping such numbers centrally, including breaking them down, for instance, by how many victims of torture are kept in detention. I know that she will say that the number is low, but the rule on adults at risk surely suggests that that number should be kept as low as possible, and we cannot know if it is unless we know what those numbers are.

Caroline Nokes: The Home Office is making good progress in replacing antiquated case-working systems and data platforms, much of which will be complete by March next year, but it is a complex change process and although it will provide us with modern tools to protect and utilise data effectively, it is not an instant fix and will require further investment in the coming years. The changes will also mean that we will be able to act more swiftly to update systems to provide better organisation and granularity of data once they are deployed, but it does not negate the risk that data can be easily misinterpreted and each individual's journey through the system is different, and aggregated information does not always represent the work undertaken. None the less, we will continue to focus on individual needs.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): My constituent Joel White, from Pollokshields, emailed me 20 minutes ago to say that he is a regular visitor to Dungavel immigration removal centre. He asked me to raise the case of a man that he spoke to recently who said:

"The Home Office don't tell me nothing—they don't tell me what's going on. When I sit down here, I don't know what is going on. Time is just rolling down the road. You just lose your mind. I just need any help."

This man has been in Dungavel for six months. He does not know whether he is being removed or whether he is likely to be released at any time. Will the Minister take on such cases and end the scandal of indefinite detention?

Caroline Nokes: I reiterate the point that detention can only be maintained where there is a realistic chance of removal within a reasonable timescale. The hon. Lady will have heard me comment earlier about auto-bail applications at two months. An individual in detention can apply for bail at any time. I urge her constituent to provide that advice to the individual concerned.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Every Child Protected Against Trafficking has worked with child victims of trafficking who have been detained in immigration detention having been incorrectly considered to be adults. Despite displaying indicators of having been trafficked, these children can struggle to prove

their age. They may not have identity documents or they may have been given false identity documents by their traffickers. What efforts is the Home Office making to ensure that no child who is a victim of trafficking is being held in immigration detention?

Caroline Nokes: The UK ended the routine detention of children in immigration removal centres in 2010 and enshrined that in law under the Immigration Act 2014. It is worth noting that, in the last year of the previous Labour Government, 1,100 children were held in detention. However, in some cases, individuals without documentary evidence of their age who are detained as adults subsequently claim to be children. When that occurs, our revised interim policy states that they will be afforded the benefit of the doubt and released into the care of social services until a further assessment of their age has been made, unless their physical appearance and demeanour very strongly suggest that they are over 25 years of age. Home Office policy means that such cases may be counted as under-18s for the purposes of data collection, but the hon. Lady is right that we should not be detaining children, and we have put in place steps that will prevent that from happening. Where there is an age-dispute case, the benefit of the doubt will always be afforded to the individual.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (IGC): I have repeatedly raised issues regarding victims of torture in immigration detention and asked questions on the number of Sri Lankan nationals granted refugee status after having previously been removed to Sri Lanka. Last November, the Minister said that there was no specific information available. It was only by pressing the Minister during a meeting in May that I was finally provided with the data requested—seven months after I asked the initial question. Why do we have to go to such lengths to pry information from the Home Office? Why do the Government withhold important data from public scrutiny? Where is the accountability and transparency in this situation?

Caroline Nokes: The right hon. Lady will have heard my previous answers about the importance of relying on published statistics that can be properly verified. Relying on information that turns out to have come from aggregated sources, which then transpire to be inaccurate, is a very dangerous route to go down.

Vernon Coaker (Gedling) (Lab): I think that the Minister has rather missed the point of what we are all saying. There is genuine shock across the House at the fact that it is Government policy to lock up victims of modern-day slavery as immigration offenders. What everybody is saying in different ways to the Minister is that that is unacceptable, and when is it going to stop?

Caroline Nokes: The hon. Gentleman might have missed the comment that I made at the start of this urgent question. Just because somebody is a victim of modern slavery or trafficking does not mean that they have immigration status in this country. It is important that we reflect on the fact that our first port of call is to offer a voluntary return, so that somebody may go back to their country of origin and receive support there. There are reintegration packages. We must not assume that we are best placed to assist those people who have been trafficked.

Helen Hayes (Dulwich and West Norwood) (Lab): A system which detains people to whom the state has a duty of protection, which regularly separates parents from their children, which results in people being denied access to food and medicine and living in appalling conditions, and which incarcerates people indefinitely who present no risk to public safety in the UK, is a system of which we should all be ashamed. Does the Minister accept that the current immigration detention system is a pillar of the hostile environment, and that the time has come for radical reform?

Caroline Nokes: I remind the hon. Lady that the detention estate is significantly smaller than it was when the last Labour Government left office. She is wrong to suggest that people in immigration removal centres are denied access to food and medicine. They have 24/7 access to healthcare and it is absolutely right that they must do so. We take the vulnerability of detainees incredibly seriously, which is why we commissioned Stephen Shaw to do his re-review last year and are implementing his recommendations. It is absolutely right that we have chosen to shrink the detention estate and that we are seeking to pilot schemes where individuals can be better supported in the community. We will continue down that road.

Points of Order

2.20 pm

Sir Desmond Swayne (New Forest West) (Con): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You were not in the Chair at the time, but the word that the Minister heard was “indefinite”. My recollection is that the word that I used was “indeterminate”. Thank you for indulging me so that I could get that on the record.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his brief and precise point of order. He has corrected the record. There is a distinction between the two words, and I am sure that his point will have been taken into consideration.

Joan Ryan (Enfield North) (IGC): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Minister’s answer to my question just a few moments ago regarding the unreliability of statistics was actually misleading. I accept that she may inadvertently be misleading the House, but she will know that I only got the answer on the numbers because I pointed out to her that a previous Minister had been asked the very same written question and gave the answer. As I said, I waited seven months, but the Minister did not give me an answer because she was unsure of the statistics. I do not know whether it is incompetence, inadequacy or what.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I appreciate the right hon. Lady’s point, but she will know that it is not a point of order for the Chair; it is a point of debate. The right hon. Lady has asked a question and the Minister has given an answer. It is not for the Chair to adjudicate as to whether any answer is acceptable or pleasing to the Member who asked the question. It is the Minister’s answer and I will give her the opportunity to expand on it if she wishes to do so.

Caroline Nokes *indicated dissent.*

Madam Deputy Speaker: The Minister does not wish to expand on it; she has given her answer. The right hon. Member for Enfield North (Joan Ryan) is not satisfied, but *c’est la vie*—that’s life.

Patricia Gibson (North Ayrshire and Arran) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I seek your advice on a very important matter for my constituents. Two in five pensioners do not claim the pension credit that they are due. My elderly constituents are now contacting me to tell me that the telephone line provided by the UK Government through the Department for Work and Pensions to apply for pension credit over the phone is not properly staffed. Some people are kept on hold for over 30 minutes to speak to an adviser, before giving up. I tried to find online application forms to download in order to allow my constituents to apply for this benefit by post, but it turns out that no application forms are available, except for those living in Northern Ireland. That means that many of my elderly and

financially challenged constituents are facing considerable obstacles to claiming the support for which they are eligible, which would go some way to explaining why two in five pensioners do not claim pension credit. Madam Deputy Speaker, I seek your advice and guidance as to what action I can take to ensure that the Government make it as easy as possible for pensioners in my constituency and across the UK who are eligible for pension credit, and who need this important support, to claim it without encountering these obstacles.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her courtesy in giving me notice that she intended to raise that point of order. She raises a very important and serious matter about which the House has shown its concern on at least two occasions in the past few weeks—that I can recall—in the form of an urgent question and a debate. It is a matter of significant importance. I cannot give her any further advice from the Chair today, except to say that those on the Treasury Bench will have heard what she has said and I am quite sure that the appropriate Minister will be informed of her concerns. Of course, there are various ways in which the hon. Lady can bring this matter to the Floor of the House once again. If she cares to visit the Table Office, I am sure that she will be given the appropriate advice. I look forward to hearing her raise the matter with the Minister on the Floor of the House in due course.

Alison Thewliss (Glasgow Central) (SNP): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. You may be aware that yesterday the National Records of Scotland released the drug deaths figures for Scotland, which stand at a record high of 1,187 deaths—souls lost to drug addiction—in the past year. There is nothing to this effect on the Order Paper today, but have you been given any indication whether a Home Office Minister will come to the House and make a statement on this issue? Some of the responsibility lies with the Home Office, as these matters are considered to fall under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971, so it may be helpful for a Minister to enlighten the House on what their part may be in dealing with this crisis.

Madam Deputy Speaker: I thank the hon. Lady for her point of order. The answer to the first part of her question is that, yes, I am aware of these very worrying and serious statistics, which I am sure all Members will take very seriously. On her second point, I am not aware that a Minister is at this moment planning to come to the House to make a statement. I will say to the hon. Lady what I said to the hon. Member for North Ayrshire and Arran (Patricia Gibson) just a moment or two ago, which is that there are various ways in which she can bring this matter to the attention of the House in a formal way, and if she cares to visit the Table Office, I am sure that she will be given advice on how to do so. I look forward to hearing her raise these matters with the appropriate Minister in due course, because I am sure that it is a matter about which the House would like to hear.

Reservoirs (Flood Risk)

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

2.26 pm

Holly Lynch (Halifax) (Lab): I beg to move,

That leave be given to bring in a Bill to grant the Environment Agency additional powers to require water companies to manage reservoirs to mitigate flood risk; and for connected purposes.

Calderdale—which comprises my Halifax constituency and that of my neighbour, the hon. Member for Calder Valley (Craig Whittaker)—was devastated by flooding on Boxing day 2015. Storm Eva followed Storm Desmond, and wreaked havoc on parts of Cumbria, Lancashire and Yorkshire. My constituency, particularly Sowerby Bridge and Copley, was badly impacted by the floods, with the storm bringing extreme weather events, compounding a prolonged period of heavy rainfall. However, it was the total devastation further down the valley in Mytholmroyd and Hebden Bridge, with further damage in Elland, Todmorden and Brighouse, that brought Secretaries of State and the national press to Calderdale to see the unprecedented damage for themselves.

The River Calder was described as having become “weaponised” over Boxing day, picking up everything in its path and using it to smash its way through the valley, taking out bridges, roads, homes and businesses. In total, 2,781 residential properties and 1,635 businesses were affected in Calderdale alone. I hope this gives some sense of why flood protection is still a massive priority in our area. Residents are genuinely fearful every time the forecasts suggest that heavy rainfall is on its way. Since the flooding in 2015, many different initiatives have begun to help ensure that that level of destruction cannot be inflicted again. My Bill proposes to add the role of reservoirs to that package of initiatives. We need all these measures to work if we are truly to get a grip of flood risk in Calderdale.

The hard infrastructure work is currently ongoing across the borough, including a major remodelling at the centre of Mytholmroyd, with a new bridge and widened channel. Similar works are scheduled to start shortly in Hebden Bridge, providing that the funding gap can be closed. Natural flood management has also been a significant part of our response, with local organisation Slow the Flow deploying its team of energetic volunteers to such great effect. Since 2016, they have been working with the National Trust, the Environment Agency and Calderdale Council, using the natural environment to build leaky dams across streams, and to stuff deep gullies and channels. This work seeks to spread the water as it makes its way down the valley, to prevent it from coursing rapidly through channels to the valley below—delaying its journey to hold as much water up in the crags as possible. Managing the upper catchment in this way is essential if we are to do all that we can to mitigate flood risk for those in the valleys below.

Also in the upper catchment above Calder valley are six Yorkshire Water reservoirs, and conversations about their role in mitigating flood risk have been under way for some time. The Bill seeks to formalise that process and demonstrate parliamentary support for its aims. In the winter of 2017-18, Yorkshire Water and the Environment Agency started a trial to manage the Hebden Water reservoirs down to 90% of their usual top storage

level, with the aim of assessing the potential of utilising the reservoirs as a more long-term flood risk management option. Maintaining the reservoirs at 90%, instead of the usual 100%, created the extra 10% capacity to hold more water in the upper catchment during periods of unusually heavy rainfall.

While the reservoirs were placed under nothing like the pressure of the 2015 Boxing day weather during the trial period, the report was able to conclude that:

“The lower reservoir levels did provide a significant impact on peak flows in Hebden Water for the largest events observed during this period”.

The report proposed that next steps might include trialling 85% capacity, as the levels in the reservoir had been restored faster than expected during periods of rainfall. The report was clear that the scheme had a positive impact on flood mitigation and that this managed and collaborative approach would be complementary to ongoing flood protection work in the area. This approach is not just happening in Calderdale. Similar conversations and trials are under way across the country, including at Thirlmere reservoir in Cumbria, reservoirs in the Upper Don valley and Watergrove reservoir in Rochdale—I am pleased to see my hon. Friend the Member for Rochdale (Tony Lloyd) in the Chamber.

So why do we need legislation to make this happen? There are still challenges that need to be ironed out before water companies have the confidence to commit to these types of scheme more routinely. Currently, the legislation that underpins water companies and the regulation of them has a focus on mitigating drought risk, rather than flood risk. We know that extreme weather will increase in frequency in the years to come, and reservoirs will be key in ensuring resilience within our water infrastructure if we are to manage both drought and flood risk. Right now, we need to give reservoir management of this kind a statutory thumbs-up, explicitly giving the Environment Agency the powers to instruct a water company to manage down the levels on pre-designated reservoirs, where the evidence suggests that doing so would reduce flood risk and protect communities.

To be clear, it would not be a case of drawing those reservoir levels down at speed at the point when we are faced with extreme weather, as that would place dangerous pressures on the watercourses and, if anything, contribute to flood risk. Instead, the Bill would set out a framework for having agreements in place long in advance of that for the EA and water companies to have identified which reservoirs, what capacity level is appropriate and when that reduction would be in place, with the evidence base to support those decisions.

Water companies are currently regulated by Ofwat, and inevitably there is a strong focus on preventing over-abstraction of water sources, particularly in the context of fears that climate change will bring about prolonged periods of hot, dry weather. However, the Environment Agency warned in May that entire communities might need to be moved away from rivers if we are to prepare for a predicted, terrifying average global temperature rise of 4°C. Again, regulation must find the appropriate balance between the two threats of drought and flooding.

The water industry in England and Wales is diverse, and pressures in one area are not the same as those in another, so regulation needs to allow for water companies

[Holly Lynch]

and the EA to respond to the local risks and react accordingly. The Bill would set out the transfer of powers to the EA and the framework in which such arrangements between the EA and water companies, in consultation with local authorities and communities, would work.

For the Bill to be as effective as we would all hope, further considerations might be needed. For all the reasons set out, resilient water infrastructure will ensure that reservoirs can assist in alleviating both drought and flood risk, and increased capacity would only be a good thing. To allow us to respond in real time to changes in our climate that mean we can face both drought risk and flood risk within months of each other, we need a more automated means of doing that. Reservoirs involved in the recent trial required an operator to alter the water levels manually using largely Victorian infrastructure. While the Bill focuses on the powers and framework required, it goes without saying that investment in automation and resilience in water infrastructure would be hugely beneficial.

In an ideal world, the ability to transfer water between reservoirs, and even across the country, would enable the release of excess water to mitigate flood risk, which could be sent elsewhere without wasting a single drop. Yorkshire Water is currently exploring the possibility of directing the water released from its trial reservoirs into its nearby treatment works, which is exactly the approach we would like to see.

With that in mind, I hope it is clear to Members why my Bill is needed and why those of us from flood-affected areas feel so passionately about getting this right. I want to take this opportunity to thank both Adrian Gill at the Environment Agency and Yorkshire Water's Granville Davies, who strive to reduce flood risk every day in the Calder valley and who have been incredibly helpful in engaging in constructive dialogue.

I am not naive about the nature of ten-minute rule Bills, but I hope that the Environment Minister and her team have heard the details of my Bill and will reflect on its merits. I also want to stress that, just because the Bill will not become law tomorrow, it does not mean we are not looking to water companies to undertake this work on our behalf in the meantime. They have my full support and that of many MPs and our communities in doing just that. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Ordered,

That Holly Lynch, Louise Haigh, Rachael Maskell, Diana Johnson, Hilary Benn, Paul Blomfield, Angela Smith, Rachel Reeves, Philip Davies, Trudy Harrison, Gill Furniss and John Mc Nally present the Bill.

Holly Lynch accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time tomorrow, and to be printed (Bill 424).

Census (Return Particulars and Removal of Penalties) Bill [Lords]

Second Reading

2.37 pm

The Minister without Portfolio (Brandon Lewis): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

I am delighted to present the Bill, the purpose of which is simple: it will remove the criminal penalty for not responding to new census questions on sexual orientation and gender identity, which means that these questions will be voluntary. The Office for National Statistics recommended that these questions only be asked of those aged 16 and over and, importantly, that they be voluntary. The Bill enables that by following the same method used to make the question on religion voluntary in the Census (Amendment) Act 2000, which is by removing the criminal penalty for not responding to census questions on sexual orientation and gender identity.

Following consultations with the Northern Ireland Office and the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, we have extended the Bill to Northern Ireland. The Bill does not require either question to be asked in the 2021 census, but it does extend the voluntary nature of the questions should Northern Ireland decide to include either question in the 2021 census.

The 22nd national census is due to be carried out in March 2021, and that will be provided for by secondary legislation in the normal way. This Bill is distinct from that secondary legislation. It simply ensures that, in delivering on the White Paper's proposals, the ONS can include these new questions on a voluntary basis. I want to make a couple of brief points on how that voluntary nature is guaranteed.

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I support the thrust of what the Bill is designed to achieve. However, many of my constituents are concerned that the Bill does not seek to achieve more wide-ranging change by allowing both Jains and Zoroastrians—both internationally recognised religions—to be properly recognised in the forthcoming census, which would end the historical under-reporting of the number of people who subscribe to those religions in the UK.

Brandon Lewis: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his point, but I would just say that everybody who wishes to identify, for example, as Jain in the census will be able to do so. They will be able to use the write-in option and a new search-as-you-type facility. The Jain populations are concentrated in a small number of local authorities, which we know, and the ONS has committed to work with local groups and organisations to ensure that anyone who wishes to identify as Jain knows how to do so.

First, the ONS has committed to ensure that the voluntary nature of the questions on sexual orientation and gender identity are made clear in its design for the census forms in England and Wales—both on the front pages of the forms, and alongside the questions themselves.

Secondly, respondents will be provided with a unique access code to the online census, and anyone aged 16 years and over will be able to request a code, or paper form if

answering offline, who wishes to respond privately. This will enable people to answer the census, including these two questions, without having to tell the person completing the household form that they have done so. Any individual answers will override any submitted on the household form. That is vital to protect people's privacy.

Thirdly, census confidentiality remains of the utmost importance. All personal data collected by the census will be stored confidentially and not released for 100 years. This Bill delivers on the White Paper's proposals to include new questions on sexual orientation and gender identity in the 2021 census, and on a voluntary basis. I urge all Members to join me in supporting this simple and worthwhile legislation, and I commend this Bill to the House.

2.41 pm

Christian Matheson (City of Chester) (Lab): I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his introduction, and I also thank the Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, the hon. Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster), for his willingness, once again, to work with me and our side openly on this important legislation, which is greatly appreciated. I have to note, when I look across the Atlantic and see the difficulties the racist President Trump is having about his citizenship question in the United States census, that the Minister here has surely shown how to get a census Bill through the House by working, as they say in the United States, across the aisle.

The aim of this Bill is to provide for voluntary questions on sexual orientation and gender identity to be asked in the England, Wales and Northern Ireland censuses. Crucially, this Bill renders questions concerning gender identity and sexual orientation voluntary, as the right hon. Gentleman has outlined. I think we can all agree that it would be totally inappropriate to compel someone to answer a deeply personal question about their sexuality or gender identity in the census. However, at the same time, these are vital questions that reflect better the modern UK and how we address the needs of a long discriminated against section of society.

Labour supports this Bill on the basis that any census must be LGBT+ inclusive. Recognising gender identity and sexual orientation as core aspects of personal identity in official statistics is a step forward in the fight for LGBT+ equality. It gives individuals the opportunity to identify themselves however they choose in this important civic event. Indeed, the Opposition support this change as a point of principle. This tick box clearly demonstrates that, as a society, we value LGBT+ inclusivity. As a party, we have always fought for minority rights. Progressive equality legislation is part of Labour's history. Labour brought in the Equal Pay Act 1970, the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Equality Act 2010, and we introduced the minimum wage and Sure Start. We support this Bill in the spirit of inclusivity and equality, strengthening a proud history within Labour of fighting for minority rights.

This change is not only symbolically important, but practically necessary. Gathering the required data to properly understand and support the LGBT+ community is vital. Information derived from the census helps us to inform policy, plan services and distribute resources

effectively to local government and health authorities, and enable these resources to be directed where they are needed.

Of paramount importance is the acquisition of accurate data to address inequalities facing minority groups. Accurate data about the size and characteristics of the LGBT+ community are currently severely lacking. Small-scale surveys struggle to grasp the whole picture, producing significantly varied estimates of the size of the LGBT population. Without an accurate picture of the size or nature of any minority community in society, how can we provide the necessary targeted support and services they need?

We are talking about a community that is in particular need of support: LGBT+ people have worse mental and physical health outcomes on average than the rest of the population. In particular, suicide rates for gay and bisexual youth are significantly higher than for their heterosexual counterparts. It is not just the youth who are suffering; older LGBT people suffer disproportionately from social isolation and a lack of social support networks. It is only through accurate data about minority populations that agencies can begin to properly address the inequalities faced by LGBT people. The census has the advantage of being a whole-population count and can therefore build a representative and accurate picture of the whole country.

Privacy is always a matter of concern when discussing these topics. I commend the work that has been done by the Parliamentary Secretary, his officials and the ONS to consider people's privacy when a family member is completing the census form. Any member of a household will be able to request their own individual census form if there is information they do not wish to disclose to the householder, such as gender identity, sexual orientation or a change of religion. These are clearly issues that we must be aware of and sensitive to when carrying out a census.

Labour has a proud record of championing the fight for LGBT equality. We abolished section 28, equalised the age of consent and created civil partnerships, and it was with Labour votes that equal marriage became law. The Opposition are committed to taking radical steps to improve inclusivity in our society. The inclusion of a gender identity box in the census is an important step in this direction, but there is still a long way to go, particularly in the area of LGBT inclusivity. We are still not free from bigotry as a society. Issues such as lack of education, unequal access to public services and levels of LGBT hate crime and mental health remain barriers to full equality.

By way of illustration, recently in my own county, Bob Fousert, the chair of the police and crime scrutiny panel, attacked our deputy chief constable, Julie Cooke, for wearing a rainbow lanyard in support of LGBT rights. He said it was a political statement. Well, if standing up against hate crime is a political statement, then yes, it was a political statement. His appalling comments were condemned, including by David Keane, the police and crime commissioner. I wrote to Deputy Chief Constable Cooke, who leads nationally for the police on LGBT issues, to offer my support. Mr Fousert had to resign as chair—and good riddance. I recount this story because, in the same week that those comments were made, there was a well publicised attack on a lesbian couple on a bus in London and a vicious

[*Christian Matheson*]

homophobic attack in Liverpool. We may have made progress in the last couple of decades, but we are not there yet.

The Opposition have been calling for a particular focus in this census on homeless LGBT+ communities. The position of LGBT+ homeless people warrants particular attention in this discussion, not least given the shocking statistic that up to 24% of the youth homeless population are from the LGBT+ community. Clearly, we are far from solving the issue of LGBT+ discrimination. Young homeless people continue to be one of the most disenfranchised and marginalised groups in society, but young LGBT people are particularly isolated. The Albert Kennedy Trust reports that LGBT homeless youth are highly likely to have experienced familial rejection, abuse and violence, leading to their state of homelessness. In many cases, homophobia is the reason why they became homeless. LGBT+ homeless people are regularly at the receiving end of shocking levels discrimination and abuse.

Homelessness in any form makes people more vulnerable to other risks, such as mental health problems. The unprecedented rise in homelessness under the current Government is a national disgrace, yet more and more people continue to be forced on to the streets by the Government's policies—from welfare cuts to a lack of investment in social housing. Homelessness charities have reported a rise in homelessness of up to 169% since 2010. The Government hold a direct responsibility for the perpetuation of this national crisis. It is time the Government looked to the root causes of rising homelessness, and invested in more affordable homes and stronger rights for renters.

What is more shocking is the direct ramifications that austerity cuts have had for the LGBT+ voluntary and charity sector, given that public funding provides such a large proportion of overall income. This in turn further isolates LGBT homeless people. Not only do the Government need to support specialist LGBT services to allow greater access to more safe, accessible and affordable accommodation, but, above all, to fight for wider recognition of the issues that LGBT homeless people face.

Labour has pledged to tackle the bullying of LGBT young people by ensuring that all teachers receive initial and continuous training on LGBT issues experienced by students and how to address them. Furthermore, we fully support changes to the new guidance for relationships and sex education to ensure they are LGBT inclusive. Therefore, we believe that this census must make a particular effort to give LGBT homeless people the opportunity to contribute to this important civic exercise. Their inclusion will enable us to build an accurate picture of the number of people from the LGBT community living without a permanent address. It is only through an awareness of the scale of the issue that support and aid can be effectively targeted towards the most vulnerable communities.

Furthermore, there is a particular danger that all homeless people, whether rough sleepers, sofa surfers or, especially, LGBT+ people, could be undercounted. There must be a particular effort by the ONS to ensure that those communities are reached on the day of the census. There are dangerous consequences of an undercount,

which would play into the hands of those who would prefer to ignore the LGBT+ community and reverse progress towards equality.

Gareth Thomas: My hon. Friend is making an extremely good speech, which I strongly support. Will he join me in encouraging the ONS to look again at the representation of Jainism and Zoroastrianism in the religion section of the 2021 census? Notwithstanding the slight movement in progress alluded to by the Minister without Portfolio, the right hon. Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis), in relation to the provision of a drop-down box, there is a genuine concern among the leaders of both faith communities that there will continue to be a significant under-reporting of the number of Jains and Zoroastrians living and adhering to their faith in the UK.

Christian Matheson: My hon. Friend has been pushing this issue with perseverance and resilience. Representations have been made to the Minister by those and other religions and ethnic groups. It may well be that this issue is considered in Committee or on Report, or, if it is not included in the scope of the Bill, then later on when we come to the census. I look forward to reading any proposals my hon. Friend brings forward.

Returning to the homeless count, I am grateful to the Minister for assurances that the ONS will work with organisations representing LGBT people and charities, to locate hard-to-reach communities and ensure they are given the opportunity to complete the census. I understand that the ONS is organising both national and local campaigns to highlight that everyone in England and Wales should complete the census. Community engagement programmes will allow field teams to specifically target hard-to-reach communities and help minority groups with census completion.

Working with stakeholders throughout this process is vital, particularly when it comes to drafting specific questions for the census. The drafting of the questions and the accompanying guidance must be subject to extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders from across the LGBT community and women's groups. I understand that my noble Friend Baroness Hayter made that important point via an amendment in the other place.

We are pleased to support the Bill, which is a step forward in the fight for LGBT+ recognition, and to ensure that the mirror we hold up to ourselves in the form of the census portrays an accurate reflection of all parts of our nation. It is vital that thorough consultation follows the passage of the Bill to ensure that these words are carried forward into action. Given the richness and range of data provided by a survey of this size, the 2021 census provides us with an exciting opportunity to gather accurate data about minority communities, and to plan services and distribute resources accordingly.

2.53 pm

Steve Double (St Austell and Newquay) (Con): It is a pleasure to contribute to this debate. I welcome the introduction of the Bill to ensure that the census is up to date and accurately reflects the country as we go to seek its views.

There was another census that took place about 2,000 years ago, possibly the most famous and most significant census ever undertaken. It was a census

where people returned to their homeland, to the place they were from, to register. There was a recently married couple at this time who left the town of Nazareth and undertook an arduous journey of about 100 miles on foot—maybe with a donkey, but probably on foot—to their home town of Bethlehem to register that this was the place that they belonged to, that this was their homeland. The journey was particularly gruelling because the wife was heavily pregnant. As is well known to us all now, when they got to Bethlehem the woman gave birth to a son, the most famous human to have ever lived and the founder of the Christian faith. I am sure Sir Cliff Richard is eternally grateful that they made it to Bethlehem, because “O Little Town of Nazareth” does not have quite the same ring to it and he would probably have been one Christmas No. 1 short.

Why did they make that journey? Because they had a strong connection with a place and its people. They wanted to demonstrate that this was the place that was bound up in their identity. This was the place that they were from; this was their homeland. That desire to identify with a place and its people remains as strong in many people today as it did 2,000 years ago. In fact, I would argue that in recent times there is a growing sense, with a more mobile population and globalisation impacting on communities, that the desire to have a strong connection and identity with a place is stronger today than it has been. Today, thankfully, we do not need to travel to our homelands to be able to identify where we are from. Modern census methods allow us to do that by way of a simple tick—well, that is true of almost everyone, as I will come on to explain.

The right to demonstrate which of the national identities within the UK we choose to identify with is not currently protected by legislation. Currently, it is down to the ONS to recommend to the Minister which national identities should be included in any census. I find it quite astonishing that it was only in the most recent 2011 census that the Welsh were given the opportunity to identify their national identity by way of a tick-box, and only in 2001 that the Scottish were given a tick-box. I find it incredible that those developments took place so recently. There is nothing that currently protects that status, and it could be removed in subsequent censuses by a recommendation from the ONS. I am sure many Members of this House would find that completely unacceptable.

Let me say that I have a great deal of respect for the officers and staff of the ONS, who provide a very important service to our nation. I do not believe, however, that it should be down to the ONS, using statistics and data, to decide which national identities should and should not be included in any given census every 10 years. The right to demonstrate one’s UK national identity should not be a matter of data or statistics. I believe it should be a right established in legislation. That right should also be a matter of equality across the whole UK. No one national identity should be considered more important or be recognised more than any other. All the national identities in the UK should be given equal status and equality of opportunity to be recognised as such within any census. We could never countenance one UK nationality being given less status in a census.

I, along with a number of my colleagues, will be looking to add a clause to the Bill to establish in legislation the right for all UK national identities to be

treated equally in all future censuses. The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, my hon. Friend the Member for Torbay (Kevin Foster) is well aware of this issue. I want to put on record my thanks to him, and to the Minister he is currently filling in for, my hon. Friend the Member for Norwich North (Chloe Smith), for their positive and constructive engagement on this issue.

The Minister is aware that there is a particular matter in this regard that I want to address. As matters currently stand, there is one UK national identity that is not being given equal status in the census. In 2014, the Cornish were recognised by the Council of Europe under the framework convention for national minorities. That status was not just accepted but enthusiastically embraced by the UK Government, who declared that this would now give the Cornish equality of status with the other Celtic nations within the UK, the Scottish, the Irish and the Welsh. The ONS, however, does not recognise that status. It is treating the Cornish as a minor local difficulty restricted purely to Cornwall. We are being told that we can have a write-in option for our Cornishness and that there will be an advertising campaign in Cornwall to make people aware of it, but that misses the point that there are many thousands—probably hundreds of thousands—of proud Cornish men and women across the UK who would like to identify as Cornish, if they were given the same opportunity to do so as the other Celtic parts of the UK.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I am listening with increasing fascination to the hon. Gentleman’s contribution. To take forward his point about the Cornish, which I totally accept, is there not a parallel case to be made for the Gaelic-speaking highlander in Scotland, who does not regard himself as a lowlander and, in fact, views them with considerable suspicion?

Steve Double: I will come on to why I believe that, at this time, the Cornish have a unique claim on the matter. In future, this may apply to other peoples, but I suspect that it does not at this time.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): Will my hon. Friend give way?

Steve Double: I will, gladly.

Eddie Hughes: I thought I had better get in before my hon. Friend moves on. I did not come to the Chamber today expecting to hear the Christmas story in the middle of July, but as we have inadvertently touched on religion, I want to say that I have 3,500 Sikhs living in my constituency. The idea that they would have some sort of write-in box to identify their ethnicity is not appropriate either. It is not too much to ask for Sikhs to have a box specifically to identify their ethnicity on the census.

Steve Double: I would say the same thing in reply to my hon. Friend: I believe that the Cornish have a unique claim in this regard, because it is the only UK national identity affected that is formally recognised by the Council of Europe under the framework convention for the protection of national minorities, which has been fully accepted and endorsed by the UK Government. I therefore think that there is a unique case for Cornish

[Steve Double]

that perhaps does not apply to other ethnic identities. I say that in no way to belittle or denigrate other national identities, but—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I understand that the hon. Gentleman and various hon. Members who have intervened on him over the last few minutes have very genuine concerns, but we must stick to the purpose of the Bill, which is about sexual orientation and gender identity. I have allowed some illustrative points about religious belief, ethnicity, geographical attachment and so on, because I have a lot of sympathy, but we must stick to the purpose of the Bill.

Steve Double: I am grateful for that advice, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am raising this because I think that the Bill is an opportunity to address an issue that otherwise may be missed, but I take your point and will seek to wind up my comments quickly.

Gareth Thomas: Back Benchers should stick together and, therefore, I strongly support the hon. Gentleman's desire to amend the Bill to enable a longer debate about Cornish identity being included in the 2021 census. If I am sympathetic to him, will he be sympathetic to me and help me to find a way to amend the Bill to ensure that Jains and Zoroastrians, who are recognised as world religions by the United Nations—not merely by the Council of Europe, which he prays in aid—also have their concerns properly recognised?

Steve Double: I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but I return to the fact that I think that the Cornish case is unique, in that within the UK, it is the only national minority identity that is not being included as a tick-box on the census.

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): I am conscious of your comments, Madam Deputy Speaker, but is this Bill not really about equality of treatment for people? My hon. Friend makes a very good point about the Council of Europe framework convention. The UK Government have been criticised by the Council of Europe for failing to live up to their legal obligations on Cornwall, as undertaken when we signed that convention.

Steve Double: I am grateful to my hon. Friend and Cornish colleague for making the point very well that the Government made this commitment in 2014. They have been criticised by the Council of Europe for not living up to that commitment and obligation under the framework convention. This is a very simple and straightforward way for the Government to go some way to rectifying that and fulfilling their commitments.

By saying that the matter of Cornish identity is primarily a geographical issue that is restricted to Cornwall, and that there will be an awareness campaign in Cornwall, we are effectively treating the Cornish around the country in the same way as Mary and Joseph were treated 2,000 years ago. We are saying, "In order to identify yourself as Cornish, you really should live in Cornwall and return to your homeland." That is completely unacceptable, and it is definitely not equality of recognition for the Cornish, as the Government promised and made a clear commitment to in 2014.

Any argument that to extend this opportunity to the Cornish would open the floodgates for other minority groups who are also seeking some sort of recognition is, I believe, misdirected. The Cornish people's claim to national minority status in the UK is unique. We are the only group who have been given this status by the Council of Europe, which the UK Government have accepted and endorsed. I believe that the unique claim for the Cornish means that we should be given equality with the rest of the UK.

Do people today still desire to identify themselves with their homeland? If so, should they be given equal opportunities in the forthcoming census to do so? Should that right be enshrined in legislation? I believe that the answer to all three questions is very much yes, and I trust that we can use the Bill to establish the right of national identity within the UK in law.

3.6 pm

Gareth Thomas (Harrow West) (Lab/Co-op): I have been inspired to speak in the debate by the contribution of the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double). I agree with him about two things. The first is his strong support for the Bill; as I indicated in my two interventions on the Front-Bench spokesmen, I think they are right to bring in and strongly support the Bill. I also echo the praise from the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay for the tremendous job of work that the Office for National Statistics and all its staff do. However, I share his frustration that, with one or two questions that have faced the ONS in preparing for the 2021 census, its temptation has been to see them as a little local difficulty and perhaps not to take them as seriously as it might. I recognise that concern.

At the beginning of his remarks, the hon. Gentleman retold the Christmas story in his own unique way—

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dame Eleanor Laing): Order. I have made it very clear that this is a very narrow Bill. I have allowed considerable leeway, and I have allowed the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) to make three very long interventions—[*Interruption.*] Oh, was it only two? I have allowed him to make two very long interventions, because I thought that he was not going to make a speech. Now he is making a speech on a subject that I have said is not within the scope of the Bill. I hope that he will not seek to go further down that line. The Bill is about sexual orientation and gender identity.

Gareth Thomas: For the record, Madam Deputy Speaker, I was not querying the number of interventions that you were gently chastising me for, but merely the accusation that they were long. I thought that they were entirely appropriate points to make.

Finally, I hope to follow the inspiration of the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay in looking for an opportunity, perhaps on Report or in Committee, to explore the under-representation of Jains and Zoroastrians in the census.

3.9 pm

Cat Smith (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Lab): It is probably worth noting that much of the debate on this Bill has not been about its content, which concerns

inclusivity for LGBTQ people in the census. That is a good sign that the issue is not controversial and that common sense has been used and a consensus has been reached across the House. I hope that the hon. Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double) and my hon. Friend the Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) have the opportunity in Committee to pursue the issues that they have raised during this debate.

I am proud of the steps that the House has taken to strengthen LGBTQ equality, including the amendment tabled to the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation) Bill last week by my hon. Friend the Member for St Helens North (Conor McGinn) to extend marriage equality to Northern Ireland. I am proud of the record of the last Labour Government, who were at the forefront of advancing progress for LGBTQ people with the equalisation of the age of consent, the repeal of section 28, the introduction of equalities legislation covering things such as access to goods and services, and the introduction of civil partnerships.

We cannot pretend, however, that LGBTQ people do not face disproportionate discrimination and prejudice in their day-to-day lives, including in schools, in employment and in access to goods and services. The number of homophobic and transphobic hate crimes, including stalking, harassment and violent assault, has more than doubled in England and Wales over the past five years. LGBTQ people have worse health outcomes and are more likely to suffer from poor mental health than are the population as a whole. That is particularly true of the trans community, with roughly half of trans people in Britain having attempted suicide at least once. It is vital that the Government match their commitment to visibility for LGBTQ people in the census with a commitment properly to fund our public services, which provide essential support to marginalised groups across the country. The addition to the next census of the new questions on sexual orientation and gender identity is a welcome step, and it represents a significant victory for the LGBTQ community.

When it comes to statistics, the LGBTQ community are a hidden population. In the absence of comprehensive national population data for these groups, charities such as Stonewall are forced to rely on little more than estimates. Those estimates are frequently derived from smaller-scale surveys, and as a result, they vary widely. The data collected under the census will be vital to local authorities and other services in providing accurate estimates of the overall size of the LGBTQ community and providing geographical concentrations, which will be crucial for service planning. At a national level, it will have a significant impact on policy development, equipping regulators and Government bodies with accurate data to develop programmes of work that have a positive impact on LGBTQ people.

In a society where many LGBTQ people struggle with their sexual orientation or gender identity, there are challenges involved in ensuring that the data collected by the census is accurate. Given the personal and sensitive nature of the questions, a proportion of respondents will always prefer not to disclose their sexuality, even on a confidential form. We must be cognisant of the risks associated with an under-count of the LGBTQ population, because it could play into the hands of those who would attempt to reverse progress towards equality.

Furthermore, the fact that census responses are often completed by one member of the household represents a real barrier to disclosure for individuals who are not out to their families or those they live with. I understand that the Minister has thought about that and informed my Labour Front-Bench colleagues in recent meetings that he wants to establish a process whereby people in that position can fill in the census separately and privately, overriding the household response. We support that proposal, and I urge the Minister to ensure that such an arrangement is accessible to everyone, given that the privacy concerns will be felt by people of all ages and in a range of settings.

It is crucial that statistical agencies continue to engage with organisations that represent LGBTQ people to ensure that robust solutions are found and communicated. Privacy concerns must be fully addressed, and officials must work with LGBTQ communities to convey the importance of being counted and build trust in the census process—what is counted counts.

The drafting of the questions and the accompanying guidance must also be subjected to extensive consultation with a wide range of stakeholders from across the LGBTQ community and women's groups. The Minister has informed the Opposition that the ONS is consulting, and we welcome sight of the draft guidance, but if he could provide more information to the House, it would be very much appreciated. As I have made clear, the Opposition welcome the Bill and believe it is an important step towards building a society in which LGBTQ people are truly accepted, included and counted.

3.15 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Kevin Foster): It is a pleasure to wind up this debate. I thank the Opposition Front-Bench team for their support and their kind words; I was almost blushing at times during their speeches. I confirm that, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Great Yarmouth (Brandon Lewis) said when he opened the debate, anyone who wishes to disclose a particularly private matter will be able to apply for a number and make a separate census return that overrides the household census. That information, in a non-anonymised form, will be held for 100 years. I want to make it very clear that that opportunity will be available.

It is clear from the debate that there is strong support for the Bill, and there is widespread recognition of the importance of the census as an event. As you have confirmed, Madam Deputy Speaker, the Bill is designed solely to enable the next censuses in England and Wales and in Northern Ireland to ask questions about sexual orientation and gender identity on a voluntary basis. The Bill does not prescribe that those questions should be asked, or how they should be asked. That is a matter for secondary legislation, which Parliament will have the opportunity to scrutinise later this year.

On that subject, I recognise the passion with which some Members of the House—especially the hon. Member for Harrow West (Gareth Thomas) and my hon. Friend the Member for St Austell and Newquay (Steve Double)—support additions to the census. Those are matters for the census secondary legislation, rather than for this Bill, which is purely about making the questions voluntary rather than compulsory.

Steve Double: Leaving aside the question of Cornish identity, does the Minister not think that there is a case to be made for protecting national identity in law, rather than leaving it to the data and statistics of the ONS?

Kevin Foster: In deciding the questions for the census, the Government will be guided by the technical recommendations of the ONS. Of course, the House and Parliament will need to decide on the questions in the census via the orders that will be introduced later this year, but the Government will continue to be guided by the ONS.

Gareth Thomas: Will the Minister ensure that the orders to which he has just referred, which would allow the inclusion of questions about national identity and about Jainism and Zoroastrianism, are debated on the Floor of the House? If they are debated upstairs in Committee, the vast majority of Members are likely to be excluded.

Kevin Foster: I will come back to the hon. Gentleman after a discussion via the usual channels. We are talking about a hybrid order of a unique nature, some of which will be amendable and some not, but we will certainly make sure that that is discussed. I thank him for the constructive meeting that we had about his concerns relating to his constituency.

When it comes to Cornwall, I can understand why we had a religious story—not least because Cornwall is located next to God’s own county, Devonshire. We will have an opportunity to debate that further in secondary legislation, but the Government are guided by the ONS.

I turn to homelessness, which was one of the main issues raised during the debate. The ONS is working with stakeholders such as Homeless Link, Shelter and St Mungo’s to develop plans to allow those who are experiencing homelessness to take part in the census. That will include work around census day, because not everyone will necessarily be in a particular shelter on

the evening of the census. It will also include engagement with those connected with the LGBT sector to make sure that the census is thorough and counts everyone in.

This is a very simple piece of legislation, which does not direct that any questions should be in the 2021 census; it merely sets out that questions on those two subjects should be answered on a voluntary basis. That will ensure that vital information on both issues is captured, but that no one is forced to disclose it if they do not wish to. I therefore urge colleagues to support the Bill, and I commend it to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

CENSUS (RETURN PARTICULARS AND REMOVAL OF PENALTIES) BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7)),

That the following provisions shall apply to the Census (Return Particulars and Removal of Penalties) Bill [Lords]:

Committal

(1) The Bill shall be committed to a Committee of the whole House.

Proceedings in Committee of the whole House, on Consideration and up to and including Third Reading

(2) Proceedings in Committee of the whole House, any proceedings on Consideration and any proceedings in legislative grand committee shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion two hours after the commencement of proceedings in Committee of the whole House.

(3) Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion three hours after the commencement of proceedings in Committee of the whole House.

(4) Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings in Committee of the whole House, to any proceedings on Consideration or to other proceedings up to and including Third Reading.

Other proceedings

(5) Any other proceedings on the Bill may be programmed.—
(Amanda Milling.)

Question agreed to.

Bullying and Harassment of MPs' Parliamentary Staff

[Relevant Documents: Bullying and harassment of MPs' Parliamentary staff, Independent inquiry report, HC 2206]

3.20 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mel Stride): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the Gemma White report on bullying and harassment of MPs' Parliamentary staff.

Let me begin by thanking Gemma White QC for her report, and paying tribute to all who came forward to share their personal experiences with her.

Each of us is directly responsible for the staff whom we employ. Without them we would not be able to carry out our duties effectively, and I am sure all Members will want to join me in expressing our immense gratitude for the hard work, support and loyalty that those who work in our offices provide for us day in and day out. We would not be able to serve our constituents without them, and, as such, they matter not just to us as Members of this House, but to the millions of constituents up and down our country whom we are here to represent.

I am sure that Members in all parts of the House will share my concern about a number of the matters to which the report refers. It highlights statements alleging deeply inappropriate conduct on the part of some Members towards their staff, and between staff. It contains serious allegations, including those relating to Members who "shout at, demean, belittle and humiliate their staff on a regular basis, often in public."

Reference is made to

"staff being subject to unwanted sexual advances, often accompanied by touching, sometimes forceful."

We should not hesitate to condemn any occurrence of that kind as completely unacceptable, and as a failure to uphold the standards that we expect in our Parliament. The report constitutes a call to all Members of all parties to continue to act together to ensure that appropriate measures are taken to prevent and deal effectively with bullying, harassment and sexual harassment, and I reiterate that call today.

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): The Leader of the House has made an appropriate point, but may I ask for clarification? A number of external members of the Labour party have been severely bullied and harassed, allegedly by people who are paid with Short money. Given that they are paid with parliamentary money, would they too be eligible to make complaints by means of parliamentary procedures?

Mel Stride: The hon. Gentleman has raised a very specific and interesting point, to which, I am sorry to say, I do not immediately know the answer. I always like to know all the answers. *[Interruption.]* I am being told by Members sitting behind the hon. Gentleman that the answer is yes, but I will clarify that one way or the other and write to him accordingly.

None of the points that I have made are intended to suggest that progress has not already been achieved, or that serious shortcomings in the management of, and behaviour towards, members of staff have been universal. Indeed, in her report Gemma White says:

"Most Members of Parliament treat their staff with dignity and respect".

She says that she

"received a number of written contributions from people who wrote only to tell me about their positive experiences in Parliament."

As she points out, that was despite the fact that her remit did not extend to inviting people to do so. She also says that during her work on the report, she heard or read of MPs who were

"MPs who were "a model employer", "a fantastic boss", "the best employer I have ever had".

The report draws attention to areas of slow progress, but recognises that important progress has been made. The independent complaints and grievance scheme is praised as being

"an appropriate and relatively sophisticated means of investigating allegations."

I echo the report's praise for the dedicated implementation team who have made the scheme's introduction, in the report's own words, "a success". Its operation is a clear improvement in the support that it offers to victims of bullying and harassment, and is also a firm indication of the seriousness with which Parliament views these matters. It shows the will and determination in the House to take strong and effective steps, working across the parties with the unified purpose of addressing inappropriate behaviour wherever it is found. It is important not to forget that before the introduction of the scheme, most complainants typically had recourse only to the Member about whom they were complaining, or to party political processes.

There has, of course, also been the Cox report. The White report calls for the implementation of Dame Laura Cox's key recommendations, which include the removal of the June 2017 cut-off for historical complaints. That will be the subject of the motion that I will move shortly after this debate. If the motion is agreed, it will be a significant and important step forward. It will open up the ICGS to those who, for example, may have been bullied or harassed as recently as just before the last general election, and/or are no longer in the employ of a Member.

Although I recognise that there has been progress, there should be absolutely no cause for complacency, and Gemma White makes a number of important recommendations. Some appear relatively straightforward to consider and, potentially, implement, such as the recommendation for a review of confidentiality clauses within the standard contracts of employment of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority; the recommendation that IPSA should send out staff exit surveys; and the recommendation that the House Service should address the

"fair recruitment and management of staff with disabilities"

in its training. Other recommendations will require more thought, and present significant further questions. For instance, there is the recommendation that a new human resources department should be set up to cover Members' staff, and to include HR personnel located both centrally and out in the regions.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): I do not understand why there is any debate about this bit. I think that the vast majority of Members, when they arrived in the House, would welcome with open arms the idea of a good HR function here, providing them good training, because many of us were never employers before we

[Chris Bryant]

came here. I just do not understand why it is difficult for us to put that together. It seems to me to be the simplest thing of all.

Mel Stride: I do not think that anything I have said has suggested that we should not go ahead with this recommendation. The point that I am making is that it is a quite a major proposition which needs to be thought through carefully, as does any proposal of this magnitude. The hon. Gentleman shakes his head. That rather implies that he does not think it should be thought through carefully, which I am sure is not what he is intending to communicate.

Chris Bryant: I am not questioning the integrity of the Leader of the House, and I am sure that he is not questioning mine. It is just that this debate has been around for quite a long time, and the House of Commons Commission probably needs to meet more frequently and be able to transact business more expeditiously so that we can get on with this. The Finance Committee stands ready to do its share of the work, but honestly, some of us have been arguing for HR for a very long time.

Mel Stride: I know that some Members have been arguing for various aspects of the approach that we should take to addressing harassment, sexual harassment and bullying, and I know that there have been issues around the time that it has taken to put into place various aspects of our appropriate response to that. What I am saying from the Dispatch Box this afternoon is that we are now moving with pace. Directly after this debate we will have, as the hon. Gentleman is aware, a motion to bring in and broaden the scope of the ICGS, and that in itself is an example of how we are now moving forward with pace.

However, while recognising the progress made, there should be absolutely no cause for complacency on the various recommendations I have highlighted that have been brought forward by Gemma White. Consideration of the recommendations is of course a matter for the House, and today's debate is an important part of that process. I say to the hon. Gentleman that the fact that this debate has been brought forward so shortly after the release of the White report is in itself a very healthy sign. We need now to continue to proceed at pace, to come to our conclusions on the recommendations of the report as soon as possible, and to bring forward further much-needed change at the earliest possible opportunity. We owe that to those who do so much to support us as Members of Parliament, but we owe it also to those who send us here and who in turn rightly expect the highest possible standards of each and every one of us.

3.30 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for opening this debate, and I, too, want to start by thanking Gemma White QC for all the time she has put into talking to Members and Members' staff. As she said in her report, she spoke to 220 out of 3,200 people—Members' staff. I will look at her report in detail, but I first want to mention Carl Sargeant.

Perhaps we should pause for a moment to think about the stresses that resulted in him taking his own life; I am sure there are lessons to be learned from the inquest, although it had a narrow remit and did not look at everything. We must be aware of the stresses and strains people are under and the effect of accusations on them.

Gemma White outlined the testimony in an extremely accessible way in what is an accessible report, but it does not make for pleasant reading. It must have been very debilitating to have had to go through those experiences, and I say sorry to those who had a terrible experience. However, the White report also says that staff took time to relate their positive experiences, as the Leader of the House said, and at paragraph 26 it says that Members wished to share their experiences as employers and also expressed concern about current levels of support for them and their staff. But the ICGS is in place and any system requires refinement. Paragraph 118 cites the Alison Stanley report's finding that the experience of first users of the ICGS has been mixed, with much of the input being negative. Gemma White said that she shared that view.

Alison Stanley reviewed the first six months of the operation of the ICGS and her report was published on 12 June. I want to pull out some of its recommendations, because it is important going forward that we look at them. She suggested creating a fully resourced bicameral ICGS team with the requisite skills and experience to ensure effective implementation and streamlined operation; it is important that both Houses are able to access this excellent team. She also suggested proactively using the behaviour code to improve ways of working in teams, for example as part of the wider cultural work being led by Julie Harding, the new independent director of cultural transformation here in the House.

The Stanley report said also that the solid start of the training programme should be built on, ensuring that the principle of the equal importance of training for all members of the parliamentary community is addressed. It is compulsory for House staff to go on the training, and I think it should be compulsory for all of us. I think the Leader of the House has already been on the training or is about to go on it, and I have been on it. It is not a very onerous task, although not many people have signed up to it, as mentioned in the White report. The training is in groups of 12, and it might be difficult for the trainers to provide the training in one whole day. I know that it has been changed to two sessions, so I wonder whether later on when Parliament is sitting we could look at having a training session specifically for Members and Members' staff, perhaps in a Committee Room, and have that rolled out over a long time so that we ensure that everybody takes part.

The Leader of the House was right to pull out Gemma White's recommendation that there should be fair recruitment and that the management of staff with disabilities should be specifically covered in future training. I would add that that should also apply to visible minorities. Parliament needs to become a more diverse place. We know that the Bank of England has undertaken unconscious bias training, and it may be available here. A really good report has been produced about this place entitled "Stand in my shoes: race and culture in Parliament", and it is available on the intranet. I certainly know that people sometimes feel uncomfortable about being around people from ethnic minorities and certainly they do not

want to take instructions from us, because we are in an unusual position. A bit of training along those lines might be useful.

On page 47 of her report, Gemma White refers to a “collective centralised solution”. In paragraph 166, she talks about having a body that she calls an “HR department” to support both Members and Members’ staff. In setting up such a department, it would be vital to ensure that staff felt that they had access to their own HR advice, which might be different from the HR advice given to Members.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Representing my party in the Chamber today, I wish to associate my party entirely with the thrust of what is being said. I have yet to do the training course, but I will be doing it in the early autumn. I was a Member of the Scottish Parliament for a number of years, and I believe that the hon. Member for West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine (Andrew Bowie) would agree with me when I say that the Scottish Parliament has made some good moves in this direction. May I ask two things of the Government and perhaps of all of us? First, can we look at what the Scottish Parliament has done in this regard? Also, as we develop best practice, can we share it with the devolved Administrations across the UK? Bullying and sexual harassment are no respecters of national or political boundaries, and if we can get a good policy, it should be for all of us, wherever we are in the UK.

Valerie Vaz: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution. There is a lot to be learned from different organisations, including the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Government, the BBC and the Bank of England. There are a number of public service bodies that may have gone through this process, and we can look at this again.

The White report talks about an HR department, and I want to dwell on this slightly. She talks about a regulatory role in terms of documentation and of support. I believe that as the department is being set up, we need to look at separating those two functions, possibly within the same Department. It is a matter for the Commission to direct the House authorities to get the HR director in place first, and the HR director would then get his or her own staff, but it would be useful to ensure that there was no crossover between those two functions.

I know that hon. Members will have read the report and seen the helpful diagram on the last page, page 55, in which Gemma White talks about “Who”, “What” and “By when”. This gives us a useful timetable. The Commission has already issued a statement and indicated that it will set in train her recommendations. It has already started the consultation on those recommendations, but will the Leader of the House set out a timetable for the consultation and possible implementation of the proposed changes? As he said, we have lots of reports, and I hope that all the threads of those reports will be pulled together. I know, because I have had contact with them, that we have a dedicated and hard-working team currently working on the ICGS, and I have every confidence that Parliament will be an exemplary environment that is both inclusive and supportive.

Could I ask the Leader of the House how we will measure this cultural change, and what steps for immediate action the Government will take to promote these new policies? As many hon. and right hon. Members know, we have dedicated staff who are committed to democracy and public service, and I know that the House staff and our own staff do, and will, serve us well as we serve the public with the highest commitment to democracy in this extremely interesting and challenging time.

3.38 pm

Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this important debate today, following the publication of Gemma White QC’s report last week. I would first like to pay tribute to her for the incredibly detailed independent inquiry that she led. Her report into the historical allegations of bullying and harassment of MPs’ staff adds greatly to the work done by the independent complaints and grievance scheme working group and will drive much-needed further reforms in the way we treat and value all those who work for and support us in our roles as MPs.

I also want to acknowledge all the current and former staff members who contributed their experiences to the inquiry and helped to expose behaviours that have clearly gone on in this place for far too long.

I met Gemma White during my time as Leader of the House and found her to be both knowledgeable and determinedly constructive in supporting Parliament’s desire to modernise our practices. Her report highlights the need for everyone working in or visiting Parliament to be treated with dignity and respect, but she also highlighted some truly unacceptable employment practices. I was appalled, as I am sure were colleagues from both sides of the House, to read some of the comments from staff. As part of my work in chairing the ICGS working group, I heard some pretty harrowing testimony from several individuals, and I want to pay tribute to them for their bravery in coming forward to speak with the group. It is clear that we in Parliament must bring about long-lasting and positive institutional change without delay, and that change must come from the very top. Only then can we truly restore confidence in how Parliament works.

The report acknowledges that the ICGS provides MPs’ staff for the first time with a mechanism for having complaints of bullying and harassment independently investigated. Feedback from some of the first complainants is that turnaround times under the new procedure can be too slow. My first observation is that the scheme is still developing, so it is important that we allow it time to become fully embedded into the fabric of Westminster. The staff working for the scheme are all fully committed to continuous improvements in its processes. Secondly, I am glad that the White report agrees that employment relationships should continue to sit with individual MPs, and I fully agree with the recommendation for a centralised human resources function for MPs’ staff.

However, the question of where the responsibility for a new HR function would lie must be considered further, although the two obvious candidates would be either IPSA or the House authorities themselves. The former—I am sorry to say—currently suffers from fairly widespread feedback from Members’ staff about a lack of confidence

[*Andrea Leadsom*]

in its practices and hence in its ability to be the supportive voice that staff members need. The other alternative provider of HR for staff would be the House authorities themselves. During the working group, they raised concerns about taking on an HR role for themselves, because that could create an unhelpful secondary employment relationship, but it would be worthwhile looking again at whether that could be the best way forward.

A key aspect of the White report is that many current staff still feel uncomfortable making complaints, and to assure them the working group must focus specifically on ensuring that, as far as possible, an individual's career will not be affected in any way if they come forward with a complaint. That is why the ICGS carries out any investigation in strict confidence. I urge anyone with a grievance or a complaint to be encouraged to come forward via the helplines that have been widely advertised around the estate.

As part of the scope of the working group, it was recommended that a wide range of training should be available to MPs and their staff. The White report recommends making some of that training mandatory in order to bring about institutional behavioural change, and I totally agree. All MPs and all staff working for MPs should now be required to undertake at least the Valuing Everyone training that was implemented as part of the ICGS. I call on each of the Whips Offices to ensure that their MPs have completed their training within six months of the report's publication.

Chris Bryant: When someone arrives here—perhaps straight out of university—to work for a Member of Parliament, that MP may be their first employer, so all the bad ways that they learn from them then become the bad ways that they may get into in later life, perhaps when they later go on to become an MP or work elsewhere in the civil service. Is it not therefore all the more important that new Members of Parliament are trained in human resources best practice from the moment they arrive here?

Andrea Leadsom: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. He has followed this closely, and he will recall that, during the working group's investigations, it was clear that we needed to take things slowly and not to push for too much change too quickly, but it is also apparent that Parliament has come to value its progress and its modernisation of practices, and so on. We can now move much faster than was thought back in late 2017. It is right that people should undertake mandatory training, particularly if they will be employing staff who may be coming into their first job.

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend have a view as to why so few MPs have taken up this training opportunity? Thirty-four of 650 MPs, and 135 of 3,200 staff—these are tiny numbers.

Andrea Leadsom: I am glad my hon. Friend raises that point because, of course, the truth is that the training has been properly up and running for only the past couple of months. An awful lot of work went into procuring the training provider, as we needed to find a provider that could deal with the sheer volume of people

who need to undertake the training. The training course itself was written specifically to be relevant to our working practices in Parliament.

I and a number of other people who are closely involved with the independent complaints procedure establishment went on the training only six or seven weeks ago to test it and to make sure it is entirely relevant and will be useful and welcomed. That has been done, so it is a bit unfair to say, "Well, why hasn't everybody done it?" There genuinely is a capacity issue, but if all Whips were now to encourage Members to go on the Valuing Everyone training within the next six months, and all staff to undertake it within a year, it should be doable and would certainly be valuable.

I also believe that, with so many people working on the parliamentary estate, the centrally organised induction course that already exists should be made mandatory for all new starters and should be completed within three months of joining. No other major organisation would allow a new member of staff to come into such a huge and complex institution, let alone a building that is semi-falling down, without being compulsorily trained on things like health and safety, cyber-security and fire safety, let alone the behaviour code and how to raise a complaint or a grievance.

It would be easy to implement compulsory induction training, and the Director General and the Clerk of the House of Commons are keen to oversee that. It could be easily done by simply giving any new joiner a parliamentary pass that lasts for three months and is then renewed subject to their having completed the induction course.

As Leader of the House, I was proud to host visits from the Canadian and Australian Parliaments and to meet the Scottish Presiding Officer and the Llywydd of the Welsh Assembly to answer their questions on how we are determined to achieve culture change here in Westminster.

We should be ambitious to be a role model for all Parliaments around the world, confident in our determination always to treat everyone who works here or visits here with the dignity and respect they deserve.

3.48 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): It is a pleasure to follow the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (*Andrea Leadsom*), the former Leader of the House, and I acknowledge the significant amount of work she has done to drive this forward.

I pass on the apologies of my hon. Friend the Member for Perth and North Perthshire (*Pete Wishart*), who is travelling with the Scottish Affairs Committee. He, too, has been part of the process for some considerable time.

Most of all, on behalf of the SNP, our parliamentary group and our parliamentary and constituency staff, I thank *Gemma White* for her thorough and challenging report, which marks an important milestone on the journey towards culture change in this place. It is welcome that the Government have made time for this debate and for the motion on the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme so soon after the report's publication.

I also thank, in particular, *Emily Cunningham* from the SNP's central staff. She has been on several of the workstreams as a staff representative and has helped to inform a lot of this.

I will briefly address the report, which we are happy to endorse, and what it means in terms of culture change and the professionalisation of Parliament, with some best practices from elsewhere. As the opening speakers have said, the report makes for sobering but not necessarily surprising reading. It is important to note, as the Leader of the House did, that Gemma White says

“there are very many MPs who are good employers and who treat their staff with the dignity and respect that they deserve”.

We should also not be blind to the occasional possibility of vexatious or malicious complaints—we are in a high-pressured, high-profile environment—but overall the report presents a picture of a culture that badly and urgently needs to change. Sadly, it contains accounts of behaviours that many of us will have heard about and perhaps some of us will have witnessed. Bullying, harassment, and a toxic culture of insecurity and undermining have been found to be commonplace, and they are all perhaps manifestations of deeper-rooted cultures and behaviours associated with the abuse of power.

As the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) hinted at, eventually that can become embedded and it becomes a form of learned and normalised behaviour that others either pick up or openly embrace. Challenges arise from the fact that we work in a particularly fast-paced, rapidly changing environment, where employment can be precarious and opportunities for advancement can be limited. When it comes, advancement can be massive, involving significant leaps in responsibility. So this is a huge challenge that requires each and every one of us to go back to the start and question our own behaviours and assumptions.

Jamie Stone: The hon. Gentleman is correct in what he is saying, but there is a greyer area at the edge of this issue. He has outlined the obvious cases of shouting, bullying and so on, but I would also argue that when an MP asks a member of staff to babysit a child or go to the MP's flat to wait for the gas man to come that, too, is an abuse of that member of staff.

Patrick Grady: The hon. Gentleman is touching on an important issue—these little grey areas where relationships can become very close, because of the intense environment, and we ask for things that perhaps we would ask a friend to do, but not necessarily a paid member of staff. It is important that boundaries are established, and some of this is covered in that Valuing Everyone training. I will say a little more about that later, but I cannot recommend that training highly enough. The former Leader of the House, the right hon. Member for South Northamptonshire, will be pleased to hear that a significant number of the Scottish National party group took part in that training last Thursday, coincidentally just as this report was being published, and everybody came away with things to think about and having found it a very worthwhile experience.

As well as the Valuing Everyone training on respect, dignity and understanding boundaries, there is definitely a need for further training on employment best practice. It is worth thinking about when and how some of that training takes place. There is a role for the political parties to play here, even at the candidate selection stage. Doing what we are doing now, sitting on the

Green Benches and standing to make speeches is the most visible part of the job, but it is a tiny part of what is involved in the work of a Member of Parliament. People putting themselves forward for election—and I count myself in this—do not necessarily realise everything that comes with the elected responsibility. So at the selection stage prospective candidates have to be fully aware of the responsibilities they will be taking on as employers and the standards that they will be expected to adhere to. There is also perhaps a more formal role for returning officers to play during that nomination stage or shortly after the election. Then, as the hon. Member for Rhondda said, very early in the MP induction process the advice and support on being an effective employer must be available.

That is why the proposal on a fully resourced human resources department is crucial to all of this, and we warmly welcome it. The system would probably be better sitting under the auspices of the House or the Commission. If it was to be somehow independent, it should be clearly so, even if staff continue to be funded through the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. This is not what IPSA has been set up for and I do not think it is fair to IPSA, let alone to the people who would have to live with the consequences of it.

A new-form HR department also leads on to the recommendation that MPs be required to adopt and follow employment practices and procedures aligned to best practice found in the public sector and elsewhere. We also fully support the recommendation that former members of staff be allowed to access the independent complaints and grievance scheme, and will support the motion to implement that following this debate.

As I said, underlying any structural and procedural changes that are put in place must be a wider cultural change. Politics and political considerations should never be allowed to take precedence over principles of dignity and respect. That means that Members of Parliament and staff must be active in calling out and working to eradicate unacceptable behaviour. It comes through in the training that I mentioned that as Members we all have a duty to recognise our privilege and power and not abuse it. When complaints are made, staff and MPs should be properly supported. Nothing should discourage staff members from coming forward through the proper channels if they have concerns about their own experiences or those of others. We must work towards creating an environment in which everyone feels empowered to speak out if they feel they are being affected by bullying or harassment, and in which everyone in the parliamentary community feels that they work in a safe, comfortable and professional environment, supported by a robust system of human resources and a complaints and grievance procedure.

It was not strictly part of the remit of either Gemma White or Laura Cox, but perhaps we need to look a bit deeper into where some of these practices and behaviours have come from and how they are perpetuated. We work in a building that was designed to promote power and hierarchy—to establish a culture of “them and us”. In previous debates, we have heard new Members of Parliament speak of how on their election they felt intimidated by signs on toilets and tea rooms that say “Members only”. That was certainly my experience back in 2015, and it sometimes still is today. Quite why a

[Patrick Grady]

staircase or a toilet is only for the use of Members of Parliament is somewhat beyond me. I know that moves are afoot to drive some change in that regard.

Once upon a time, I worked as a researcher in the Scottish Parliament. Although by no means was everything perfect there, there was an openness and transparency that undoubtedly shaped a different culture of tolerance and respect. In Portcullis House and on the Terrace, we still have tables that are clearly marked as for Members only. As the hon. Member for Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross (Jamie Stone) will know, in the Scottish Parliament canteen one will see Cabinet Secretaries sitting down next to the team from the mail room and special advisers sitting next to the cleaning staff. There is no sense of deference and no sense of particular entitlement based on obscure notions of seniority or grading.

Jamie Stone: I am always terribly glad when a colleague makes a good advert for the way we did things in Holyrood. That level society is a reflection of the fact that in Scotland we ourselves are all Jock Tamson's bairns.

Patrick Grady: Absolutely. That is not to say that everything there is perfect—I do not pretend for a minute that everything is perfect—but when the Scottish Parliament was set up 20 years ago, it was designed with a completely different culture in mind, and that has led to very noticeable differences.

Here at Westminster, we work hours that push everyone to the limits of tolerance. Massive uncertainties, even on quiet days such as this, as to exactly when things are going to finish only contributes to the stress and tensions. Perhaps it would help if we had fixed times for voting and if we were not locked into crowded rooms to vote, which again promotes hierarchy and literally divides us. None of it is massively surprising. Another report that ought to be factored into this discussion is Professor Sarah Childs' "The Good Parliament", which is in many ways about driving a wider cultural change. Perhaps if more of her recommendations were put in place, that would go a long way towards driving that change forward. None of these reports should be left to sit on the shelf; we all have a responsibility to drive them forward.

This is not and should not be a comfortable debate for any of us. Nobody is in a position to claim the moral high ground; if the dignity of any individual member of staff has been violated, in some way we are all diminished by that. Perhaps, on reflection, some of us will recognise our own behaviours, although hopefully not the more extreme examples and hopefully not things that are intentional. In the heat of the moment, in a stressful situation, we can forget our privilege and project our frustrations on to a member of staff or on to colleagues who are not really the cause of a problem. That is something I have taken away from the Valuing Everyone training which, as I said, I cannot recommend highly enough.

Since many of these accusations and reports of bullying, harassment and unacceptable behaviours first began to surface, there has been a strong and commendable consensus throughout this process. In the SNP, we want to continue to be part of that consensus, and I assure

the House that we will happily support any and all efforts to implement the recommendations of the White report, and anything that we can do to drive change of the toxic and outdated culture and practices that are experienced in this place.

3.59 pm

Mrs Maria Miller (Basingstoke) (Con): I join other hon. Members in welcoming Gemma White's report. The Leader of the House is right that we should never fail to condemn the sort of bullying or harassing behaviour that is so carefully set out in the report. Everything needs to be done to ensure that we do not have a culture that would in any way perpetuate that. It is also right to recognise that, as Gemma White has clearly said, the severe criticisms are levelled at a minority of hon. Members. As in any organisation, however, regardless of whether it is Parliament, a public institution or a private sector company, we need to deal with that behaviour head on.

I cannot believe that many MPs do not want to work in a modern workplace or have the most modern workplace practices. Although some might not have employed people before they came here, many did, so they know what a good workplace is and what good workplace practice is. As the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) said, we should start at the beginning with our candidate selection process. I have the privilege of being involved in candidate selection for my party and I am impressed by what my party does to look at the qualities of the individuals who are accepted to stand for election. There may be more that we could do, however, to ensure that people have experience of running organisations, because that is what we expect them to do if they are successful in being selected and elected to this place.

Enormous strides have been made—no pun intended with regard to the Leader of the House—in recent months and years, which is in no small way attributable to my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom). She brought a vigour to addressing the issues that was second to none. I pay personal tribute to her and reinforce the tributes from across the House to her tenacity in navigating a minefield of interests to get the independent complaints and grievance scheme in place. We will be forever in her debt for that.

The Leader of the House talked in his opening remarks about his intention to introduce an instrument to ensure that non-recent cases could be heard. I say amen to that; it is vital that it is introduced immediately. My only question is, why delay until the autumn? Why can those non-recent cases not start to be heard from the moment the instrument is laid, so they can be brought forward in the summer when it is perhaps more convenient for people, and so there is no delay to his intention to make sure that everybody can be held to account?

I also note the introduction of the helplines and the training programme, which I have been on. I was very impressed by the quality of the training that was given and of the individuals giving the training. I do not care who someone is; everyone can get something out of the training, however experienced they are. I was the head of graduate recruitment in the firm that I worked for and I recruited many staff over my years in the private

sector, but I learned an enormous amount about self-awareness, particularly in a digital age, which has come midway through many of our careers. The use of electronic media can unintentionally create tensions that none of us would want to exist.

There is also the behaviour code and the code of conduct. An enormous amount has been done in this space to address some of the issues that Gemma White raised in her excellent report, so I have only a few questions. I have huge respect for the Leader of the House and the shadow Leader of the House, but I note that the report was commissioned by the House of Commons Commission. Although I believe that they are both members of the Commission, they are not responsible for it. Why, oh why—I have raised this issue before—are we talking again about an issue wholly in the remit of the House of Commons Commission, without the House of Commons Commission leading the debate on it? It asked Gemma White to produce the report and it has responded to it; indeed, as Gemma White clearly points out, it is the organisation most responsible for delivering on the report. As a Member of the House of Commons, I want to know where the accountability is so that we know how the House of Commons Commission has stuck to what Gemma White has set out and that it is being delivered on.

The House of Commons Commission is the most archaic bit of the House of Commons structure, and it is long overdue for reform. Unlike almost any other of our Committees, it is not chaired by an elected representative, or at least by somebody elected to that position; its membership is appointed, and it is not able, it appears, to come to the House of Commons to explain what it is doing. However, it is instrumental in making this a better place of work, a better parliamentary democracy and a better Parliament. Why is how the Commission operates still so opaque?

I can go on to the website and find details of the Commission's meetings, although that is not always easy—and they are actions taken, rather than minutes of discussion. It is difficult, even for someone such as me who is interested in these issues, to stay abreast of what is going on. Is the biggest elephant in the room the need to understand who is accountable for implementing the Gemma White report? We have, of course, already had a debate about the Cox report, when the Commission had made very slow progress on the implementation of a number of recommendations.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire was right when she was Leader of the House to forever tell us that it is for Members to decide these things. The Commission, however, is the body that enables Members to have a collective thought and collective way of implementing things. Perhaps the current Leader of the House will be able to comment on that when he replies to the debate. I feel strongly that there is still opaqueness about how these things are handled. Why is that important? If we are to achieve the sort of institutional change that the Leader of the House, the shadow Leader of the House and the hon. Member for Glasgow North have spoken about, we must have clarity about accountability. At the moment, that clarity is not there.

We have not yet picked up on the fact that Gemma White did not receive any reports from Members about harassment and bullying by other Members. We should

be concerned about that; as a body of 650 people, we will have such instances. Clearly, however, Members still feel that they are not capable of talking even to somebody independent. The Conservative party has a strong Whips Office that has changed radically in the past 10 years. We need to make sure that Members feel that they can talk about these things. I was concerned that Gemma White had no examples of Members wishing to talk to her about bullying and abuse from other Members. We need to address that.

I also wish to pick up on the fact that non-disclosure agreements were discussed and highlighted in the report. Will the Leader of the House discuss that when he responds to the debate? The recommendation is:

“IPSA should consider amending the wording of the standard confidentiality clause to make it clear that it does not prevent employees bringing a claim of bullying and harassment.”

I say clearly that all my members of staff already have a standard confidentiality clause. If they were to exit my employment, I would have absolutely no requirement to reinforce or reiterate that, because it continues to stand. It is already there in our employment contracts. Why are we allowing IPSA to assert that it is a requirement on Members to have a further confidentiality clause when people leave their employment? I know from the work of my Select Committee, the Women and Equalities Committee, that this can cause considerable confusion in people's minds and a feeling that they are being muzzled from ever talking about adverse experiences in an employment setting. That requires a little more thought and consideration before we take it as read that IPSA should view confidentiality clauses and exit contracts, or exit agreements, as being standard, because legally that is not correct.

My final point concerns the independence of Members of Parliament. We jealously guard our independence, and we are right to do so. Our employment relationship with our staff has to be independent of interference from others—that is the right of MPs—but with that right comes a responsibility to act as a sensible and a good employer. Every employee here has the right to expect their MP, whoever they are and whichever party they represent, to act in a responsible manner. I absolutely agree with others who have made the point that that has to be a relationship of which we are in charge. The idea that IPSA would become the employer of my staff, potentially imposing conditions on their employment that are inconsistent with the way in which a particular constituency office is run, would be entirely unacceptable. MPs are right jealously to guard their independence, not because of any personal gain but because, if our democratic Parliament is to work in the way that our constituents expect it to work, we have to have MPs independent of interference from outside.

This is an important debate, and it is important for every Member to engage in it and to understand that treating our staff well is a hygiene factor in being a Member of Parliament, not an added extra. I hope that even Members who are not in the Chamber today can recognise that and make sure that they take part in the training, that they raise awareness among their staff of the helplines that are available, and that they adhere absolutely to the behaviour code and the code of conduct, so that we can be truly proud of this House of Parliament.

4.12 pm

John Mann (Bassetlaw) (Lab): My colleague next to me, my hon. Friend the Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), has just reminded me of a point that I had omitted, but that I am now going to make. Let me clarify. From information that I have seen recently, it seems to me that, if a tribunal case were taken against an MP, the MP could use legal insurance to defend that case, and the only way that anyone would know would be the £500 excess that has been paid, which would be itemised as an expenditure. In other words, could a Member of Parliament use the parliamentary insurance system, and therefore very expensive lawyers, against an employee who had taken a case to tribunal? In particular, if the tribunal were to rule in favour of the employee, would the Member of Parliament be required to pay those legal costs back to the taxpayer?

The Leader of the House might like to clarify that point in his closing remarks, because that seems to tip the balance in favour of the employer and the Member of Parliament against the employee. The employee could, of course, attempt to get union representation. That used to be rather more difficult. It was the last Unite general secretary election when, mysteriously, just before the nomination process, I got removed from my local branch, where I have a little bit of influence, and put in the Westminster staff branch. The matter was not resolved until after the nominations were done. Having been a member for 40 years, I cannot imagine what administrative change led to me being moved out of one branch, in which I have influence, to a branch in which I have none.

There was a positive conclusion, however: I was able to demonstrate that I had found a whole range of MPs in the same union branch as staff in this building. That was clearly a total nonsense and it had been going on for decades. I managed to get that resolved by protesting about being placed there myself, and MPs were then excluded from that branch—reputed to be the largest union branch representing employees in this Parliament.

Even though these problems have emerged very publicly in recent years, the unions have not quite caught up, although one has. I was pleased to hear the comments of the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), which were very appropriate, regarding the processes for selecting potential candidates for Parliament. I have previously given a bit of detail to the House about the exemplary role of the GMB in the east midlands in addressing sexual harassment. Following some press commentary, perhaps I ought to give a little more detail. In the recent past, David Prescott—a member of the Labour leader's office—went for selection in Mansfield, and the GMB east midlands decided to give him an interview about sexual harassment to see whether he understood the issue. He did not pass that interview, so the GMB withdrew its nomination of him.

It seems that trade unions might have this remit within the Labour party because they have a significant role in the potential selection of Labour MPs, but this is an exemplary principle that should be the case everywhere. It ought to be a requirement for political parties to ask and interrogate their candidates about issues such as sexual harassment to ensure that they are up to the mark; as the GMB east midlands withdrew its nomination, it obviously determined that the individual I mentioned was not.

Last week's shocking "Panorama" programme featured eight mainly young former members of Labour party staff, who went through the traumas of harassment and intimidation that they had been involved in. The allegations are primarily against people who are employed by Short money through Parliament. I have a list with me, so I can see that large numbers of them are employed by Short money. Now, it is essential that these former members of staff, who are external to the building, can use our independent complaints and grievance procedure if they have complaints against individuals employed through Short money who have allegedly been misusing their power to pressure people in relation to various activities. It is essential that we clarify and confirm that position, because that route could then be open to these people.

The situation is similar when it comes to external sexual harassment allegations. This report is very helpful in strengthening the systems, but it is still noticeable how reluctant people are to pursue issues. I have spoken to people who work in this place and have very specific complaints against Members of Parliament or other staff. Some have been prepared to go out there, but I hesitate to use the word "brave" because there is no less bravery from someone who is not prepared to go public about their situation but is prepared to say things about it. The role of the political parties remains the Achilles heel—the weakness.

We have cases in the Labour party where people—I have met some of them—have made allegations but no action has been taken for two or three years. Where is the decency in that? What about the rights of those who say they have been inappropriately treated or harassed, whether it is sexual harassment or any other form? If there is no resolution one way or another for years, what message does that give to people working here about how seriously the political parties take this?

Nothing exemplifies this more than the House of Commons Commission. The Whips have never suggested that I should sit on such a body; I wonder why. That is the problem with it. I would have been more than happy to submit myself to the will of other Members of Parliament. I might get zero votes to sit on such a body—fine—but there would be accountability built in.

Things are done behind the scenes. There are time bombs in all the political parties. I am not aware of any political party that does not have them ticking away, and there are some big, very serious ones. The political parties love to cover these things up and try to manage them, especially if it relates to Members of Parliament. They do not want a Member of Parliament having to resign in scandal and shame, because that is not the best way to fight a by-election.

The norm now seems to be, "Let's wait until we get to a general election, then we can quietly drop people, and no one will notice because it's in the general hubbub and excitement of a general election." There is nothing wrong with dropping people. I can think of one Conservative who was mysteriously dropped in a recent election. I was delighted to see him dropped. It was done very discreetly and effectively, and I commend those running the party for doing so, but that has become the system—in other words, sending the message, "Hang on and hope for the best."

There is no question but that it is shameful how some of the Whips have dealt with this in my time here. Obviously, I only know my own party, but I do not think that this is particularly a Labour problem, as opposed to a cultural problem here. I will give one example. I was told in a meeting, unequivocally, “If anyone’s got a complaint about sexual harassment within the Labour party, they can go to the police.” If someone wanted to go to the police, they would have done so already. I deal with a lot of people when it comes to sexual assault and child abuse who have come to see me and had my assistance and advocacy and who do not want to be named and be in the public eye.

There was an exposé in *The Sunday Times* two or three weeks ago about an MP who went to their party leader—my party leader—and he did nothing about it. He did nothing whatsoever. We found out about it because emails were leaked that exposed what was going on. Is that leadership? It is not my definition of leadership. It is exactly the opposite.

Layla Moran (Oxford West and Abingdon) (LD): I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I pay tribute to the brilliant speech he is making. I recognise much of what he is saying from my experience in my own party. The Liberal Democrats have been through an incredibly painful process of coming to our own independent complaints procedure, which enables many of the issues he is raising to come to the fore. Most importantly, it was co-created by activists and, in particular, young women in the party who felt that the current processes were not working. I believe that the procedure is now much more robust. It is by no means done, and he is right that the buck stops with MPs and that we have to lead from within our parties. I commend him for his words.

John Mann: The Liberal Democrats have had problems, like every other party, but my specialism is dealing with antisemitism, and I will say that the only political party I have met in the last three years that has a robust process for dealing with antisemitism at the moment is the Liberal Democrat party. The reason why I can say that it is robust is that there are ways in which an external person—someone not in the party, and who may be an opponent of the party politically or electorally—can actually go in, make complaints and hold the party institution to account if it fails to take action. That does not mean it will necessarily draw the right conclusions in my judgment and it does not mean people will be coming forward, but it does mean people are far more likely to have trust in the system. It is a transparent system, and that is the key—it is not an opaque system—and it is impressive. The fact that it is transparent and that I and others were able to go in and say, “Well, you could perhaps change this, do it this way, consider this, speak to that person,” was also very healthy indeed.

Such a system would strengthen any political party. To be honest, it is in the electoral interests—in the medium term, not the short term—of political parties actually to get their act together, because it means they will keep far more young people, particularly women, and encourage more to stay. It will be easier for young people, and especially for women and minority groups, to progress within that party and feel confident in being able to do so. It is a sensible approach for any party that wants to be in power or expand its political base.

The “Panorama” programme shows where these things can end in terms of the impact on individuals. That could just as easily have been an exposé of members of staff in here about what has happened to them—just as easily. If all the emails, the WhatsApp messaging and the secret ways in which people deal with things, such as recordings from Whips Offices of meetings that I and others have unfortunately had to be in—not that they were recorded; I did not record them, anyway, but I hope that they were recorded—were put out there, such transparency would be of significance.

My appeal to this House is to speed up the processes, not to be scared of independence inside it and to get rid of the antiquated structures that are a blockage. We must make sure we have the widest possible definition of who can raise grievances, how complaints can be taken to the independent body and how they will be heard. We should be confident, if necessary and as necessary, in saying to people, “Well, the judge and jury has determined on you: out you get. We’re not having you in here as a Member of Parliament. You are not suitable because of the way that you have treated people.”

That would be a very good thing for democracy, because far too many people—brave people—are suffering anonymously and in silence, but they remain brave because they are refusing to be cowed by what has happened to them. There are far too many of them in here, and we need to think that we will get on top of it, which needs our action and our honesty and, for the political parties, leadership. Perhaps some political parties might be prepared to show some.

4.28 pm

Maria Caulfield (Lewes) (Con): It is a pleasure to welcome this report and to speak in support of it. It is reassuring that the report shows that the majority of staff who responded have not experienced any harassment or bullying, but it is absolutely unacceptable that any of them have; we should really have a zero-tolerance approach.

As many Members have already said, one of the most shocking things I found as a newly elected MP was that there was absolutely no support or training in taking on staff. I had worked for many years in the NHS as a research sister, leading a team and being responsible for the staff of the team. I had had extensive experience of advertising for staff, interviewing and recruiting; doing staff appraisals and staff development; taking on disciplinary proceedings and dealing with conflict management within the team; looking at the staff budgets; looking at sick leave and maternity leave; looking after the temporary staff; and doing the payroll returns each month. I was therefore pretty experienced in staff management, but if I had not been, how on earth would I have learned how to take on a team of staff and look after them? We elect MPs on the basis that they will be good constituency MPs and good legislators, who bring their knowledge to this place when we make laws. We never give a moment’s thought as to whether they will any good at employing and supporting a team of people.

Language is important. It is not by chance that we do not have a staffing budget, but are termed to have an “expenses budget” for staff. In any other institution or big workplace, we would not treat our staffing budget as an expense. That demeans the staff we employ. It suggests that they are seen as a little bit extra, an

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add-on, of no real significant structural value to the team. That term should be changed. It should be a staffing budget, which has procedures, policies and guidelines for how it is managed. The current term is unacceptable.

When I was a nurse with a team of staff, I had protected time to look after them. I had protected time to do their appraisals and training. I had other professionals to ask for support. I could phone up the HR department and say that I had someone going on maternity leave and had forgotten how to do the paperwork, and could ask for up-to-date guidelines? I could contact the payroll department if I wanted to look at giving someone a pay rise, or if someone needed to take sick leave. I had senior managers. If I was having a difficult time, I could ask for their support and some guidelines. We get none of that as an MP and we wonder why we run into problems.

My big difficulty with the report, which makes some excellent recommendations, is that it does not go far enough. It is all about dealing with bullying and harassment. We need to encourage a culture of staff welfare, because by the time we have got to bullying, harassment and sexual misconduct, it is far too late. From day one, or when a person is even applying for a job here, there should be policies and procedures that safeguard their welfare. If they are then employed, those structures and processes would be in place.

Layla Moran: I recognise much of what the hon. Lady is saying, but there is a Members' HR service which has been dealing very professionally with some issues in my office. That service is available, although not enough. It should be much more structured in the way she suggests, but it does exist. I want to take a moment to thank the staff for their work; they probably just need a lot more resource.

Maria Caulfield: I have used that service, and its staff do provide a fantastic service. The point is that as an MP we have to approach them and know that their services are available. I recommend them to any MP because they are fantastic, but they are not available to staff. When I was working in the hospital and I had an issue, I could go to the HR department whether I was a team leader or an ordinary member of the team. That is the difference. Our staff do not have access to that wonderful support, advice and experience which could make a huge difference. The report recommends that they do have access to it.

I agree with my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) that MPs should remain as 650 small individual businesses, but changes do need to be made. We are treated as if we have autonomy over our staff, but there are some subtle things in the way that stop us. For example, I have a south-east constituency and my staff budget—it is not an expense, it is a budget—is £11,000 less than that for a London MP. Some of my staff live in London and some live in the south-east, which is as expensive as London. Some have to commute to London, spending £4,000 or £5,000 to do so. As I have £11,000 less in my budget, I cannot pay them as much or I cannot take on an extra member of staff. My small team, which does the casework and everything else that other staff members do, is under

extra pressure from day one because they have the same workload as a London MP but without the same financial recognition. How is it fair that from day one the staff of non-London MPs already feel the pressure of being in a smaller team or of being less valued financially, while doing exactly the same work?

I have an office manager to whom I delegate responsibility for looking after some of the other members of the team: taking on appraisals, looking at staff leave, conducting staff training and working with them. Most of my staff work in the constituency office. They do not work in Parliament, so they cannot nip to the office next door in Norman Shaw North and say, "I have a difficult case; can we get some advice on it?" They are completely isolated as a team, and my office manager has the responsibility for looking after them. We have had members of the public come into the office in tears because we are the last port of call when the jobcentre has let them down, when they cannot get their housing benefit or when they have been made homeless on a Friday evening. They often land in tears in my office, and my staff, many of whom have just left university and do not have a huge amount of life experience, have to pick up the pieces.

Ultimately, I am responsible for my staff, but I am not there every day of the week. My office manager has to support them as a team. What training and support is available for those staff? I cannot do it all as their employer, so it is incumbent on the House of Commons to help MPs to provide that support for their staff—whether that means the senior staff who are delegated to look after them or the junior staff who have to do some very difficult work on a daily basis.

Mrs Miller: I apologise for not hearing the start of my hon. Friend's speech. Does she not agree that there needs to be accountability for who is looking at that? This process needs to be led by Members, and therefore there is a role for the House of Commons Commission to be doing such things, although we do not really know whether it is doing that.

Maria Caulfield: I completely agree. Such things are part of our role, but I do not think they are treated seriously. We are seen as legislators and caseworkers, but our duty as an employer is seen as an expenses add-on. Until that is seen as a crucial part of our role, for which we need training on how to support our staff, including junior members of staff, a culture of staff welfare will not be created.

That brings me to my point about how we support MPs. I have been a MP for over four years. This is not a criticism of the Whips Office in any way—I do not think this is necessarily their job—but in that time, I have never had anyone sit down and ask me what my strengths and weaknesses are and what interests I have in policy. I have had health problems this year and I can get a slip any day of the week, but sometimes it would be nice for someone to sit down with me and say, "Can we give you extra support?" There is not the culture in this place to look after Members of Parliament, and that filters through to their staff. If we are dealing with a problem at the point at which it has become harassment, bullying or a sexual problem in the workplace, it is too late. We need to change the culture overall, and that starts with us looking after one another.

I come from an NHS background where training was ingrained in us. We all found that the fire training and so on was not what we wanted to be doing, but we had to do it; it was mandatory. Even as a bank nurse now, when I do shifts in the NHS, I get learning and development phoning me up to say, “You are not registered for your mandatory training. You will not be able to do any bank shifts until you have done it for this year.” I get HR telling me, “Your registration is due for renewal.” I have people checking on me.

We are busy people and we do not have someone to oversee what happens. That is exactly what is in the report. It says that we should have a body responsible to oversee us that can say, “Do you know your staff appraisals are overdue? Have you had those conversations with them? Have you looked at their annual leave? Are they taking their annual leave, or are you working them so hard that they feel that they cannot ask for it? Are they taking too much annual leave? Is there a problem with health and wellbeing?” We have no one.

We all know what it is like as busy MPs. I am just a Back Bencher—I do not have any other responsibilities—and I struggle to sit down with my staff every few months to go through some of the issues that they have. I absolutely agree, therefore, with the report’s recommendations that we need uniform policies and procedures, so that every MP’s office is the same; that assistance is provided with recruitment; that there is proactive contact with MPs’ staff; and that probationary periods are checked, because they can just go on indefinitely, with people on temporary contracts when they should be employed in substantive posts. We should ensure that appraisals are in place, because these are talented people. They are often graduates of universities, who could be getting good jobs anywhere else, but they can get stuck working as a caseworker, not getting a pay rise or staff development, which is absolutely criminal. Why? Because as MPs—as their employers—we are not there to support them.

There are lots of recommendations in the report that I strongly support, but I go back the point made by the former Leader of the House that when training has been provided—I know that the training on valuing people only started a few months ago—very few of us take up the offer. I think there needs to be more publicity around it. This week, we had a very good email from the Clerk of the House of Commons about the Valuing Everyone training, Members’ HR support, the health and wellbeing service, the sexual misconduct advisory service, the bullying and harassment reporting hotline and the employee assistance programme. There are great measures in place, but I put my hand on my heart and say that I have used none of them, and I have told my staff about none of them. If we do not read our own emails and act on them, no one oversees whether we use those crucial services.

I conclude by saying that I completely agree with the report. I believe we should have autonomy over our staffing, but we need support to be able to support our employees properly. I do not think we recognise how much is expected of MPs. We are members of probably one of the most hated professions in the country, and sometimes we need to give ourselves a break. We may be great constituency caseworkers or fabulous legislators, but there is no shame in saying that we are not sure how to employ people or how to look after those we employ.

I urge everyone to read the recommendations, and to ensure that we and our staff take up the training and support that is available.

4.41 pm

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak in this debate and to follow the hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield), who gave an interesting speech. The Committee on Standards, which I chair, will be discussing Gemma White’s report at its meeting next week, and I do not want to anticipate the Committee’s views ahead of that meeting. Speaking personally, and like other Members who have spoken this afternoon, I very much welcome her report. I put on record my thanks to her for her work on it and pay tribute to the staff, past and present, who spoke to her, often about very painful experiences.

As with last year’s report by Dame Laura Cox—indeed, as with last week’s report to the House of Lords by Naomi Ellenbogen QC—Gemma White’s report does not make comfortable reading for us as parliamentarians, but we must pay heed to what it tells us. The White report reinforces Dame Laura’s message that abuses have taken place in the dark corners and closed offices of our institution. Of course, that does not mean that all, or even a majority of, Members or senior staff have been abusers or complicit in abuse—Gemma White acknowledges that many are seen as good employers—but there have been enough documented cases of bad behaviour where the House authorities and the political parties have been unresponsive to cause us significant concern.

The Standards Committee is determined to play its part in evolving a better standards system for Parliament. As we have heard, that has proven to be a complicated and very protracted process. That is partly because of the complexity of parliamentary structures, but there is no doubt that the sheer number of alternative and competing centres of authority—including, as we have heard, the House of Commons Commission, the political parties, the Government, various teams in the House administration, the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards, the ICGS helplines and investigation services and the Standards Committee, as well as their duplicates in the House of Lords—have all made it much more difficult to capitalise on the political will that I believe exists in this place to deal with the problems that we face. The number of separate reviews that we have had, and the lack of co-ordination between them—not necessarily the fault of the individual reviewers—has not helped either. I hope that clarity is now slowly emerging and that Gemma White, like Dame Laura Cox before her, will assist us in moving forward rapidly.

I am pleased that Gemma White welcomes the Standards Committee’s current work on reviewing the range of sanctions available to the Committee, the House and the Parliamentary Commissioner. She notes that this development

“has been a long time coming.”

That is a fair comment, although we have not been short of other tasks to keep us busy in recent months. She has given us a deadline of December this year to put in place a package of reforms to the sanctions system. I assure the House that the Committee will use its best endeavours to meet that deadline, and I am confident that we will be able to put proposals to the Leader of the House, and the House as a whole, in time to do so.

[Kate Green]

I should add that the Committee's work on this subject is without prejudice to any decisions that the House may make in response to Dame Laura Cox's recommendation that Members should play no part in determining complaints about bullying and harassment against other Members. A working party of officials has been set up to put proposals to the Commission, and I am pleased that one of the lay members of the Committee has been appointed to it. I hope that the Committee will recommend an updated set of sanctions which are fit for purpose and can be implemented no matter who the decision-takers on sanctions are in future, whether they are MPs or not.

Other work by the Committee includes formulating a framework for considering ICGS appeals, on which we published a report in March. We have set up a formal sub-committee on ICGS matters to deal with that important and sensitive work. I am pleased to see that Gemma White comments favourably on the progress that the Committee has made in this area. As promised, we are keeping the appeal arrangements under review, and if necessary we will report further to the House on any modifications that we consider desirable. We have also set up an informal sub-committee to review the Code of Conduct and the associated Guide to the Rules relating to the conduct of Members, which we are required to do in each Parliament. The sub-committee, which is dominated by lay members of the Committee on Standards, has been doing good work, and we intend to launch a public consultation in the autumn on proposals for revisions to the code and guide.

Our seven lay members continue to play a very active role in the Committee, and to provide an independent perspective from outside the Westminster bubble. I want to place on record my thanks to them. The House will recall that it conferred full voting rights on the lay members in January this year. Because the Committee has equal numbers of lay and elected members, and because I, as Chair, only have a casting vote, they now have, in effect, a majority vote on the Committee. However, I am glad to say that in the six months since we made that decision, no formal votes have taken place in the Committee. We are working very much as a unified team, following the consensus-seeking approach of all Select Committees.

We also plan to report to the House soon on the subject of confidentiality in relation to complaints, in the light of early experience of how the ICGS procedures have been working in practice, as well as reflecting some of the concerns of both the Committee and the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards about the recent extension of confidentiality to non-ICGS cases. I can assure the House that Committee members, including me, have also undertaken the Valuing Everyone training, and I endorse the comments that we have heard about it this afternoon. I should add that I will be supporting the proposals in respect of non-recent allegations on which the House will be asked to vote later today.

I thank the House for giving me an opportunity to update Members on the work that the Committee on Standards has been doing in order to play our part in making Parliament a safe and respectful place for everyone who visits or works here.

4.48 pm

Mike Wood (Dudley South) (Con): I shall speak very briefly, because so many of the points made during last month's debate on the Cox report apply to this debate, and so many further points have been made so effectively by Members on both sides of the House today.

As the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) said earlier, many of Gemma White's findings, and the evidence with which she was presented, were simultaneously shocking and, sadly, unsurprising. It is with sadness that we must reflect on that, and consider what measures we can take to ensure that those who work for us, those who work with us, and those who support us and allow us to perform our functions as representatives here in Parliament can be sure that they will be treated with respect and dignity, and with the basic decency that we would expect from any other employer in the country.

The basic issue in the Gemma White report is the balance to be struck in terms of the role of individual MPs: the extent to which we are independent Members and employers and the extent to which we are part of a collective. Of course we are effectively 650 small businesses in this place, each operating our own shop, but like all small businesses our offices work best when they work as a team, and well performing teams are built on a strong culture of respect. It is very rare for an effective team to be founded on fear; a team is rarely strengthened by abuse and bullying. That principle clearly applies in our own offices.

I have previously worked for Members of Parliament, although in constituency rather than here in the Palace, so I have seen and know about many of the demands from both sides of that employer-employee relationship. I know the flexibility that is offered so freely by many of our staff, and it is offered so freely because they usually see themselves and us as part of a team—as engaged in a common endeavour, working in the same direction for the benefit of constituents and seeking to achieve the same things. In a good environment that is working properly staff are happy to be flexible. I know I was very happy to go well beyond what I was contracted to do; I never felt pressured to do work, including the kind of work referred to by Gemma White of a personal nature in terms of making sure MPs' wider parliamentary activities and life are functioning smoothly. But we must also be mindful that, as other Members have said, there is a risk that the flexibility that we value so much can be taken advantage of, and not always consciously. It would be far too easy for us to get into a routine whereby we start to expect things of our staff that are clearly well beyond what they are employed to do and what it is reasonable to expect.

It is important that Members of Parliament are autonomous and, as Gemma White recognises, there is a need for MPs' office structures to differ to reflect the needs of each different Member, but that should be an autonomy within common standards. We are autonomous, but we are not separate. We as Members cannot allow ourselves to become effectively chiefs of our own fiefdoms—judge, jury and executioner of our own parliamentary office. It would clearly be wrong and entirely unacceptable if behaviour that we would not stand for if any of our constituents came to us complaining about their own employer was allowed to happen here, under our noses and in our own offices and those of our colleagues, on very little basis other than that that is the

way things have always been in Parliament. While respecting the autonomy of parliamentary offices, as Gemma White's report does, we need to ensure that the common standards and the common framework for protecting our employees' rights, decency and dignity at work are protected, whoever they happen to work for. The only way in which we can move on from the cases raised in this report is to embrace its recommendations and implement them. We need to establish those common standards and practices across the House, regardless of a Member's or staff member's length of service, apparent seniority or junior position.

Like those in other public sector workplaces, we need to ensure that there is a properly resourced HR department that can support our staff as well as supporting us as employers. That would go a long way towards providing the support that our teams need and deserve. It would provide an impartial eye, so that any difficulties could be corrected before they became serious problems. Everyone in all parts of the House should come behind this report and invest all the time and effort needed to ensure that we end the culture of harassment and bullying that has clearly been common in a small number of, but still too many, cases in parliamentary offices in recent years. As I have said, we would expect any employer in our constituencies to follow these standards of decency. We need to set that example and to lead.

4.56 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I am sure none of us thought we would be surprised to read Gemma White's report, given that there were reports of bullying and harassment of MPs' staff in the press as far back as November 2017, but even though we knew there was a problem, the report has been no less shocking. It is shocking to know that in the place where I work, some staff have been and are still being subjected to an "unacceptable risk of bullying and harassment, including sexual harassment, at work"

from their employers. Those employers are Members of Parliament, not some backstreet employer. They are people elected by this country to lead, not to have an attitude to staff that belongs to a bygone era.

No one reading the report could fail to be moved by the testimonies of those who have suffered at the hands of some of our colleagues. Like many others who have spoken today, I want to pay tribute to the former and current members of staff who have been brave enough to come forward and participate in this inquiry. I am sure that their stories were not easy to share, and I want to assure them that I and others will listen to what they have to say and do our best to put in place measures to ensure that those in the future do not go through what they have gone through. I want to read out the words of some of those members of staff. One talked about an MP who

"would intimidate, mock and undermine me every day".

Another stated:

"After I resigned I suffered a breakdown which I have never recovered from".

Another said:

"My entire sense of self was crushed, and by the end, I felt incapable and incompetent".

No one should be made to feel that way when they go to work.

Grown men and women have been shouted at, sworn at, belittled and humiliated. Some have been relentlessly picked on, day in and day out, and worn down by the drip-drip nature of the abuse that they have suffered. Others have been the victims of unwanted sexual advances or banter. This is nothing short of sickening. It might not be something that many Members have personally been on the receiving end of, but we all know people who have received appalling treatment at the hands of their employer. These are people who wake up each morning with a knot in their stomach, or worse, because they do not know what they will face when they go into work. However, they know that what they will face will be unpleasant, harrowing and debilitating.

Staff are already expressing their concern that the number of Members here today does not send out the right message about the importance that we should place on the way in which our staff are treated in this place. This has happened right here under our noses in these buildings, in the corridors and the offices. It is like something from a bygone era: staff feeling bullied and abused and, most importantly, feeling powerless to do anything about it. Talk to any member of staff and they will almost certainly know someone who has been involved in such issues. Unsurprisingly, that will have had a detrimental effect on them, with some becoming too anxious or ill to work. Some have been forced to resign, often following a period of sick leave, and some have been sacked. Some have left Parliament altogether with promising careers ruined while the perpetrators get off scot-free.

Eddie Hughes: I recognise so much of what the hon. Gentleman is saying. He used the word "banter"—he was referring to the report—so I googled it, and it seems to imply some sort of friendly, playful exchange. However, the impacts that he is describing are far from friendly and playful. We should get away from the idea that abuse can sometimes be acceptable because it is casual.

Justin Madders: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. People may sometimes feel that they are being amusing or engaging in banter, but they have no idea of the effect that that is having on the individual. Many sexual harassment cases over the years will have the same characteristic. That is why training is important, because we all must understand that some of the things we say can have a negative effect on people.

This behaviour has been happening for a long time, and perpetrators have been getting away with it, enabling them to carry on the cycle of abuse with the next member of staff, a problem that we absolutely must end. It is unsurprising that one contributor to the report states that staff have come to believe that there has been

"general disregard for the dignity, wellbeing and employment rights of MPs' staff".

I agree with that, and Gemma White agrees with that. She concludes that

"bullying and harassment in MPs' offices is widespread and cultural",

and it would be impossible for anyone who reads her report to conclude otherwise.

As has already been said, a minority of Members are involved in this kind of activity, but it is important to say at this point that Gemma White explicitly stated:

[Justin Madders]

“Some Members were the subject of contributions from a number of different contributors.”

In some cases, we are talking not about isolated incidents, but about the same MP repeating a pattern of abusive behaviour with successive members of staff. The fact that this is just a minority must not stop us treating the matter with the utmost urgency. If the same names keep cropping up in reports, without any acknowledgment of wrongdoing or any action to put things right, we know that something is not working.

The majority of us, of course, are perfectly able to be fair and reasonable employers, but that is not an excuse for a small number who behave inappropriately. People have got away with that for too long, because we have not had the right procedures in place. We must now collectively find a way to deal with the situation, or we will all be responsible for what goes on in this place.

There is no place for bullying and harassment in any workplace, but we should be the exemplar of best practice. We should be the place that people look to for positive behaviours. We should set the standards for others to emulate. If we cannot get our own house in order, how can we effectively challenge the employment practices of others? We are failing badly to get our own house in order, because we have here another publication with yet more cases of bullying and harassment, but we have not properly implemented the recommendations from the last one.

We must stop dragging our feet. We must at least implement changes to employment practices to give our staff the same protections that we would expect from every other employer and that we would expect our constituents to have. We must ensure that the necessary steps are taken so that staff can report incidents without any fear of reprisal or retribution, because many who took part in the inquiry were clear that they felt unable to raise a complaint against their MP because, until July of last year, those complaints had to be made directly to that MP. In many cases, they were complaining to the boss about the boss's behaviour, so who could blame them for concluding that there would be literally no point in doing so because the same person being complained about would be the judge and jury over that particular complaint?

Staff now have access to an independent complaints and grievance scheme, but it is clear that, even though the new system is in place, they still do not have confidence that it would not be career suicide to refer complaints to it. Indeed, Gemma White concludes that, even now, it is “unlikely that the majority of bullying and harassment suffered by MPs' staff will be reported under the ICGS.”

We must consider that seriously today.

Staff are simply not convinced of the process's independence, so it is vital that we move to a fully independent process in which MPs are not able to sit in judgment on their colleagues in any way, shape or form. No longer should an employer be a judge in his or her cause. It really is not good enough for the Commission to recommend the non-involvement of Members in determining bullying and harassment cases. We have to move away from it altogether.

It is not good enough that there is a complete lack of clarity on the sanctions that can be imposed on an MP. The Women and Equalities Committee heard at the

beginning of this month, in evidence on a gender-sensitive Parliament, that sanctions against MPs appear to amount only to an informal quiet word with a dozen or so offenders. If that is all that happens, who can blame staff for feeling that there is not much point in going through the system?

Mrs Miller: It is interesting that the hon. Gentleman raises that point. The Select Committee's concern is that, even though there is now a formal grievance procedure in place, it appears that some senior members of staff still think it is the right procedure just to have a quiet word. If they are not recording who they are talking to, there is no ability to monitor repeat offenders. We are quite concerned that that procedure and practice still seems to be embedded in this place.

Justin Madders: I thank the right hon. Lady for that point. I find it incredible that we are still in that place. I cannot imagine that the contracts of employment of those staff do not make it explicitly clear that bullying and harassment are considered gross misconduct. A quiet word following an allegation of gross misconduct is not good enough, and it deters people from making valid complaints in future. That really has to change.

Even if we get to a truly independent process, we still need to think about why staff feel inhibited in making a complaint against their employer. The employer might have to write them a reference, or they might still share an office. Until recently, staff could not pursue a complaint at all if they left Parliament. I think that will change with the motion on the independent complaints and grievance scheme, but it was a ridiculous distinction to make—it would not be allowed in any other workplace—because a lot of people, for valid reasons, will not make a complaint until they have left their employment.

I am pleased that we will finally have a chance to extend the independent complaints and grievance scheme to cover non-recent cases of bullying and harassment. I do not know why we need to wait for the autumn, as has already been mentioned, and we have to be clear that this is not the final point on our journey but is a step towards it.

From what Gemma White has said, it is clear to me that, without effective sanctions and a truly independent complaints panel, we will not have true justice. It is bizarre that we can talk about extending the scheme, when the report basically says that staff do not have confidence because of the lack of independence and the lack of sanctions. That problem will not be rectified when we pass the motion on the independent complaints and grievance scheme, and we need to address it as a matter of urgency.

Ultimately, this comes down to the power imbalance between MPs and staff, the high demand for jobs in politics and the reliance on patronage in our political system, which means that the risk of abuse of power is all too great. We have 650 individual offices, which together employ more than 3,200 staff. Any other public sector organisation of that size would have a body that allows some degree of independent oversight of its employment practices, whether it be the use of probation periods, appraisals, performance management or training.

As an absolute minimum, we need basic policies and procedures to drag our worst offenders into the 21st century, and it cannot be ignored that probation periods and

performance management were repeatedly raised by contributors to the report. Those of us who already recognise employment practices in a fair and reasonable manner use them to support and develop our staff, but they can be used as a stick to prevent people from making complaints—those are the tactics of a bullying employer. So I welcome the Commission's statement that it will begin consulting immediately to see what implementation issues there will be in the creation of a new HR department, because it is clear that we need to give much more support to Members and staff in developing and implementing policies in a fair and reasonable manner. That we do not already do this in 2019 is shocking to the outside world, so we have to get on with it as soon as possible.

Having spoken to staff, I know that they are keen to see that department set up, because, as Gemma White recommends, it would also support staff welfare. We hope it would also introduce initiatives such as a buddy system for new staff, to reduce isolation, and peer mentoring for staff who need extra support. Many staff do this in an informal way already, but others are struggling behind closed doors and are not calling for help but actually need it.

There is a role for IPSA or a similar independent body in respect of the introduction of both a leavers survey and a way to collect data to monitor MPs' employment records, which would help to identify trends or specific pockets of concern in individual offices. That is important, because there must be nowhere for bullies to hide. Only through introducing transparent systems and independent scrutiny will we be able to end the impunity that currently exists in some quarters to hire and fire at will. Let us imagine it became public knowledge that a Member had gone through a dozen or more staff in a couple of years—questions would rightly be asked about what was going on there. So although I also welcome the Commission's announcement that it will consult on how to collate this data and use it to improve employment practices, I again urge it to do that with the utmost expediency.

Finally, I come to an issue that I have spoken about before and that the hon. Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) spoke about at length. Many MPs enter Parliament with little or no management training or experience, but that cannot be used as an excuse. If we know MPs lack that training, we should be providing it, to make sure that no one falls behind. Even with my experience in the law, I would still have welcomed a Members' staff handbook, with correct procedures and policies in place, and I was shocked to find that there was little support here when I was starting out as a new MP, having to hire staff, set up offices and so on. Clearly, with such a low take-up so far of the Valuing Everyone training, voluntary training is not the answer. I see no reason why that training should not be mandatory for all current Members and their staff, and it should be completed within a short timeframe. It is up to us as Parliament to set the standards not just for this place, but for the rest of the country. We cannot lecture others on the way they treat their staff if we cannot get our own house in order. We must be an example of the best practice, not the worst. That starts with getting our house in order, and getting true independence in our procedures and meaningful sanctions for those who transgress.

5.12 pm

Eddie Hughes (Walsall North) (Con): I wish to begin by apologising for not bobbing earlier; I was enjoying the speech from my hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Mike Wood) so much and reflecting upon it that I forgot to get to my feet. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Ellesmere Port and Neston (Justin Madders), and I was obviously so engaged with what he was saying that I wanted to join in.

I can almost encapsulate the essence of my contribution in one or two sentences. I simply want to reach out to the staff who work on the estate or in offices around the country and say, "We are on your side. Clearly, bad things have happened. We understand and appreciate now, at least to some extent, the scale of the problem. And you do not need to fear that it will be limiting to your career or 'career suicide', to use the term used in the report, if you report terrible behaviour by your boss, who happens to be an MP."

My hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Maria Caulfield) said that being an MP is held in very low regard by members of the public, but there is an unusual double-edged sword here, because although the public in many ways do not respect the role of an MP, a lot of people hold the job in such reverence that it gives us power, which should be used appropriately. For example, there are 150,000 doctors in the country, and I guess that vacancies for doctors are probably coming up every day of every week, but there are only 650 MPs and the opportunity to become one does not come around very often. Therefore, many people—we encounter them on the estate all the time—treat us with a degree of reverence that is completely inappropriate. Initially, I was surprised and delighted by it, but now I am slightly embarrassed by it. So I can completely see that a small number of MPs might let that feeling of power go to their heads and exercise it in a completely inappropriate way when it comes to their staff or other people—and we see that in the report.

Let us remember that the number of people who contributed to the report—220 people—feels relatively small, given that we have heard that figure of 3,200 staff, but it says in the report that more than half those people had significant mental or physical illness as a result of the behaviour that they experienced. That is 110 people, just from that small sample, who have experienced totally dreadful behaviour. I do not see how we could be in a position to do anything but treat this issue urgently and get on and address it.

With regard to the training, I seem to have made a bit of a mistake: when I said that only 34 MPs and 135 members of staff had taken part in that training, I did not realise that the opportunity to take part came about relatively recently. I was reminded of the fact that when I became a councillor in 1999—as a young, I think, very well brought up lad—I went to the council and was totally shocked by the way councillors berated and belittled members of staff. I just could not understand how they could treat them so poorly, yet it felt like that was just the way that relationship worked: the councillors had the upper hand, and it was perfectly acceptable for them to be rude in public to staff at the council. That clearly was not acceptable, and fortunately, three years later, the council was placed in special measures and it became mandatory for councillors to attend training.

[Eddie Hughes]

One problem we have with training is that those people who need it least are the people most likely to take it up. Those people in the council who actually would have benefited from the training were completely aghast and self-righteous—“Why should I be made to attend any training?”—but the Government said, “This is mandatory. You don’t get out of special measures unless you attend training,” so those who needed it were forced to have it and the council moved quickly to a much more comfortable position. I hope that we do not end up in a position where we need to make training mandatory, but that MPs just accept that we have a problem and that it would be a good idea if we sought to address it.

Personally, I still found it a shock coming here. I had run teams and managed budgets—all those sorts of skills that would be necessary to do a good job of running a team in Parliament—but I distinctly remember how completely overwhelmed I was in my first weeks as an MP. There was information coming from all directions; I was trying to understand parliamentary procedure; and emails were coming in by the hundreds and thousands. I felt almost a sense of panic. I just wanted to understand my role as an MP, and my role as a manager was secondary.

When I attended the parliamentary assessment board to get on the candidates list, that was not exactly the skillset being tested. The board wanted to know that someone was a committed Conservative, that they understood policy and that they could make a reasonable job of representing the Conservative party publicly; it was not so focused on whether someone could manage a budget and staff and handle HR procedures. It is therefore completely appropriate that we have a beefed-up HR department and that there is the opportunity for us all to access the excellent support that already exists but perhaps not at a scale that is appropriate for 650 MPs.

I have one other thing to say. I agreed with almost everything that the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady) said, with one exception, which was when he said that we should not have tables saved for us in Portcullis House with something that says “Reserved for MPs”. I completely understand his point, but on an estate where meeting rooms are at an absolute premium and with 650 of us looking to have meetings perhaps two or three times a day, sometimes the only way that I find the space to have a meeting is to meet people in Portcullis House and sit at one of those tables. I do not feel in any way that that sets me at a level above; it is just a practical thing. Give us some more meeting rooms and I say, “Let’s have equal access to tea, coffee and cake in future.”

I wish to conclude where I began, by saying to the staff, “We are wholeheartedly on your side. Do not suffer. If you have any problems with your boss, come and talk to one of the people who have contributed to this debate, because we are on your side.” I have no doubt that the Leader of the House will make that apparent.

5.19 pm

Mel Stride: I thank everyone for their valuable contributions to the debate. Interestingly, there has been a high level of consensus. It appeared that it had broken at the end, when my hon. Friend the Member

for Walsall North (Eddie Hughes) suggested a disagreement with the hon. Member for Glasgow North (Patrick Grady), but then the hon. Gentleman started to nod vigorously, so we are in agreement on virtually every aspect of the matter.

We agree that, as was set out in the White report, in the main Members of this House behave appropriately and in some cases in an exemplary manner towards their staff. We all recognise, however, that there are cases in which the behaviour between Members of Parliament and their staff is inappropriate, sometimes grossly. We all agree that, particularly as a Parliament that sets an example to others and, rightly, sets the legislation that requires businesses to conduct themselves in a certain manner, we should uphold the highest possible standards and that any example of egregious behaviour between a Member and their staff is one example too many. Equally, as has been clearly expressed, we share a desire to do something about that, which is why we welcome the recommendations of the White report, and to make sure that we proceed at pace to tackle the issues that Gemma White has rightly shone a light on.

I will deal with some of the specific questions asked in the debate. The shadow Leader of the House, the hon. Member for Walsall South (Valerie Vaz), among others, raised the Valuing Everyone training and made the point that a relatively small number of hon. Members and their staff have engaged with it. Notwithstanding the valid point that it is in its early stages—I believe that it was only earlier this year that it was being piloted; my right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom) said that she had taken part in what was then a pilot—it is important to make sure that each and every Member undertakes it. I have undertaken it, as have the shadow Leader of the House and you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I found it helpful and useful.

Further suggestions were made about the training. We have discussed whether it might become necessary to mandate it. In the event of there not being broader engagement, that might have to be seriously considered. My right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire suggested that there might be a three-month induction period, during which that and other training sessions might be expected to be completed and, in the event that they were not, passes might be withheld as a consequence. There are different ways to address the issue, but there is no doubt that it needs to be addressed.

The shadow Leader of the House asked how long the consultation on the report will last. As she knows, although she is right to ask me that question in the context of this debate, which I am leading, it is a matter for the House and the House of Commons Commission, on which she, I and you, Madam Deputy Speaker, sit. What I will say is that we will press forward as quickly as we can in that respect, as was expressed at its last meeting.

The shadow Leader of the House also asked how we might measure the cultural change that we are seeking to achieve in this place. There are various statistics and numbers that we can use to measure progress: the statistics on access to the helplines that form part of the independent complaints and grievance scheme are publicly available; we touched on the number of hon. Members and their staff who attend the Valuing Everyone training; and there will be the 18-month review of the ICGS, as recommended under the terms of the Alison Stanley report.

My right hon. Friend the Member for South Northamptonshire welcomed the fact that the White report does not recommend a fundamental change in employment status when it comes to Members of Parliament and staff, and I would agree. She also speculated about where the new HR function should rest, suggesting either IPSA or the House authorities. She had a fairly strong view on “the former”, as she termed it—on IPSA. That was echoed by the hon. Member for Glasgow North. We must have that debate, which is why sometimes these things take a little time. It should not take longer than it needs to, but we need to work our way around the human resources recommendation in particular, to make sure that that aspect is absolutely right in every possible detail.

The hon. Member for Glasgow North also spent time discussing hierarchy and the areas of the Palace not available to non-Members. He made an important point, and the House of Commons Commission is discussing those issues. Although the Government may not agree with him on the matter of Scottish nationalism, we can perhaps even learn some things from the Scottish Parliament in that respect, as he suggested.

The hon. Member for Bassetlaw (John Mann) asked two specific questions, one by way of intervention on my opening remarks: it related to the treatment or accessibility of the ICGS for those whose employment is funded through Short money. I have had further notice from the box to tell me that if someone was part of the parliamentary community, they would have access to the independent complaints and grievance scheme, irrespective of how their employment was funded.

The hon. Gentleman also raised the payment for legal advice of which Members may be able to avail themselves under insurance policies provided by IPSA, if I understood him correctly. He may have been referring solely to industrial tribunals, which would be outside the context of the internal arrangements that we are discussing here. However, if his remarks pointed more towards the ICGS scheme, I should say that, as I understand it, there would be no advantage, under insurance arrangements or otherwise, to the MP as opposed to the member of staff who might be complaining about them.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) specifically asked about why the Cox 2 recommendation, which we will address in a moment by way of a motion before the House—that the scope of the ICGS be extended back beyond June 2017 and include those no longer employed at the House—should not be rolled out immediately when the motion is passed. The answer is that it will take a little time, particularly to get on board the specialist independent assessors required to look at cases that, of necessity, will sometimes go back some time.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): The Leader of the House may or may not know the answer to this question. What would be the total cost of setting up an organisation such as that?

Mel Stride: I do not know; the House of Commons Commission will consider that. I interpret the hon. Gentleman’s question as showing concern that we should always be aware of the costs of putting recommendations into place, and he is entirely correct. Often, reports come forward with recommendations, and off we go

saying that we should accept everything exactly as it is presented; further down the line, we decide that it was rather bureaucratic and expensive. In making sure that the recommendations of the report are bedded in correctly, we should have such issues at the forefront of our minds.

Mrs Miller: No one would expect non-recent cases to be dealt with immediately; it is obvious that they will take time to look into. Why cannot the Leader of the House enable cases to be brought forward now, while the recruitment process is going on? Clearly, during the summer period people might have more time to gather the necessary information to submit a claim.

Mel Stride: The message from the Dispatch Box this afternoon is that we expect these measures to be introduced by October. Therefore, the message to anybody who is minded to come forward is that there is now time to prepare prior to October, when we hope that the independent assessors, who will handle that work, will be in place. I think that I can at least signal that that is our anticipation, and hope that that in itself is helpful.

Justin Madders: I am grateful to the Leader of the House for giving way. I must say that I am a little perplexed that we have a scheme that is essentially identical to the current complaints scheme, that it has taken this long to come to fruition and that there will be a further delay. What is also of concern is that there may be an election later this year and those who may get caught by this historical complaints process may no longer be Members of this place. Can the Leader of the House confirm that, in those circumstances, those people will essentially not face any inquiry?

Mel Stride: The hon. Gentleman has very perceptively poked his finger into one of a few areas where it is not entirely clear how the system will work. Indeed, he is right. If a Member has left this place, I guess that an investigation could be conducted, but then there would be the issue of what sanctions could be applied and by whom. Indeed, a Member may have left this place and gone to the other place and, in those circumstances, he might ask what the process would be and who would apply the sanctions—if sanctions are to be applied. The best answer that I can give him is that there are elements of this that will require further work. If he would like to contribute to that, my door is always open.

That brings me rather neatly on to the important point made by my right hon. Friend the Member for Basingstoke. She rightly asked the question about this whole issue of transparency, ownership, accountability and leadership, and where these decisions ultimately rest. I am standing at this Dispatch Box as a Minister leading this debate, but, of course, these are matters not for the Government, but for the House. They are matters for all 650—600-plus—MPs who have actually taken their seats in this place. In some senses, there are some quite deep and reform-related issues around governance here that various Members have raised, which really fall to the House to grapple with. My role in that is that I sit on the House of Commons Commission, as does the shadow Leader of the House, but I do not lead the House in terms of reforming its own procedures and practices, albeit that I can facilitate some of those changes, as I have done, by bringing forward this debate today, and, indeed, the motion that we will very shortly and hopefully be passing in regard to historical cases.

[Mel Stride]

Finally, let me turn to some other points that have been made. I thank the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) for her outstanding work on the Committee on Standards, and for the time and courtesy that she offered to me when we met recently to discuss a number of the aspects of the work of her Committee. I also thank her for the work that she is doing at the moment on the different sanctions that may apply to Members of Parliament and for her best endeavours to complete that work, as suggested in the report, by December of this year. Finally, I thank her for the work that she will be doing alongside the House of Commons Commission in respect of the Cox 3 recommendation around MPs effectively not being able to mark their own homework.

In conclusion, I thank again all those who have contributed to this very important debate. We in this House hold this place dear. We are the guardians of its present and of its future, and we have a duty to ensure that it represents the very finest traditions and principles of our country. The way in which we treat those who support us in that endeavour lies right at the heart of any claim that we may make that we meet that vital test. I thank Gemma White for her report. Progress has been made, but there is still more to do and we will press ahead now with vigour.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the Gemma White report on bullying and harassment of MPs’ Parliamentary staff.

Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme

[*Relevant document: Extending the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme, report from the House of Commons Commission, published on 15 July 2019, HC 2554.*]

5.34 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Mel Stride): I beg to move,

That this House endorses the report of the House of Commons Commission entitled *Extending the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme*, laid on Monday 15 July and approves the steps set out in paragraph 8 of the report to make the changes necessary to extend the scheme, endorsed under the resolution of 19 July 2018.

We have just debated the findings of the Gemma White report. In the course of her inquiry, MPs' parliamentary staff came forward to discuss their experiences of working in the House of Commons, just as members of staff employed by the House of Commons came forward to speak to Dame Laura Cox last year. As I think all Members here today have recognised, even one case of bullying, harassment or sexual harassment in this place is one too many. I am grateful to those who have come forward to share their experience with these inquiries. As has been noted today, significant progress has already been made on these issues, and it has been made with cross-party support. In making this progress, it has been critical that the parties were able to work together to establish an independent complaints and grievance scheme for Parliament, which marks its first anniversary this week. I particularly my predecessor and colleagues from across the House for their work in setting up the scheme.

Now is the right time to make an important change to the function of the ICGS, to enable all those who came forward with past experiences of bullying or harassment to access the scheme and to have full access to an investigation where it is appropriate. I am determined that all those who have worked or are still working in Parliament should have an independent route to turn to if they have been bullied, harassed or sexually harassed. The opportunity for those with historical cases to access the ICGS was one of the three key recommendations made by Dame Laura Cox in her report of October last year. Gemma White has also recommended that the limitation on historical cases be removed, including to allow former members of staff access to the ICGS.

If we are to create a culture in Westminster in which everyone is confident that they will be treated with dignity and respect, we must continue to reform and also be prepared to confront the problems of the past. Today's motion is about doing just that—giving complainants whose cases date from before June 2017 full access to the ICGS, along with providing access to this scheme to those who have left their employment here. There is certainly more to be done, but today's motion is a huge step forward. By acting to address and face up to the past, we work towards creating a Parliament where all can rightly expect to be treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

5.37 pm

Valerie Vaz (Walsall South) (Lab): I thank the Leader of the House for tabling this motion, and all those involved with producing the House of Commons

Commission report, "*Extending the Independent Complaints and Grievance Scheme*", which was published on 15 July.

In May 2019, the Commission unanimously agreed to consult on its approved proposal for dealing with non-recent cases by using the existing ICGS and employing specialist investigators for both assessing and investigating non-recent and recent cases. The consultation was launched on 21 May and closed on 14 June. The responses to the Commission's public consultation were overwhelmingly supportive of its preferred option. Respondents included current and former staff of MPs and the House service, the Centre for Women's Justice, the trade union side, the Equality and Human Rights Commission and the Committee on Standards in Public Life. Accordingly, at its meeting on 24 June 2019, the Commission agreed to include non-recent cases in the ICGS—hence, this motion. Until now, the ICGS has been available to all those who make up the parliamentary community. Paragraph 8 of the Commission's report sets out necessary changes to open the ICGS to non-recent cases and to former members of the parliamentary community.

I pay tribute to the staff who are currently working on Dame Laura Cox's third recommendation; we know how hard they work. Every time Members say that things have to be done quickly, there are a lot of hard-working staff who have to carry out that work as soon as possible. The staff team are currently working on ways to implement a fully independent complaints system, and will be helped by a working group of experts in constitutional law, constitutional history, human resources and procedure, as well as consulting Chairs of various Select Committees and party representatives. The right hon. Member for Basingstoke (Mrs Miller) is one of those consultees. A statement has been published today, and I urge everyone to read it on the intranet and respond to it. She made a point about the Commission, but everything is open. The decisions are published on the intranet, and questions to the Commission can be answered in the Chamber by the right hon. Member for Carshalton and Wallington (Tom Brake) or tabled.

I have a simple question for the Leader of the House: can he tell us the timetable for the report following the consultation and the completion of that work? He might know that, or he might want to ask his officials. In the circumstances, Her Majesty's Opposition support the motion.

5.40 pm

Patrick Grady (Glasgow North) (SNP): As I said in the previous debate, the SNP is very happy to support this motion and welcomes the changes to the independent complaints and grievance procedure, to open it up to cases that predate the 2017 Parliament. That is the most important way we can ensure that anyone who has been affected by inappropriate behaviour in the parliamentary community has access to and independent means of achieving justice, as well as the many excellent support services that have been put in place.

While I understand why the previous cut-off date was introduced to begin the process, it now feels arbitrary, and it does not recognise that investigations should be based on the weight of evidence, not simply the passage of time. That is why we are pleased that in the Commission's statement, a key emphasis is placed on ensuring that the investigatory process at all stages is "independent, impartial, thorough and fair, and evidence led".

[Patrick Grady]

As was said in the previous debate, we have to remember that this is fundamentally about achieving not only justice for people who have been affected by inappropriate behaviour but longer-term cultural change in Parliament. Once again, the SNP is happy to support the motion.

5.41 pm

Justin Madders (Ellesmere Port and Neston) (Lab): I will not speak for too long, because I am sure the House has heard enough from me today, but I have a couple of queries, following what I said in the previous debate about this only being a staging post to our final destination.

The Gemma White report says that

“contributors to this inquiry have expressed considerable concern about using the new procedures and scepticism as to what the ICGS can realistically achieve. Many of them told me they would not contemplate making a complaint under the new ICGS procedure, because it would be ‘career suicide’... Some are concerned about the independence of the ICGS process... and the lack of clarity as to the sanctions which could be imposed on an MP.”

Those are still the issues with getting a process that we and, most importantly, staff can be confident in. Until we have a process that does not involve Members at all—I appreciate that work is going on in respect of that—staff will feel a bit inhibited in making a complaint.

The other issue is sanctions. I am not at all clear, and I hope the Leader of the House can clarify when he responds, what sanctions will be levied against an MP for a complaint being upheld under this procedure. For the procedure to have the confidence of staff, it must have proper sanctions.

Kate Green (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): To clarify, on behalf of the Committee on Standards, we are conducting an inquiry into exactly the question of what sanctions would be appropriate in a number of different situations. We would be more than happy to hear from my hon. Friend and, indeed, all Members.

Justin Madders: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. I am aware that a consultation is ongoing, but it begs the question of what will happen with complaints that are being dealt with now if sanctions have not been clarified. Presumably some complaints will be resolved before the Commission reports. If I am wrong about that, I am happy to be corrected. Will sanctions be applied retrospectively after they have been agreed, or will investigations be reopened? Those are the questions that I hope the Leader of the House can clarify when he responds.

Question put and agreed to.

Transport in Bedfordshire

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(Iain Stewart.)

5.44 pm

Mr Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Ind): I am extremely grateful to Mr Speaker for granting—and to you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for chairing—this Adjournment debate on the topic of transport in Bedfordshire and, of course, in Luton. This issue is incredibly important to my constituents and to me. We all know that transport is a key enabler of economic growth, allows access to work and education, and is increasingly recognised as key to tackling loneliness.

My constituency is fortunate to have a number of great transport options, with the midland main line for rail, the M1 motorway and its proximity to the M25, and of course London Luton airport. These are the fruits of far-sighted decisions and investments made both in this place and elsewhere over the decades, but we cannot stand still. Infrastructure from the 20th century will not be sufficient for us to thrive in the 21st. While, understandably, that means having better broadband, with 5G and rural connectivity, it must mean having better roads, trains, buses and aviation links. Today, I wish to outline five areas in which I believe transport in Bedfordshire needs to put in good stead for this century, not just for the last.

First, we all know that we must develop our roads with an eye to the vehicles that will use them. Yes, this means electric vehicles and self-driving vehicles, but it will continue to mean existing petrol and diesel vehicles for some years to come. These contribute to climate change and cause congestion, but they are also a lifeline for the 54% of my constituents who travel to work by car, and they are essential for many living with disabilities. In supporting the logistics industry, good road connections will always be at the heart of our economy.

In that context, I remind the House that the M1 motorway was this country’s first full-length motorway, and it is a major strategic route. It is currently being upgraded to a smart motorway north of London. This is of course welcome, and it will tackle congestion on routes as they grow. However, the M1 leaving Bedfordshire south of junction 10, which has been subject to its own upgrade programme in recent years, is not currently operating in the same way.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on bringing this forward. There is not an MP in the House who does not have a transport problem in his constituency. My understanding is that the hon. Gentleman has problems with road closures across his constituency, as I have in mine. Ever mindful of that—and I did do some research into his key issue—is the hon. Gentleman worried about the disruption that the closure of the A6 for repairs will cause for transport in Bedfordshire, and if so, are there plans to tackle the disruption? If we do not tackle such disruption in every constituency, and particularly in this one, we will have a real problem.

Mr Shuker: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman, who once again uses his well-recognised ingenuity to raise the parallels between his constituency and my own. He is obviously well versed in the issues of

the A6 just south of Bedford and adjacent to the village of Wilstead. He is quite right that its closure for up to six months will have a knock-on effect on constituents and on my constituency. I might say that I am surprised he did not raise the user experience of Luton airport, as he is of course a keen commuter backwards and forwards to his own constituency. Later in my speech, he may have some views on Luton airport, as I am sure he will have tried one of the many routes allowing him to get back to his constituency from the brilliant user experience that is London Luton airport.

Jim Shannon: I am very pleased to say that I have had the opportunity to use the Luton airport connection to Belfast City. It is extremely usable and accessible, but I would say to the hon. Gentleman that, unfortunately, Heathrow is just that wee bit handier for here.

Mr Shuker: I am particularly grateful that the main business of the House finished much sooner than we were expecting, because if the hon. Gentleman wants a long list of the many advantages that are coming to London Luton airport—in many ways, they may outstrip the advantages of London Heathrow airport in the years to come—I am sure I will be able to mention them at some point in my speech.

As I was saying, the M1 south of Bedfordshire does need looking at, particularly as London Luton airport looks to expand in the coming years. I ask the Minister to consider carefully whether the existing programme of development that is already in place will provide the capacity needed to keep the traffic flowing not in just in the next five or 10 years, but for the next 50 years.

That said, there is a wide body of evidence to show that simply widening roads does not do much to reduce congestion, as new capacity brings forward new demand. The brave programme, put in place under the previous Administration, of exploring smart motorways might allow further expansion of capacity south of Luton airport.

The other point I would like to make about roads before I move on is that it is 30 years since bus deregulation, and there is clear demand to reverse it. As a regular user of the bus services in my constituency—I acknowledge that there are many benefits as well as the cost implications, which in many ways are very different from those in major metropolitan areas—I am keen to hear the Minister's thoughts on whether the process of allowing local authorities to have a greater say on the provision of services, achieved in places such as Manchester and London, could be extended to Luton, Bedfordshire and beyond.

Secondly, we must provide our railways with the resources they need to succeed in the decades to come. The railway is extremely important to Luton. Many people travel to London for work or to see friends and family, while many thousands of others travel in the other direction to take a flight from London Luton airport. There is even more travel from Luton to Kettering and beyond, and such northerly connections are essential. Our railways serve a diverse set of needs. They might easily be characterised as just London's commuter belt, but they are much more than that: they are Bedfordshire's link to the world. Luton's stations, of which there are three, serve 7.7 million people each year, and they are growing rapidly. That growth is built partially on the

delivery of the Thameslink programme, which delivered extended platforms and a new footbridge to Luton station. In some ways, however, access for my constituents was diminished by the implementation of that programme and further fixes have not been put in place.

Alongside the botched timetable changes for Thameslink in May last year, which were very damaging to Lutonians, the programme as a whole delivered more seats, trains and capacity for Luton. I acknowledge that a lot has been achieved on rail transport in the past decade, but we should also remember that such programmes take time to be implemented. The Thameslink programme was originally called Thameslink 2000. It was proposed in 1991, just three years after the first Thameslink services began. Planning permission was not granted until 2006 and funding not delivered until 2007. It took 30 years to deliver the Thameslink project. Much of that time involved important consultation, impact assessments and cost implications, but Luton has not stood still in the past three decades.

I know the Minister has journeyed to see some of the improvements in Luton, and I met him at London Luton airport among other places, but I encourage him to see Luton railway station and the surrounding area. In the past decade, the area around Luton railway station has been completely transformed, with major investment by the local authority, businesses and others. The one remaining eyesore that still exists there, which I will come on to speak about, is Luton railway station.

Through the Luton to Dunstable busway, residents of the nearby town have access to London via Luton in less than 30 minutes. Over the past 30 years, Luton has grown significantly, and so have its transport needs. I am not the only Member of Parliament from this part of England to complain about his local train service. I would not want to put any money on the number of Adjournment debates you have sat through during your tenure, Madam Deputy Speaker, involving Members standing up to complain about commuter journeys. I acknowledge that the south-east does receive its fair share of transport funding, but that only serves to remind us that there is such a strain on railway services in the south-east because of demand.

I put on record that there are currently serious problems due to timetabling on the midland main line. As a result of the last-minute downgrading of the Thameslink programme and delays to the midland main line upgrade programme, last May, Luton station—where passenger numbers have risen by 12%—did not gain services but lost its peak-time East Midlands Trains services. Many of my constituents preferred using these services to get into and out of London in the evening, because they get to London faster and go more directly. At least at that time, however, the Department for Transport, in seeking to try to take some responsibility for the mess that had been caused, mandated Thameslink to provide for the loss of the services by providing additional fast peak-time Thameslink trains.

Infrastructure constraints mean that providing the replacement services to Luton required some Thameslink services to no longer stop at Harpenden, just a couple of stations down the line. Govia Thameslink Railway, which manages the route, has announced today that it will consult on moving some peak-time Luton services so that they stop at Harpenden. Many of my constituents rely on these services for their employment, and I would

[Mr Shuker]

be deeply concerned to see their livelihoods put at risk by any loss of services from Luton. In February this year, I successfully blocked that move in an ill-tempered meeting with representatives of the company, commuter groups and other MPs. It was not a pleasant experience to have to do that to try to prevent services that rightly serve my constituency from being taken away and given to groups that shout more loudly in more leafy areas further down the line. As this consultation opens today, I urge all residents of Luton and those who travel from there to take note and contribute. In a growing town with growing railway usage, train users should have more trains, not fewer, and Luton residents who rely on these services to get to work must be heard.

I understand that there are difficulties caused by the delayed midland main line upgrade in places such as Harpenden, and while it is easy to sympathise with commuters further down the network towards London, any changes to the timetable should reflect the data and not just those who shout the loudest. I would go further and say that the consultation should also take into account the economic inequalities that are in play. Arguments to move services based on the proportion of season ticket holders, for example, do not accurately reflect the number of commuters, but rather the number of commuters who have the financial means and access to purchase expensive season tickets. It is a misleading comparison, and acting upon it would be hugely regressive for my constituents. It would be wrong to remove services, and particularly those put in place to mitigate the loss of other services due to the Government failing to foresee what was about to happen on that congested stretch of line, to serve a richer, more vocal community at the cost of a poorer one.

Let me say this: I will not stand by and watch my residents' services taken away by a more vocal minority. It is an injustice, and the Department should not hide behind Thameslink's action, if the move that the consultation brings about takes services away from Luton and places them in the hands of Harpenden.

Thirdly, we must make our railway stations fit for everyone in the community, so I make no apologies for raising again the matter of Luton station, which serves some 3.7 million passengers a year. Close watchers of this House's proceedings will recall that 1,223 days ago, I secured an Adjournment debate on this matter, noting at the time that no progress had been made on the rebuild in the 2,179 days since the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins) had secured a debate on this issue. My maths tells me that 3,402 days have now passed since that first debate, and I regret to inform the House that, despite widespread agreement that the upgrade at Luton station is required, no progress has been made.

Luton station was identified in 2009 as one of the 10 worst stations in the country, and it was promised money from the £50 million better stations programme, but it saw that funding pulled by the coalition Government when they came to power in May 2010. The station is as old, tired and inaccessible as it was 10 years ago. Because of its location in the town, the station also harms accessibility for people who want to get from one part of the town to another to access jobs, education and shopping opportunities. Frustratingly, funding for that

vital rebuild has been close on several occasions, but it has not been close enough for my constituents. Luton station has received no new funding in a decade.

I seek a commitment from the Minister to meeting me, GTR and local rail users to discuss how we can improve Luton station. There is no point in delivering a railway that succeeds for the decades to come if it continues to fail some of the most marginalised groups in our society. I would like the Minister to reflect on the fact that in richer constituencies along the Thameslink line—the line has received £7 billion of investment to upgrade capacity—works have been scheduled in control period 6, and other upgrades have been delivered in control periods 4 and 5, but there has been a complete failure to mandate any upgrades to the facilities at Luton station.

Fourthly, we must enable aviation to succeed in the national interest. I see you taking the Chair, Mr Deputy Speaker, and you will be pleased to hear that I only wish to make five points. I have long championed Luton airport, which is in my constituency and which supports around 30,000 jobs and puts £1.5 billion into the local economy. Each household in Luton benefits to the tune of £340 a year because we chose not to sell off London Luton airport in the late 1980s, as many on the local authority wished us to do. In retrospect, that looks like a very smart decision.

The benefits are widely spread. The airport carries 16.6 million passengers a year; that figure is 80% higher than when I came into the House in 2010. The airport is England's gateway to the rest of the world, and it brings major benefits to the whole country, as well as to my constituency. Crucially, it has delivered growth and improvement with no additional runway capacity; we still operate with the same runway that we have used for many years. That is in line with the Government's aviation strategy, which allows expansion but not at Luton airport. I welcome the airport's masterplan for sustainable growth over the next 30 years, which seeks to take capacity from 18 million passengers a year to 32 million or 33 million.

The Government will be asked to make a decision on expansion at Luton airport, because only central Government can balance matters of national importance against local concerns. Against the backdrop of otherwise unmettable aviation demand in the south of England, expansion is necessary and wholly appropriate. We know that we can deliver it at Luton, where we have a real vision for an airport that is currently Britain's fifth largest. It is also right that local authorities make decisions on smaller matters that might affect local residents but that are not strategic concerns for the nation. As an example, increasing the planning limit on noise at Luton airport by some small amount will directly affect local residents, but it will not have massive strategic implications for the future of the nation.

Both those planning processes are appropriate and important. Personally, I think that it is outrageous deliberately to conflate the two, alongside the local authority's ownership of London Luton airport. That might make good copy in the pages of the *Herts Advertiser*, but it represents really poor behaviour from those who should know better. I would appreciate it if the Minister laid out his understanding and expectation that under

the current planning framework, the decision to undertake any major expansion at London Luton airport would be made by central Government after weighing up all the implications.

Fifthly, and finally, interconnectivity between different modes of transport must be at the heart of any transport strategy for Bedfordshire. I should point out that the largest railway station in my constituency is not Luton, but Luton Airport Parkway, which serves 3.9 million passengers each year. At present, it takes about at least 20 minutes to get from the station to the airport terminals. If we are to enable aviation to succeed—Luton airport is particularly important to airport capacity in the south of England—we must provide easy interconnectivity between the airport and the railway. That is why the Luton Borough Council's investment of £220 million in the direct air-rail transit, or DART, system is so important.

I now take great pleasure in commuting from my constituency and seeing the progress that is being made on that project every day. DART will greatly improve passenger connectivity, cutting the shortest journey time between St Pancras station in central London and the terminal door to less than 30 minutes. I believe that when it is in place, it will be quicker for me to travel from the House of Commons to Luton airport than to travel from the House to Heathrow—certainly before the new Elizabeth line opens. I encourage Members to try that out when the opportunity comes along.

Most services currently take considerably longer than 30 minutes, however. The shortest journey time of under 30 minutes is possible on just one train per hour. Most airports—for example, Gatwick and Heathrow—benefit from four fast trains per hour from central London, but those airports are full, and any new construction will not be completed for decades. I am sure the Minister will agree that Luton airport has an essential role in meeting new aviation demand, but it will not be able to play that role without effective surface access, which, in my view, requires a Government commitment to putting its rail connections on an equal footing with those of Gatwick and Heathrow. As the Minister knows, I lobbied hard for that at the time of the awarding of the East Midlands franchise and was disappointed by the missed opportunity to mandate four fast trains per hour. I ask the Minister to work with me in trying to lobby the new operator, Abellio, to introduce that service voluntarily. Even at this late stage, it will be missing an opportunity if it does not do so, as the airport seeks to expand and potentially double its numbers over the coming years.

That five-point plan for improving transport connectivity in my constituency and beyond is obviously not conclusive. It will not radically transform transport. The issues are more complex than that. No single Minister is likely to pick up a pen to grant all those wishes in one go. That is, in many ways, part of the frustration experienced by a Minister at the Department for Transport: making decisions that will take a long time to come to fruition. However, these are the important bread-and-butter issues on which we are elected to the House to deliver. I would love the sort of decision-making prowess for which the Minister is renowned to be applied to them and particularly to the rebuilding of Luton station. In that context, I shall welcome him back to Luton as soon as his diary secretary will allow him to pay it a visit.

6.8 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Andrew Jones): I congratulate the hon. Member for Luton South (Mr Shuker) and welcome the opportunity to discuss the important issue of transport in Bedfordshire. I will deal with all the points that he raised. He ended his speech by saying that there were some frustrations for a Minister in the Department for Transport. I have to say that being a Minister in the Department for Transport is a great privilege and honour, and great fun, too, but it would be nice if we could sometimes deliver projects a little more quickly in the United Kingdom. That problem has bedevilled the delivery of infrastructure and, indeed, all sorts of procurement in the UK. But we fully recognise the importance of transport underpinning the economy of our nation. The investment in transport we are making underpins economic growth and investment in social mobility and in environmental improvement—all points the hon. Gentleman made very eloquently in his speech.

It is a while since I last visited Luton, but I recall doing so and I am acutely aware that Bedfordshire is an historic county and an important county in transport terms. The hon. Gentleman mentioned the M1, and there is also the A1, the A5 and a number of key rail routes, and obviously it is home to a major international airport. Transport is critical in ensuring that his communities can work together to secure the local ambitions of a vibrant place to work and live. He also mentioned the important social function of tackling loneliness, which I entirely agree with.

Across transport modes, the Government are making a number of key investments to help drive economic growth through our transport networks. Let me start by talking about the investment in rail. I am aware of how critical rail is to the Bedfordshire economy and transport network, and the number of people who rely upon it for their daily commutes. As the hon. Gentleman highlighted, the majority of services in Bedfordshire are delivered by GTR and East Midlands, and he highlighted the particular challenge in terms of GTR performance last year. I am pleased to say that the service has been significantly better over recent months, although several external incidents have impacted on services over the past few weeks, such as some flooding and trespass on the line.

The performance of Thameslink and, indeed, the entire network in terms of punctuality is absolutely my priority. Officials in the Department are continuing to engage with GTR to ensure that performance improvements are delivered and then sustained, and I have also raised this with GTR and will continue to do so. The entire industry knows, because I have been very boring in saying nothing much else, that I expect to see performance improvements and it basically doing what it says on the tin: keeping to the timetable. That is the rail industry's key customer pledge.

Since the timetable change of May this year, Luton is receiving an increased weekend service and passengers are seeing the benefits of the Thameslink programme, providing enhanced connectivity for Luton and Bedfordshire, and Luton and Luton Airport Parkway stations will both receive £80,000 from the GTR £15 million passenger benefits fund.

As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Secretary of State announced in April that Abellio East Midlands will operate the next East Midlands rail franchise. This new franchise will bring a host of enhanced services and

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passenger benefits to Bedfordshire. The service is due to start almost exactly one month from today, and Abellio East Midlands will invest over £500 million pounds in the network; this will deliver significant improvements in the quality of trains and stations to maximise and build upon the £1.5 billion investment the Government are making in the midland main line upgrade.

Abellio will oversee the introduction of a brand new fleet of trains to the upgraded midland main line from 2022, which will result in faster journeys over long distances in the peak and introduce new frequent express services from Corby through Luton into London. From December 2020, once the relevant section of the midland main line upgrade is complete, the additional East Midlands services mean that Luton Airport Parkway will benefit from an extra-fast direct, branded Luton airport express service from St Pancras every hour throughout most of the day.

This is in addition to the current East Midlands service and the GTR services, so up to 10 trains per hour will run to Luton Airport Parkway in the peak and a minimum of eight during the off peak, including twice hourly fast and direct express services. This additional East Midlands express service will also benefit Luton station, which will be served by eight trains per hour all day, up from seven, and up to 14 trains per hour during the peak, up from 12. Together, these improved services will improve access to and from Luton airport.

The points that the hon. Gentleman made about the importance of connectivity to airports were absolutely spot on. We obviously wish that connectivity to be increased through the rail network, not through the road network. These improved services will help that objective significantly. He mentioned the consultation that GTR will carry out with Luton and Harpenden passengers, which could indeed see some small targeted changes made to the timetable from December this year. GTR opted to undertake the consultation so that it could fully consider the views of both sets of stakeholders, alongside other factors such as passenger numbers, in making its decision on what represents the best balance of services on the line.

I understand entirely where the hon. Gentleman was coming from on that point, and I encourage him to ensure that all his constituents contribute to that consultation. My focus will be on increasing the capacity on the line so that both communities benefit from better services. The objective is to ensure that we do not have to worry about the allocation of rare slots and that we see the upgrades that will ensure that all communities are better connected.

The hon. Gentleman made a good point about the station at Luton, and I hope that the news that Luton is one of the 73 stations that will benefit from the £300 million Access for All funding available in this spending period has been welcomed. It is part of our inclusive transport strategy to ensure that our railways are open to everyone. I am aware that local partners, including the borough council, have aspirations for a much wider redevelopment of the station. I believe that Network Rail is working with the council to try to ensure that their proposals are integrated and will allow the Access for All phase of the development to commence as soon as possible. However, delivery of the Access for All work can progress only

with the co-operation of Luton Borough Council, and I therefore hope that the current co-operation between the council and Network Rail will continue, because the project is long overdue and we want to see it delivered.

The hon. Gentleman has a very good track record of bringing people together to solve community issues on his patch, and I hope that he will continue that work to bring people together on this issue. I will be happy to take up the issue with Network Rail. He asked for urgency, and I am happy to give that undertaking. I will of course keep him updated on progress.

The hon. Gentleman highlighted the importance of local roads and congestion, and he pointed out that 54% of his constituents travel to work in their cars every day. As we know, there is congestion in the area, and congestion is a problem that we take very seriously. That is why we have made a number of investments for local transport within Bedfordshire to help to address this issue, and we will continue to invest. This includes £2.5 million towards a new Bedford western bypass and £11 million towards the regeneration of Bedford town centre. We are also funding £22 million towards the A421 dualling scheme that is being led by Central Bedfordshire Council. That £22 million investment will improve journey times and ease congestion from Fen Farm to junction 13 of the M1.

I clearly remember my visits to Bedfordshire during my time as Roads Minister. In fact, there were three visits. Two of those were related to the £162 million investment in the new link road between the A5 and the M1 north of Dunstable. I saw the project twice during its construction, and I know how important it has been in improving journey times and reliability, and in improving the quality of life in that area, because Dunstable was a real bottleneck and the town centre was being made significantly less pleasant than it could be because of the sheer volume of through traffic, particularly heavy traffic. I hope that that construction has helped to tackle that problem.

That project followed earlier investment in Bedfordshire, including the £30 million improvement to junction 10A, which the hon. Gentleman and I both visited. We visited a number of places across the constituency. Indeed, it was my honour as Roads Minister to cut the ribbon to open that new spur to the airport. I will certainly pass on the comments about the M1 south of Luton to the current Roads Minister. The smart motorway network has helped to improve the capacity and predictability of our network. The system has evolved through several iterations since the early days on the M42 many years ago, and the scheme has helped to improve capacity considerably.

Buses are a core part of local transport infrastructure, and bus use in central Bedfordshire has risen by 27% over the past 10 years. The innovative Luton to Dunstable Busway, which my Department helped to fund, has been key in increasing bus patronage in the area, allowing Luton to be reached from Houghton Regis and Dunstable in less than 30 minutes, which puts Luton's employment opportunities, airport and fast London trains within easier reach.

The hon. Gentleman had some specific questions about bus franchising, which takes us back to the Bus Services Act 2017. Franchising is a significant responsibility, and all authorities must have a compelling case to implement such a scheme. Local decisions to move to

franchising must be based on robust evidence and analysis, with the needs of passengers firmly at the centre of a council's decisions, which can be subject to judicial review. The 2017 Act provided a suite of options, which include partnerships and enhanced partnerships. It may be preferable for local authorities to consider partnerships with bus operators to improve services in their area. Although I am no longer the Bus Minister, I am aware that partnerships have successfully helped to drive up bus usage, and they are also less disruptive, with less risk for the franchising authority—the local council. Several options are available, but I would encourage all councils to start by looking at the opportunities in the different partnership models.

At the heart of the hon. Gentleman's speech was the importance of Luton airport to the local economy and community, and he made the case for the connectivity required to help it thrive very well. Luton is the fifth largest airport in our country, and air travel is vital across the UK and the EU for connecting people and businesses. The UK and EU have a mutual interest in maintaining closely integrated aviation markets, and both have put in place measures to ensure that flights can continue under any EU-exit scenario, demonstrating a clear commitment to maintaining connectivity. That should give Luton airport's customers the confidence to book and fly to European destinations however we leave the EU. I am aware of some uncertainty in the press about how dampened demand has potentially led to people redirecting their holiday choices, but the key thing is that we have made great progress and that there will be a clear commitment to maintain connectivity whatever the EU-exit scenario. We want Luton's customers—indeed, all aviation customers—to book with confidence.

I am aware of Luton Borough Council's desire to increase the capacity of the airport and that it will be undertaking a consultation in advance of a potential development consent order application next year. As the final decision on the planning application will be taken on its merits by the Secretary of State for Transport, it would be inappropriate to comment any further, but it is good to see people working to improve the local economy and the factors that drive it.

The issue of connectivity to the airport is perhaps the fundamental point, and the hon. Gentleman has requested four trains an hour. In the development of the east midlands franchise there was a public consultation on the question of Luton airport services, and the public were supportive of the status quo, so we did not specify an increase in services to Luton Airport Parkway as a requirement. However, bidders were incentivised to propose initiatives to increase rail access to the airport that would not cause a reduction to existing services.

Passengers will benefit from a doubling of fast East Midlands services to two an hour, both to and from the airport, from December next year, and they will be modern, comfortable Luton Airport Express-branded services. The hon. Gentleman makes his case well, and I will pass on his comments to GTR and East Midlands Trains so that they both consider connectivity to the airport, as he requests.

I hope the hon. Gentleman and, indeed, Members right across Bedfordshire recognise there has been considerable investment in the county's transport network. I simply urge local partners to identify the best solutions to address their transport problems and to build a robust and compelling case that demonstrates to Government the need for investment in key infrastructure in this high growth, high potential part of the country, delivering benefits for current users and equipping the area for future growth and success.

We have had a good debate that has covered all modes of transport. The only one we have not covered, for fairly obvious reasons, is maritime—[*Interruption.*] Perhaps I should not tempt the hon. Member for Luton South. There has been significant progress, and I look forward to seeing more progress delivered to improve quality of life and to drive the economy of the constituency he serves.

Question put and agreed to.

6.26 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Wednesday 17 July 2019

[SIR GEORGE HOWARTH *in the Chair*]

Music Education in England

9.30 am

James Frith (Bury North) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered music education in England.

It is a great pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Sir George, and to open this debate—the first parliamentary debate I have led—on music education. I thank all those who contacted me about the debate, especially the schools in Bury North that told me about their experiences, as well as the all-party parliamentary group for music education, the House of Commons Library and the excellent sector organisations, including the British Phonographic Industry, PRS for Music, and of course UK Music. Those organisations demonstrate impressive leadership and make a powerful case for music education in their published works.

As friends will testify, when getting to know someone I soon share with them my passion for music. Shortly after that, I will probably mention that I played at Glastonbury in 2003, on what is now known as the John Peel stage, on a Saturday at 11 o'clock—11 am. It is good to be here for this important debate in another early morning slot. Two simple ideas will guide my argument. First, music education must not fall victim to the tired old argument of traditional versus progressive education; it applies to both. Secondly, this debate must look to the future in the light of calls for music education based on current assessments.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate and on being one of only two MPs to have played at Glastonbury. I am not the other. Does he agree that the Government could approach this issue without having to change all their assessments simply by stipulating that no school under inspection could be rated “outstanding” unless it had an outstanding creative offer, including in music education?

James Frith: My hon. Friend makes a powerful suggestion. I will come to Ofsted’s role later in my speech, as I believe it can be a friend in this mission.

Music output from the UK remains world leading. Artists such as Stormzy are breaking new boundaries and contributing to the success of our £4.5 billion industry. In seven of the last 11 years, the biggest selling album in the world was by a UK act. The heritage of British music is celebrated worldwide, but we must focus on the future. We cannot afford to be complacent at a time of great economic and cultural change. Britain’s role in the world is under new assessment. The rise in automation means that we must emphasise what makes us human, not compete on learned behaviour with the machines we make. Our education system must emphasise what distinguishes us as human, and music education is

a huge part of that effort. Creativity, expression and performance are instincts as important as what we feel from the beat of a drum.

Last year, UK Music, the umbrella body for the commercial music industry, released its “Securing Our Talent Pipeline” report, which sets out in great detail the challenges beneath the success stories facing the industry. The report details evidence that 50% of children at independent schools receive sustained music tuition, while the figure for state schools is only 15%. Seventeen per cent. of music creators were educated at independent schools, compared with 7% across the whole population, and 46% of them received financial help from family or friends to develop their career. Growing inequality of opportunity underlines the problem. In that report, the CEO of UK Music, Michael Dugher—formerly of this parish—argues that a career in music must not become the preserve of those who can rely on the bank of mum and dad, and he is right.

Alex Chalk (Cheltenham) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his excellent and passionate speech. Will he pay tribute to organisations such as the Cheltenham Festival for Performing Arts, which provide exactly those opportunities to people from all walks of life—private and state schools—and allow them to perform, build their confidence and, hopefully, build a lifelong interest in music and performing?

James Frith: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and I pay tribute to any organisation engaged in that endeavour. My argument is that we need a universal approach as opposed to an incidental one, but I absolutely support the work of that organisation.

Our education system must support a deepening of the well of talent that we rely on. Music education is falling in the charts: there has been a drop of nearly 10% year on year for subjects not in the Ebacc, GCSE music entries have fallen by 24%, and since 2010, there has been a 17.8% reduction of music tuition in years 12 and 13. That is a worrying trend that Tom Richmond—a former adviser to the Department for Education and now director of the think-tank EDSK—says can “no longer be ignored.”

There is huge variation between our state and independent schools. Access to music education, with opportunities to learn, play and perform music, remains too exclusive. That must change; we must give every child the opportunity to learn the best of what has ever been said and done. Of course, that means maths and English, literacy and numeracy, but the enrichment that music brings cannot be put to one side. Children should be given the chance to shine at both or either in formal education, whatever their socioeconomic background. They should be invested in with the cultural capital of music education. In March 2019, the BPI’s extensive teacher survey highlighted that just 12% of the most deprived state schools have an orchestra compared with 85% of independent schools, and that over the past five years, state schools have seen a 21% decrease in music provision compared with a net increase of 7% in independent schools over the same period.

All our schools should turn with the natural and developing needs of every child and be more responsive, patient and dynamic, and show less rigidity and more agility. If schools do not have the time, resources or

[James Frith]

funding to do so, we must address those issues, rather than switching off the approach. Children can be better engaged in their education by expressing their natural creativity and curiosity. In fact, the argument for school tests and exams can be applied to the preparation for a musical performance as well—the idea, the studying, the rehearsal, the performance, and yes, the acclaim. Exam hall meets music hall. If we are to prepare our young people for the emerging landscape and an active, working and loving life, we need to pursue a balanced and expansive curriculum that recognises and hones skills and aptitude.

The school accountability system has pushed music education to the fringes of the way that a school's success is judged. Music is being squeezed out of the curriculum. The suite of EBacc subjects does not include music, and although the year 9 curriculum changes may attempt to include music and creative subjects more broadly, their carousel approach means that they dilute and reduce time spent learning the speciality that music education represents. That concern is supported by the BPI's teacher survey, which says that 31% of state-funded schools have seen a reduction in curriculum time for music. In a recent Musicians' Union survey, more than 90% of music teachers reported that the EBacc has had a negative impact on music education.

The APPG for music education's excellent report on the future of music education goes further:

"Some schools perceive that they have permission to either ignore the curriculum or justify one-off end of year shows or projects as acceptable forms of music provision. Only weekly progressive music lessons can develop pupils effectively in musicianship skills."

My question for the Minister is: would the Government prefer to scrap the EBacc, or to include music in it? If students are not able to participate in music in compulsory education, they are far less likely to pursue it in further or higher education. According to Ofqual, over five years the number of students taking music at A-level has declined by 30%. However, I commend the Russell Group of universities for its decision to scrap the published list of preferred A-level subjects.

There is of course good practice, which I do not overlook. Some schools in Bury make a difference to their children's musical education by collaboration. That is innovative, energising and fulfilling, it promotes curriculum richness, and it gives the wider school lots of memorable musical experiences. Bury's music service is terrific, but the national evidence is that provision is patchy. Studying that evidence, the indices of value all point the wrong way, with a lack of universal, readily accessed music education during formal education time, in school hours, away from the distractions of often complex lives.

Recently, the Government announced that they will refresh the national plan for music education. What plans do they have to consult the industry? When will they be bringing forward recommendations? Does the Minister agree that a refresh of the national plan provides an ideal opportunity to reset the dial on music in education and to take on the challenge outlined in this debate? Will he consider providing creative education a criterion for achieving an "outstanding" rating from Ofsted, as suggested by my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan)?

I know that the Minister for Schools recognises the need to get a grip on the issue. He established a music curriculum expert group, and a contract to write a new model music curriculum has been awarded to the Royal Schools of Music exam board. Will he update us on the progress of that work? Will he also assure us that the model music curriculum will work for non-music specialist schools, to ensure that reduced capacity or a lack of specialism in our schools is not a further barrier to progress? Will he explain how monitoring of the impact of any such guidance will be undertaken? According to the BPI, only 44% of music lessons in primary schools are delivered by a music specialist. Support is still needed alongside the model curriculum for teachers who want to specialise in music, whether through a teaching route or a conversion through the postgraduate certificate in education programme. Will the national plan therefore ensure that teacher training and support for music education is improved?

I welcome recent news that Ofsted is to develop its focus on schools providing cultural capital for children. That is a step forward in ensuring that the role of music education is re-evaluated and reintroduced as a norm for all children in our schools. I note favourably that Ofsted will pick that up as part of its new framework. The Cultural Learning Alliance claims that music enhances cognitive abilities by 17%; does the Minister have a view on that proposition, or has he seen any evidence for it? Will the Minister develop the powerful cultural capital argument through his responsibilities at the Department for Education? Indeed, does he agree that one key goal should be for all children, regardless of socioeconomic, to have fair and free access to music education?

My final suggestion is that the Government should renew the effort to put music venues at the heart of high street renewal and economic development. The industry business model has been flipped in the past 15 years by digital platforms, streaming services and self-publishing. Yes, all the industry went through a period of denial of the change.

Kevin Brennan: Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government missed a real opportunity when rate relief was offered to pubs, shops and other organisations on the high street, but the guidelines specifically excluded music venues from that list? Despite appeals to the Chancellor by me, UK Music and others, the Government refused to change that ruling.

James Frith: I agree with my hon. Friend. The Government seem to have a bit of a blind spot when it comes to music venues—or perhaps a tin ear is a better phrase.

The industry business model has been flipped in recent years, as I was saying, but will the Government look, for example, at YouTube paying artists next to nothing per stream of their work? Some of the revenue that Google makes from that enormous imbalance could go to support live venues for emerging talent across the country and towards our efforts on music education, whether as a new tax or from a partnership.

Building on the Government's embrace of the superb agent-of-change campaign, with the protections that brought in, we need more new or improved music facilities for young people outside school hours. UK Music has a network of rehearsal spaces based in

deprived and disadvantaged communities to offer improved access to music. What plans do the UK Government have to develop and enhance that scheme? Can Bury have one, please?

Above the funding argument sits a bigger one. Funding plays its part, of course, but there is a bigger one even than that. It is one of choice and a question of priority. What do we expect from our schools and for all our children? If we recognise the value that independent schools place on music and music education, do we still opt to ignore that for the vast majority of all children, accepting the growing inequality of opportunity? Or do we—as I believe we must—ingrain into all our schools the rights of all children to have access to the same opportunities to learn, play, perform and enjoy music?

The truth is, it is hard to do justice to or to outline in policy what is in fact a deep passion and love. Put simply, one's faith in the power and possibilities of music, performed, recorded and live, is not just a belief in a light that never goes out; it is the knowledge that music makes life better. Music can still your senses or stir your heart, its message motivates and mobilises, it entertains and, given the chance, it educates us all.

9.46 am

Mr Edward Vaizey (Wantage) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George, in particular because you are someone who has campaigned hard for the arts in your constituency. I hope that your Shakespeare North theatre is coming along well.

As I look around at the small but high-quality attendance at the debate, I see before me a fellow member and an officer of the all-party group on arts, health and wellbeing, the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane); an excellent Labour spokesman, the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), who is also a fantastic asset of that group; and the shadow Arts Minister for the Labour party, the hon. Member for Batley and Spen (Tracy Brabin). That is not to mention those sitting on our Benches: my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (David Warburton), a member of the National Youth Music Theatre and of the National Youth Orchestra; the media star, my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell); and of course my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Alex Chalk), who represents such a centre of artistic excellence. I will come to the Minister at the end.

I have been a passionate supporter of music education throughout my time in Parliament. Having checked the records, I am pleased that I can still say, hand on heart, that I did not come to the subject late in the day. Shortly after being appointed as Arts Minister in May 2010, I commissioned Darren Henley, who was then the chief executive of Classic FM, to do a report on music education which he duly delivered in February 2011. It might astound and shock the Chamber to learn that the report was commissioned jointly with my right hon. Friend the Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove), who was then the Secretary of State for Education, showing his commitment to music education.

The biggest thing to come out of the report was the creation of music hubs, which I felt strongly we should have for a number of reasons. Despite the fact that I only look 21, I am old enough to remember when we introduced local management of schools in the 1980s,

and the first thing that went out of the window was funding for music education. When schools took control of their own budgets, perhaps understandably they chose to spend on repairing the roof or other initiatives that the headteacher wanted to follow, and music education suffered. I did not want that to happen again with the introduction of free schools and academies; I wanted to ensure ring-fenced funding for music education. We did secure it: there were some bumps in the road and some anomalies to be ironed out—obviously most of us in the Chamber would want the funding to be doubled, tripled, quadrupled or even more, to make a real difference—but the fact is that the money was saved and ring-fenced.

Music hubs were meant to be innovative organisations; not just money spent by local authorities, but money spent together with local music organisations. It seems ridiculous not to take advantage of the expertise not just of a local orchestra but of innumerable music organisations that might exist in a local area, including perhaps the local music venue, as the hon. Member for Bury North (James Frith) described so well—it was remiss of me not to have congratulated him in my opening remarks on securing this important and welcome debate.

Alex Sobel (Leeds North West) (Lab/Co-op): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for mentioning music hubs. Before I came to this place, I used to work with a local music hub in Leeds, which opened up vocational routes in music composition, such as work in film, television and video games. Music hubs create new non-traditional opportunities in music. Does he agree that they are important for creating new vocational opportunities for people involved in music?

Mr Vaizey: I am delighted that the hon. Gentleman brought up that example; let me take the opportunity to praise the important work he does in this House on video games policy. I am really pleased to hear that example, because the thrust behind music hubs was that they be innovative, different and open up music education in its widest form, not just perhaps in the traditional way.

There were other dogs that did not bark—schemes that have been maintained by the Government and remain effective. One of the most effective was the music and dance scheme, where funding has been maintained to train young musicians to excellent standards and ensure their access to the highest quality specialist music education. Let us not forget that in the wider economy, the Arts Council funding goes to 99 music organisations—not just our major orchestras but important organisations such as Youth Music.

Another aim of the Henley report that I wanted to be implemented was the integration of the In Harmony scheme started by the last Labour Government, which to a certain extent copied the well-known El Sistema scheme in Venezuela. It was whole-class music education. I remember being moved almost to tears visiting a scheme in Everton—not that far from your own patch, Sir George—and seeing incredible children learning music in class. In fact, I was more moved when I met their parents, because the scheme brought the parents and the kids together and brought the parents into school. It gave the kids such pride and belief in what

[Mr Vaizey]

they could achieve. That leads on to a truism that we all know yet we do not act on: things such as music education have a massive impact on kids' self-esteem and, therefore, on their academic attainment and life chances. If I could wave a magic wand, every school in the country would be part of the In Harmony scheme.

I am very pleased to be on the board of the charity London Music Masters, which does something similar in five inner city primary schools in London. It is heavy going to raise the money but, again, we see an inspiring effect on pupils. I was delighted when they came and played "Here Comes the Sun" in Westminster Hall, breaking every rule possible, but making a fantastic YouTube video. We should all acknowledge not just that music education is important in and of itself, but that it has a massive impact on academic achievement, self-esteem and, as I am sure we will hear from the hon. Member for Cardiff West, people's health, life chances and mental wellbeing. I know he chairs numerous meditation all-party parliamentary groups.

An important challenge, for the classical music industry more than anything, is diversity. Music education brings the opportunity to learn instruments to a wide range of pupils who would otherwise not get that chance. The creation of the Chineke! orchestra shows the efforts being made in the classical music world to increase diversity, which is urgent.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): For classical musicians or otherwise, it is important to remember the role that technology plays in producing music is enormous. Does my right hon. Friend agree that there should be more investment in the technology side, and that it should be part of the curriculum?

Mr Vaizey: I do; it is important to go with the grain of society, and it seems absurd not to engage children in music education by using the kind of technology that they will use in their day-to-day lives, and will use when they leave school and university and go into the workforce.

I want to make two brief points that are somewhat linked. While I have no doubt at all that Members on the Opposition Benches, and perhaps even on the Government Benches, might have a go at the Government about music education, I feel strongly that headteachers—I will try to put this delicately—should not be absolved of all responsibility. School leadership plays a massive part in ensuring high-quality music and arts education. In my constituency, I have been to Didcot Girls' School and St Birinus School, where there are passionate music and arts teachers who have put those subjects at the heart of the school curriculum, thanks to the support of their headteacher. They do not say to me, "We can't afford it." They do it because they understand why it is so important.

Kevin Brennan: No one would doubt the right hon. Gentleman's passionate support for the arts and for music education, but does he not agree that while headteachers should not be absolved of blame, they react to the incentive and accountability measures put in place by this Government? Quite frankly, they have led to the issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Frith) raised, namely the decline in

the number of music teachers and the number of children taking music examinations. The Government have some responsibility to make sure they set those expectations centrally.

Mr Vaizey: The hon. Gentleman's intervention shows why those of us in this House who care so passionately about the arts put party politics aside and unite in how we advocate for the arts. I wanted to get on record the point that headteachers must step up to the plate; they have the opportunity to introduce the arts and music.

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): As a former headteacher, when I meet my former colleagues in Colne Valley they tell me that where budgets are concerned, they have crossed a red line. They are making cuts primarily with support staff and the creative arts and music curriculum.

Mr Vaizey: Funding of schools and education is a matter of concern to all Members, particularly those of us who represent rural constituencies where we lobby Ministers for a fairer funding formula. As I say, at the schools I visit where the headteacher is passionate about the arts and music, they do not say it is a budget issue; for me, it is a leadership issue.

To pick up on the point made by the hon. Member for Cardiff West, I agree that Government can and should provide leadership. One of the frustrations of working with the former Secretary of State for Education was that on the one hand, he was a fantastic colleague who supported me in campaigning for better funding and clearer organisation of music and arts education; but on the other hand, he was relentlessly focused on science, technology, engineering and maths, reading, writing and arithmetic, and the EBacc. That created not only an enormous amount of confusion for teachers in an ever-shifting curriculum, but a clear signal to them that they would not be rewarded for putting arts and music at the centre of their schools. A terrible paradox was created where teachers became afraid to do that, because they felt they would be penalised in the league table. That can and must change.

That brings me to my final point. Leadership is absolutely vital—not violent, vital. We need vital leadership, not violent leadership, from Ministers, to emphasise that the arts are important, particularly in a world of technology and automation where British creativity will be centre stage in our success. I remember battling hard with successive Education Secretaries, desperately asking them just to make a speech about the importance of the arts. That leadership is needed now more than ever.

The Minister has a week left in his job—[Laughter.] In his current job—who knows what will happen to him when my right hon. Friend the Member for Uxbridge and South Ruislip (Boris Johnson) comes in on his no-deal ticket? From my own experience, let me tell him that if he is sacked, it will not be on the first day, but if he is promoted, it will be on the first day. All I say to the funky Gibb that sits before us is, "Get on your feet! Stand up for music and arts education." In his heart, I know he believes in it and he can do that funky Gibb dance today.

9.59 am

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. I extend my thanks and gratitude to my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Frith), who convened this debate. I want to thank a number of organisations that supplied us all, in preparation for the debate, with information on what is a vital issue. They include the all-party parliamentary group on music, the BPI, PRS for Music, UK Music, the What Works Centre for Wellbeing, the Musicians Union and the all-party parliamentary group on arts, health and wellbeing, which is ably co-chaired by Lord Howarth of Newport and the right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey).

I have to declare an interest. I have loved music since I was a child. I sang to my children when they were babies—three songs every night. My two girls now have grade 8 in singing. I do not put it all down to me, but I think that little bit of impetus when they were so young had an effect. I sing on my way to work in the morning. Even in these terrible Brexit times I still manage to get a tune or two out as I walk in through the Victoria gardens. I was Pharaoh in the school production of “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat” and even got an encore, but unfortunately at the tender age of 17 I did not know what an encore was, and just carried on. I have been a member of Rhyl folk club for 37 years. It celebrated its 50th anniversary in the Jubilee Room here a few years ago.

I was a teacher for 15 years before becoming an MP, and for six of those years I was deputy head of a Catholic primary school. Music infused the curriculum of the school where I worked, Ysgol Mair. A lovely lady, Mrs Malleliu, would hold singing lessons in the break and dinner times, in her own time. Mrs Jemmet would hold recorder and guitar lessons. Mr Russel was a grade 8 piano teacher who played music at every assembly. We had Christmas and Easter musical productions.

In my class I would weave music into as many areas of the curriculum as possible. We would use Don McLean’s “Vincent” when we were painting in the style of Van Gogh. We would use “The Last Leviathan”, a beautiful song sung by Melanie Harrold, when we studied the demise of the whale in environmental science. I used classical music as a background, to quieten the class for reflection and prayer, or just to prepare for studies. We would use disco music in the gym and for dancing lessons. It was a Catholic school so we sang hymns and prayers morning, noon and night. That steeped the whole school in music. I would encourage the children, even out of lessons, in the playground, to work on songs and perform them in the 10 or 15-minute reflection period at the end of the day.

The right hon. Member for Wantage said that music can raise an individual’s self-esteem, and that is true. I spoke to a young man—well, he is now in his forties—whom I taught when he was eight. He would practise to be Freddie Mercury in Queen, and would be out practising at break times. At the end of the day he would burst forward with a rendition of “We Will Rock You.” He said those were the best moments of his life. I attended a school reunion three weeks ago, and former pupils in their 30s and 40s fondly remembered those times gilded

by music and song in their old primary school. Music was central to their education, and their education was all the better for it.

We know intuitively that music is good for us. I think that goes back to the womb. From the time when we first hear the metronome of our mother’s heartbeat, we are accompanied by beat, pace and rhythm. What we feel intuitively is backed up by top-quality scientific research. I thank the What Works Centre for Wellbeing for supplying information on dozens of scientific randomised controlled tests on the benefits of music for individuals at all stages of life. There is high-level scientific proof that if a mother plays classical music for 30 minutes a day for two weeks it will reduce stress, anxiety and depression. I believe that if we want to encourage a lifelong love of music for children, it should start in the womb. Other research showed that for pensioners choral singing in groups had a positive effect on morale, depression and loneliness. The What Works Centre said that there were dozens of those experiments, including on teenagers and young adults, but very few looked at the effect of music on school-age children. Perhaps the Minister’s Department could commission some research on that. The What Works Centre summarised the research:

“Listening to music can alleviate anxiety and improve wellbeing in young adults. Regular group singing can enhance morale and mental health related quality of life and reduce loneliness, anxiety and depression in older people compared with usual activities. Participatory singing can maintain a sense of wellbeing and is perceived as both acceptable and beneficial for older participants. Engagement in music activities can help older people connect with their life experiences and with other people, and be more stimulated.”

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I am not sure whether it has been mentioned yet, but community bands are important in working in tandem with music education in schools. The hon. Gentleman may not know—I expect he will enlighten me if he does—that last week there was a tremendous opportunity to see some community bands performing in our own Northern Ireland cultural tradition. There are flute bands, accordion bands, pipe bands and brass bands, and they create character and personality, and friendships that last forever. They bring people together in love of music in every sphere, and that—community bands, education and music together—is important.

Chris Ruane: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. I am half Irish, and the Irish are probably one of the most musical nations on earth. I know that the debate is about music education in England, but we should look further afield to Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland, and anywhere where music is central to education and society.

It is not just humans who benefit from music and song. There is a field of research called zoomusicology, which studies the impact of music on living creatures. Whales, dolphins and other mammals sing to each other in the courtship process. The production of cows’ milk has been enhanced by 3% by listening to classical music—and it is a better quality of milk as well. The stress levels in dogs in kennels has been shown to reduce when they are exposed to classical music. Perhaps the most beautiful sound in the animal kingdom is birdsong. Older birds teach the younger ones in colonies how to sing, for the purpose of mating and marking out territory.

[Chris Ruane]

Should not something that is good enough for whales, dolphins, cows, dogs and birds be good enough for our young people? It is not just a human foundational capacity but an animal one that goes back to the beginning of time. We should encourage it in words but also in deeds. Teachers, parents and pupils need to know that politicians value music in education, and that that value extends to proper funding and guidelines, and indeed to celebration. We should use this House to celebrate music in education more.

Music is appreciated in certain types of school. In the independent sector it is right up there: we have heard statistics that 50% of pupils in the independent sector get regular music week in, week out, and that the figure is only 15% in the state sector. The independent sector recognises music education by putting its money where its mouth is and funding it. There is already inequality in the education system in England, but the inequality does not end with the school bell at 3 or 3.30. It is perpetuated in the home life of children from different socioeconomic groups. Children from middle-class backgrounds are twice as likely to learn an instrument because they are encouraged to by their parents. A societal, cultural and educational change is needed.

My hon. Friend the Member for Bury North has given a list of excellent recommendations, which I fully support. I urge the Minister to commission research on education in music, as I said before, and I remind him of the intervention from my hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), suggesting that it should be stipulated that no school can gain “outstanding” status without its full complement of music.

10.9 am

John Howell (Henley) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bury North (James Frith) on securing this important debate. I, too, have a musical background, but a classical one; I am a choral conductor and an organist. When I mentioned that before in the main Chamber, I was astonished at the speed with which the former hon. Member for Banbury came up to me and booked me as the organist for his funeral. Fortunately, I have not yet had to play for that, as he is still very much alive and thriving, but at least I have one booking in the bag.

I congratulate the all-party parliamentary group for music education on a fantastic report, which sets out a huge number of criteria and statistics. I will not repeat them, but I will draw attention to the report and the points it makes. It mentions that music tuition is compulsory between the ages of five and 14. That is fine, but the problem comes a bit later and in that earlier period, where I feel that the music teaching profession has been so put down that we need to do something to improve it. I will come back to that at the end of my speech.

A number of hon. Members have already mentioned how the sheer love of expressing themselves goes to the heart of what being a child is all about. If they cannot express that through music, I do not know how they can express it. I quite agree with those who have said that whatever sort of music we try to achieve, it brings out the inner person within us.

The hon. Member for Bury North touched on the importance of the music industry to the UK, but I will just repeat some of that. The industry is worth close to £4.5 billion a year for the UK—a phenomenal amount. The all-party parliamentary group brought out the point that we punch well above our weight internationally. We have something like 1% of the world’s population, but when we think of the hard-hitting albums that have been sold, we realise that a huge number have come from the UK.

If we look at the impact of music, as a number of hon. Members have already commented, we see the imagination it creates among young people. I would also bring out another thing it creates: team building. Anyone who has ever played in an orchestra will know how much team building counts in producing a good sound. Certainly, in the days when I was a clarinettist and played in a number of orchestras, it was a discipline that I appreciated.

Music therefore has a big impact on mental health, and the sustainability of music education is something we should pay a lot of attention to. As the Minister himself has said, music should not simply be the preserve of the elite; it should be available to us all. The school curriculum is not enough on its own to achieve all that; we need a range of extracurricular activities—school orchestras, school bands or whatever they may be. We need a range of other activities that fit in with what is going on in the school curriculum.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) mentioned Youth Music, a national charity helping young people to change their lives through music. I have a great deal of affection for Youth Music, not least because my son is an ambassador for the charity, helping to push forward its aims. I met him last night, because I knew I was going to participate in this debate, and we discussed a number of these points.

Personally, I am disappointed to see the declining number of areas in which singing is encouraged. When Sing Up was Government funded, it had an enormous reach in schools and provided a great base for primary school children. I would like to see more done to help to push that along, and to keep on developing the skills needed to keep a singing culture alive. We are one of the few cultures in Europe that has largely lost its tradition of folk songs; most people do not sing folk songs to their children, despite what the hon. Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) may have sung.

Kevin Brennan: May I invite the hon. Gentleman to join the all-party parliamentary group on folk arts, chaired by myself with my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) as vice-chair? We are looking for more Tory members.

John Howell: For a moment, I thought the hon. Gentleman was going to invite me to sing, which I promise, Sir George, I will not do in this session. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his very kind invitation and I will certainly look closely at that.

We have already discussed how powerful music is in developing the personal and social skills of all those who participate in it, but there is one area that I brought up in an intervention that I would like to bring up again. The Music Commission and Youth Music have challenged the curriculum because it does not provide

enough technology. The reason they stress technology is that, whether someone is a classical musician or not, the technology involved in composing or producing the music is the same across the whole industry. My son is a composer and uses a tremendous amount of technology to do that. I urge more emphasis on the technology aspect of music.

I said I would return to one thing in particular that I think we can do. We have had a number of campaigns in the past that have taken social workers, for example, and tried to ensure that they feel loved, valued and part of society. We should do the same for music teachers too. We need a great effort on all our parts to ensure that music teaching is appreciated, that it is seen to be appreciated, and that we can all play our part in taking it forward.

10.17 am

Thelma Walker (Colne Valley) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Frith) for securing the debate, and I will also say how much I enjoy working with him on the Education Committee.

I will begin by sharing some of my own musical journey and the important role that music has played, and does play, in my life. At the age of around six I had a new teacher. She was the youngest teacher I had ever had, because I went to a very formal, traditional primary school. She was warm, she was funny, she was different, and I loved her. She read us Longfellow's "The Song of Hiawatha", but on the second reading she asked us to beat the rhythm of the poem on to our wooden desks with our fists. I could not believe that we were allowed to do that or that we could make such a noise. I remember the excitement and liberation of being allowed to bang my fists on the desk. She then gave out different percussion instruments, and on the third recitation we were asked to use our instruments, keeping to the rhythm. It was chaos, but it was fun, and it was very noisy. It was like an awakening. I was so excited that I could hardly breathe. I longed for every lesson where this new teacher would play music and we could experiment.

She allowed me to play on the piano in the school hall, as my parents could not afford for me to have formal lessons. She gave up her own time to sit with me, and I never forgot her kindness or the joy of touching the keys of that piano for the first time. I did not get the opportunity to continue with the piano sessions, as my parents could not afford it, and the fact that I cannot play an instrument today is one of my few regrets. However, I do know that, throughout the most important times in our lives, music is the thread. At family celebrations, the music chosen is key. At funerals, the songs that we play to say goodbye are so important to us all.

Then for me there was the '70s disco dancing—including the funky gibbon—around handbags. These are the musical milestones of everyone's life. Fast forward and I am a teacher and a parent. I vowed that my own children and the pupils in my school would have every opportunity to enjoy and experience music. My own children knew the joy of local authority-funded music lessons. Both now play an instrument and have a lifelong love of music. The local music centre gave young people the opportunity to perform at the Queen Elizabeth Hall

and the Royal Albert Hall. They loved playing and they made friends for life, one of whom, Tom Challenger, went on to the Guildhall School of Music and Drama and is now a professional saxophonist.

As head of a large primary school in a deprived area, I was determined that every child would get the opportunity to sing and play instruments. The creative curriculum was valued and invested in. I appointed a specialist music teacher, and every child experienced that quality teaching. For every child, music mattered. One of my proudest moments was having pupils perform on Radio 3 as part of the Huddersfield contemporary music festival. The following year, our school was awarded Artsmark Gold. It was an inclusive school, filled with music and the children's joy of learning through music.

What do most children experience today? The Fabian Society report entitled "Primary Colours" tells us that 68% of teachers in England say that arts provision in their primary school has decreased since 2010, and 49% believe that the quality of arts provision has worsened since 2010. There is also a significant regional disparity, with primary school teachers in the north 16 percentage points more likely than teachers in the east of England to feel that there is a lack of resources.

I asked Thom Meredith, principal of Musica Kirklees, how he sees music in our local schools today. Thom has been an inspirational and much respected conductor for choral and instrumental music in Kirklees for many years. He said that school funding cuts mean that schools simply do not have the money to pay for resources or teachers. Musica Kirklees used to receive £299,000 from Kirklees Council each year, but by 2016 that was cut to nothing as a result of local government cuts. That resulted in the closure of two music centres, and lessons for gifted young musicians had to be cut. Although it currently appears that nationally there has been an increase in the number of young people engaging with music education, schools are actually lumping more students into larger classes. In fact, the number of young people in smaller, long-term music classes or lessons in which they are properly engaged and learn how to play an instrument or sing has dropped dramatically.

Music can comfort and heal. It can lift our spirits and bring people together. As Shakespeare said,

"If music be the food of love, play on".

Let us fund music properly in our schools, so that working-class kids, just as I was, can be given the chance to play on.

10.23 am

David Warburton (Somerton and Frome) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George, and to take part in this debate. We have heard so many eloquent and passionate speeches, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Bury North (James Frith) on bringing us to this place and allowing us to enjoy talking about such an important topic.

I, too, have to declare an interest. I was lucky enough to have an extensive classical music education at music college—I tried to stay there as long as possible so as not to get a proper job, which I continue to try to do. I was lucky enough also to be a music teacher for many years, and I now chair the all-party parliamentary group on music and am vice-chair of the APPG for music education, and I serve on the boards of various

[David Warburton]

organisations—the National Youth Orchestra and so on. I therefore have lots of conversations with many inspiring and passionate advocates for music education and hear about a lot of their successes at first hand. However, it is easy to let the activities of great organisations such as that hide the bigger picture—the picture as it is for most people around the country.

As hon. Members will be aware and as we have heard today, Ofqual statistics show that between 2014 and 2019 the number of students taking A-level music has declined by a whopping 30%. I think that is a statistical canary down the mineshaft, warning us of the result if current practice continues. If that decline came from any general disinclination to study music that has suddenly appeared, that would be regrettable but unavoidable. But I think it rather improbable that a wave of musical apathy has swept over Britain's young people, so we have to ask ourselves why fewer students are choosing to take their musical education further. If there is no mysterious and spontaneous reason, what barriers are preventing those who do wish to pursue it, and how do we eradicate those barriers?

If we look at earlier age groups, we can see critical points at which the pipeline also narrows. The availability of music tuition at key stage 3 is a factor. According to the “Music Education: State of the Nation” report, between 2010 and 2017 there was a fall of 6.4% in curriculum time dedicated to music. Department for Education workforce data shows a drop in music teacher numbers at key stage 3 of more than one quarter.

I do understand, as a former music teacher myself, that more of one subject means less of another. I know how it feels to face the problem of matching students' aspirations with the realities of available time, and I realise that the EBacc is there not to shrink opportunities, but to allow talent from every area of society to flourish. But to me, a core curriculum that excludes the arts is not a core curriculum—that is an oxymoron—so I would welcome a re-examination, as other hon. Members have said, of the possibility of adding a sixth pillar to the EBacc for creative subjects, including music.

The thoughtful and wide-ranging remarks made by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education at the Church of England Foundation for Educational Leadership conference in February described very well some of the fundamental issues in making education work across all areas of the country and all sectors of society. He focused on “the five foundations of building character”.

Two of those—creativity and performing—directly correlate with music. His focus on those five foundations was very welcome and is significant in the context of this debate.

Given the consensus on cultural capital in relation to life chances, the gap in music provision between the state system and independent schools, which we have heard discussed, is a trend that must be stopped. The BPI reports a decline in state music provision in the past five years alongside an increase in the independent sector. The gap is widest—surprise, surprise—in schools with a higher percentage of students on free school meals. Relative poverty does not equate to a relative poverty of ambition, but ambition without the opportunity to visualise and then pursue its fulfilment leads to frustration and then disengagement.

The UK's music industry contributes £4.5 billion to the economy, as we have heard. We saw it generate £2.6 billion in total export revenue in 2017—that figure was up 7%—and it is an instrument of soft power that will only become more important in the years ahead, given the wobbly world picture out there. However, that is just part of the story. The creative industries as a whole contribute more than £100 billion to our economy. We are very good at this stuff, despite the barriers that come before us. Therefore, even if we look at things in a purely utilitarian way, a greater investment of curriculum time and resources can only make sense.

I know that it is much more difficult to quantify the cognitive benefits of understanding the structure of a Bach chorale or the blues scale than it is to see an uptake in STEM subjects or exam entries leading directly to jobs in the engineering industry, but equipping our students with an understanding of our musical, philosophical and artistic heritage does something even more difficult and important: it allows those students to anchor themselves within the centuries-old progression of thought and to understand their place in the society in which they live. The anchor provided by the arts is not just a means of generating economic value; it allows young people to understand what is of value in others. Denying them an understanding of the value of their artistic heritage hides their eyes, ears and minds from the world around them.

As we look ahead to the new national plan for music education, it is vital that we re-examine both the performance of music provision within secondary schools and the metrics used to measure that performance. As we heard from the hon. Member for Cardiff West (Kevin Brennan), it is clear to me that no school should be awarded an outstanding judgment by Ofsted if it fails to provide strong arts and cultural education. The next national plan for music must focus on ensuring that these benefits are spread as widely as possible. As well as looking at the curriculum, that should also involve thinking about how to ensure that the flexibility given to academies is not a licence for them to sideline music education or treat it as an optional extra, especially given that 72% of secondary schools are now academies.

The greatest artistic achievements, from the encyclopédistes of the enlightenment through to “Sgt. Pepper”, aspire to universality. As such, they have a democratic impulse at their core. A failure to share their benefits as widely as possible not only lets down our young people, but runs contrary to the spirit of the arts themselves.

10.31 am

Tracy Brabin (Batley and Spen) (Lab/Co-op): It is an absolute pleasure to serve under your chairmanship. Sir George. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Bury North (James Frith) for securing the debate. If this is his first Westminster Hall debate, he has a great career ahead of him; his speech was powerful and impassioned and addressed an important and urgent question that will affect many youngsters across the country. We have heard several excellent contributions from people who have lived experience in this world. Their concerns about the crisis of music education in England are profound and compelling. I will pick out a couple of moments of great interest.

The right hon. Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) was, as always, a passionate advocate for the creative subjects for all. The work he did creating music hubs and the Henley report is a solid base from which we all work. The highlight of his speech must be funky Gibb, which will stick with us from now on. My hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) talked about singing for pleasure and the element of wellbeing. His statistic about cows will also stay with me. The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), who I will book for my own funeral—he is obviously going to have several bookings now—mentioned early years. Although music is in the list of Ofsted's expectations, what is the quality of the music provision for the under-5s? We had a debate yesterday about the first 1,001 days of life, and we know that brain development is supported by access and exposure to music. I thank the hon. Gentleman for his contribution.

My hon. Friend the Member for Colne Valley (Thelma Walker) made a profound contribution, speaking about her own experience. No one could challenge her experience of being on the frontline as the head teacher of a school, creating a brilliant experience for young people and giving them an opportunity to live a full and enriched life.

Finally, the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (David Warburton) talked about the extra pillar to the EBacc. I had a meeting with the Secretary of State to discuss that. His response was, "It will not make a difference." I hope that when he looks back at this debate he will read the profound and passionate pleas from people who know and have experienced it in their life, and see that this would make a difference.

I welcome the work undertaken by UK Music, Music Industries Association and the Musicians' Union highlighting the perilous state of music education across the country. As we heard from the hon. Member for Henley, UK Music's "Measuring Music" reports that the music industry's contribution to the economy is £4.5 billion, with £2.6 billion export revenue. Britain has less than 1% of the global population but one in seven albums sold worldwide in 2014 was by a British act; I can only imagine those numbers have gone up. Music is a critical part of Britain's soft power and in the current climate, as we career out of the EU, that power could not be more vital.

The Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport's own report on sector economic estimates showed the value of the creative industries rose by 7.1% in 2017—almost twice as much as the UK economy as a whole—to £101.5 billion. Sadly, the evidence gathered, not just by the unions and other trade bodies but by the all-party parliamentary group for music education, shows that music education is at a point of crisis, with creeping cuts to music education, chaotic music education policies and plummeting morale among teachers and educators.

The Music Industries Association report, "The State of Play—a review of music education in England 2019", proved beyond doubt that the inequalities in music provision are real, concluding that children from families earning under £28,000 a year are half as likely to learn a musical instrument as those with a family income above £48,000. There are children, certainly in Batley and Spennings, for whom coming from a family with an income of £28,000 would make them feel very well off. We

should always be mindful of children whose lives are so chaotic that they will never get the chance to experience the joy of playing an instrument or singing in a choir.

Eight years have elapsed since the coalition unveiled its national plan for music education; there was much fanfare around the commitment to give every child the opportunity to learn a musical instrument, with the establishment of Government-funded music hubs. Despite this commitment, as we have heard, the truth is that coherent and impactful music education is entirely dependent on the whims and talents of headteachers, the priorities of the music hub and the youngsters' postcode. Added to this, the decline in take-up of schools offering music at GCSE and A-level means even those kids who do not necessarily want to play but have a love of music do not get the chance unless their parents can pay for costly out-of-school provision.

Of those surveyed in the "State of Play" report, 60% said the introduction of the EBacc has directly affected music provision in their schools. In a recent National Education Union—then the National Union of Teachers—survey, 97% of the union's teachers agreed that SATs preparation did not support children's access to a broad and balanced curriculum, saying the time taken to prepare children for assessment in maths and English has squeezed out other subjects and activities. The problem does not go away when our children leave primary school. As we have heard, the proportion of 15 and 16-year-olds taking subjects like music and drama has fallen to its lowest levels. There are outliers: Feversham Primary Academy in Bradford recently made headlines with its focus on music leading to improved outcomes for its pupils. It made the national press, which would suggest it is unusual. It should not be.

While this is not a competition between schools, one of the many reasons parents pay the eye-watering fees to send their children to places like Eton is the attractive music provision. At Eton, there is a purpose-built orchestral rehearsal room, a recording studio, a 250-seat concert hall, an organ room, the opportunity to learn music taught by seven full-time professionals, 70 visiting teachers with over 1,000 lessons a week, teaching the full range of orchestral and solo instruments, as well as the sitar and tabla. Pupils can join the symphony orchestra, chamber ensembles, jazz, wind and pipe bands, choirs and choral groups, as well as write and produce their own music in the well-equipped music-tech studios.

I am not saying this to attack other schools in any way, but to reinforce the point that those parents know the value of this enrichment. They know that not every child will go on to be a professional musician, a composer or a singer, but they will have developed as a human being and young person with a love for music and it will stay with them all their life. A recent report from the University of Oxford suggested that 15 million jobs are at risk from automation, but artists such as musicians are at less risk. Parents who send their children to schools with great arts provision are future-proofing their children's destinies.

Creative subjects are marginalised in the curriculum and the number of post-grad students training to be music teachers has shrunk. As Members of Parliament we can encourage local opportunities. I have seen how music can transform the lives of youngsters and adults in the Batley and Spennings Youth Theatre Company's production of "Les Misérables" and Creative Scene's

[Tracy Brabin]

production “Batley Does Opera”. They transformed lives, reduced loneliness and mental health issues, boosted confidence and raised aspirations.

We know that creative subjects are a magnet for children who are not naturally academic. They might struggle to read, but come to life on stage; they might be unable to concentrate in class, but play the ukulele for hours. No one loses in music, so we all benefit; there are no winners or losers. Music aids better brain development and maths skills, and it increases human connectivity and concentration levels, but we should look at music for its own sake. It is a gift handed down from generation to generation. Everywhere we go we are surrounded by music. We all attach music to pivotal moments in our lives.

What can we do? Labour is committed to reviewing and reforming the EBacc and ensuring that children get the broad and balanced curriculum they need for the 21st century. Creative subjects will be at the heart of that, with a boost of £160 million for arts education. We will use the cultural capital fund to invest in instruments for music hubs and upgrade music facilities in state schools to match the those found in many private schools. Each child will have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument and we will instigate a creative careers advice campaign. Our creative pupil premium will support schools, ensuring that every child has access to the cultural capital that others in less disadvantaged areas can easily access.

Post Brexit, we will need our arts more than ever, not only for jobs and the economy, but for our spirit and soul. We must support children by giving them every opportunity to love music and engage with it, and to be better human beings from accessing music.

Sir George Howarth (in the Chair): I am sure the Minister needs no reminding, but he needs to leave a bit of time for the encore by the mover of the motion.

10.42 am

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. I congratulate the hon. Member for Bury North (James Frith) on securing this debate. He speaks with a passion for music, which I share. He is preaching to the choir—excuse the pun. I say to my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage (Mr Vaizey) that this funky Gibb will and does stand up for music in our schools. One of the initiatives that I am most proud of in my time as Schools Minister is the Classical 100 website, promoting classical music in primary schools, which was produced by the Associated Board of the Royal Schools of Music, Classic FM and Decca Records. Over 5,000 primary schools are already signed up to the site and I urge every primary school to do so.

The opportunity to study and explore music should not be a privilege; it is a vital part of a broad and balanced curriculum. All pupils should have access to a world-class music education. That is why music is compulsory for all pupils aged five to 14 in state-maintained schools. Academies, which do not have to follow the national curriculum, have to provide a broad and balanced curriculum. Ofsted’s new inspection framework, coming

into force from September, will support that, providing a greater focus on the provision of a broad and balanced curriculum.

This Government are committed to music education. We are putting nearly half a billion pounds into arts education programmes—more money than any subject other than PE—to fund a range of cultural and music programmes between 2016 and 2020, in addition to the funding schools receive to deliver their curriculum. In November 2011, we published the national plan for music—referred to by my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage—which sets our vision for music in schools: to enable children from all backgrounds in every part of England to have the opportunity to learn a musical instrument, to make music with others, to learn to sing and to have the opportunity to progress to the next level of expertise. We will refresh the national plan. We will consult widely on it and make further announcements in the coming plans.

Schools are responsible for delivering the music curriculum, but they cannot do it alone. Our network of music education hubs supports schools to provide high-quality music tuition. I pay tribute to the vital role my right hon. Friend played in the development of that policy. Between 2016 and 2020, we are providing in total over £300 million of ring-fenced funding for music education hubs, in addition to the funding that goes to schools to deliver the curriculum. Earlier this year, we announced an extra £1.3 million for those hubs. That funding supports pupils, whatever their background, family income, or special needs. No child should be excluded from music because their parents cannot afford to pay for lessons or an instrument, or because they have physical disabilities or other special needs.

Music education hubs help hundreds of thousands of young people learn to play an instrument in whole classes every year. They also ensure that clear progression routes are available and affordable. Many hubs subsidise the cost of lessons for pupils. The programme helps schools to nurture the budding seeds of musical passion that can unlock so much pleasure throughout life, as we heard from the hon. Member for Bury North. In the years to come, many adults with a passion for music will have the work of music hubs to thank for first introducing them to the joys of playing an instrument and playing in ensembles. In the provision of music education, the Government believe in excellence, as well as equity. Talented young musicians need the opportunity to make music with others of a similar standard, and access to selective ensembles and a demanding repertoire. Music education hubs provide high-quality borough or county-wide ensembles and direct the most talented towards specialist provision.

Bury North is served by the Bury music hub, which works as part of the collaborative Greater Manchester music hub. In this academic year, the Bury hub has received over £292,000 of funding from the Government. Last year the hub delivered over 3,500 individual singing and instrumental lessons, and 14,000 small group singing and instrumental lessons. A report by Birmingham City University showed that in 2016-17, hubs worked with 89% of schools on at least one core role and helped over 700,000 pupils to learn to play a musical instrument in whole-class ensemble teaching. That is an increase of 19% on 2013-14, the first year in which like-for-like figures are available, when the number was 596,000.

My hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) spoke about singing. The Government recognise the value of singing in schools. Developing a singing strategy to ensure that every pupil sings regularly is a core role of the music education hubs. According to the last published figures, 70% of schools in England were supported by hubs with singing strategies.

I want to ensure that the music lessons young people receive are of the highest quality and that pupils leave school having experienced an excellent music education, so that those who wish to do so can take up opportunities to pursue musical careers. To ensure that, we have started work with music experts to develop a high-quality model music curriculum, which builds on the national curriculum and forms part of our plans to ensure that all pupils can benefit from knowledge-rich lessons. It is being drafted under the direction of an expert panel composed of practitioners, education leaders and music specialists, and will provide schools with a sequenced and structured template curriculum for Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. I hope that the curriculum will make it easier for teachers, including non-specialist teachers, to plan lessons and will help to reduce their workload. I agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Henley that folk songs are an important part of our musical heritage and I hope they will be included in that curriculum.

The hon. Member for Bury North raised concerns that careers in the arts have become the preserve of the privileged and privately educated. To ensure that that is not the case in years to come, the Government are continuing to fund more than 500 full-time places at four specialist music schools, including the Yehudi Menuhin School and the Purcell School, and a similar number of places at four specialist dance schools, including the Royal Ballet School, through the music and dance scheme. The vast majority of pupils board, and means-tested bursaries are available to ensure that entry to the schools is based on pupils' talent, not on their parents' ability to pay fees. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage pointed out, funding for the music and dance scheme has been maintained since we came into power. The scheme also funds places at the junior departments of six music conservatoires.

As well as supporting the music hubs, the Government are committed to a number of programmes, including the National Youth Choirs of Great Britain and the National Youth Orchestra, that aim to enhance the musical opportunities of young people and ensure that the talent pipeline that is so important to this country remains open. Our funding helps to ensure that no one is turned away because their parents cannot pay. We also provide funding for In Harmony, an intensive orchestral experience focused on schools in some of the country's most deprived communities.

The EBacc, which the hon. Member for Bury North and others raised, was introduced to give young people the same chances to succeed through education. It is key to increasing social mobility, and an important part of that is giving all children the opportunity to study the five core academic areas at GCSE: English, maths, science, humanities and a foreign language. The range of subjects that the EBacc offers provides a sound basis for enriching pupils' studies, opening up a variety of careers beyond the age of 16 and giving a broad general knowledge that will enable pupils to participate in and contribute to society. Research published in August

2017 by the Centre for Longitudinal Studies found that studying the EBacc combination of GCSEs increases the likelihood that a pupil will stay on in full-time education.

It is not the case, however, that the EBacc has had an impact on the uptake of music GCSEs. Since 2010, the proportion of pupils entered for GCSE music has fluctuated but remained broadly stable at approximately 6% or 7% of the total GCSE cohort. People tend to cite the raw numbers, which have fallen since 2010 along with the total number of secondary school pupils, but the proportions have remained broadly stable.

Tracy Brabin: The question is about the family backgrounds of those 6% or 7%. Are those children taking music because they are supported by wealthy families who can afford the instruments and the lessons?

Nick Gibb: The proportions have remained broadly stable during that period. I do not have a breakdown of the free school meal figures, but there is nothing to suggest from the raw proportions that there should be any change in those figures. However, I will come back to the hon. Lady with the precise numbers, which I hope will reassure her.

The EBacc was designed to be limited in scope to allow pupils to study additional important subjects such as music. The percentage of time spent teaching the arts subjects in secondary schools remained broadly stable between 2010 and 2018, and our survey of primary schools indicates that they spend the same amount of time teaching music as they spend teaching other important subjects such as history and geography.

It should also be recognised that many pupils decide not to study the arts as academic subjects, but continue to take part in artistic activities in and out of school, such as singing in choirs, playing in orchestras and bands, and performing in school plays. The DCMS Taking Part survey in 2018 showed that 96% of children aged five to 15 had engaged with the arts in the previous 12 months. We are investing more than £70 million this year to support young people and adults to get high-quality careers provision, including careers advice on arts-related careers.

Northampton School for Boys is an example of how the EBacc does not necessarily mean a reduction in the arts. It has more than 20 ensembles and choirs, yet it also enters 70% of its pupils for the EBacc combination of GCSEs—significantly above the national average of 38%. My right hon. Friend the Member for Wantage cited Didcot Girls' School in his constituency for its exemplary music provision; at 52%, its EBacc entry figures are way above the national average.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (David Warburton) pointed out, the music industry is vital to this country; the hon. Member for Bury North was absolutely right to pay tribute to it. We are a nation with natural musical talent and a love for music that we all have an interest in cultivating. UK Music's report "Securing Our Talent Pipeline" helpfully highlights the importance of the music industry to the UK economy, and I agree with its conclusion that if we want to produce the stars of the future, we must invest in talent for the future. I hope that it is clear to all hon. Members present that the Government are committed to doing precisely that.

[Nick Gibb]

I am enormously grateful to the hon. Member for Bury North for his securing this debate and for his passionate case for the importance of music education. He raised some important concerns, and I hope that I have reassured him that the Government share his commitment to ensuring that music can be enjoyed by every young person. The new model curriculum, the refreshed national plan for music, the ongoing support for our successful music hubs and our other music programmes will make sure that the next generation of music superstars have all the support that they need in schools, from their first exposure to the joys of music at a young age to provision for the brightest and most talented young musicians. All children deserve the chance to fulfil their musical potential. Thanks to the national network of music hubs, the music and dance scheme, and the support of organisations such as UK Music, I believe that pupils are being provided with that opportunity.

10.55 am

James Frith: I find myself at risk of repeating earlier arguments—like when I was the singer in a band and we were invited to do an encore but had run out of songs. I thank the Minister for his response, and I thank hon. Members for such a warm, engaging and, at times, spirited and witty debate on such an important issue. It is so good to reach consensus across the parties on a subject that we deeply love and are clearly all passionate about.

In years and years of trying to record an album and find the right sound engineer, the right producer and the right moment to capture the sound we were after, I initially took comfort in the phrase, “It’s all right—we’ll fix it in the mix.” Subsequently, however, I realised that re-recording is always the answer. The EBacc is not something that we can fix in the mix; we have to re-record it. The case has been well made that music and the arts are integral and should be part of the core curriculum, protected by core curriculum time, away from the complex lives that so many children leave school to return to.

If we protect music by including it in the EBacc, we can do away with the myth of fixing in the mix. A Government who commit to an EBacc with music education as a formal part of it—that is the hit we are all after.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered music education in England.

10.58 am

Sitting suspended.

Criminal Cases Review Commission

11 am

Sandy Martin (Ipswich) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered a review of the decision-making powers of the Criminal Cases Review Commission.

As always, Sir George, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

The Criminal Cases Review Commission, which I will refer to as the CCRC, was founded in response to the situation in which a number of high-profile criminal cases had led to people being in prison for crimes that the consensus among those who had considered the evidence suggested they could not possibly have committed. Among those cases was the case of the Birmingham Six. Despite the intervention of lawyers, television and the Home Secretary, and the discovery of new evidence, the Court of Appeal managed to reject the appeals of the Birmingham Six on a number of occasions, before the overwhelming evidence that their convictions were unsafe finally prevailed at their third appeal.

As the Birmingham Six case was one of the major motivating factors for the introduction of the CCRC, we should expect that at the very least the CCRC, as it is now constituted, would have been of help in resolving that case. My fear is that, on the contrary, the CCRC’s very existence now makes it less likely that such grievous miscarriages of justice will be resolved in the future.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way and for bringing this matter to Westminster Hall for consideration. Bearing in mind that just 0.7% of cases received by the Criminal Cases Review Commission were referred to the Court of Appeal in 2017, which was its lowest ever rate, does he agree that there is a bad impression of the effectiveness of the current protocol, which urgently needs to be reviewed?

Sandy Martin: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that intervention; he is absolutely right and I will expand on that point later in my speech.

I am raising this issue today because the case of Oliver Campbell, my constituent, is a classic example of a devastating miscarriage of justice, for the resolution of which the CCRC appears to be more of a hindrance than a help.

Oliver was convicted of murder in 1991 and spent 11 years in prison. He is here in Westminster Hall today with a friend, so that he can hear this debate. He knows that I am not being rude when I say that he has a low IQ; he also knows that that is as a result of a brain injury he sustained as a baby. This reduced mental capacity should have been evident to everyone involved in this case from the moment of Oliver’s arrest in 1990, some two months after the murder of an Asian shopkeeper in Hackney.

I have known Oliver for about 10 years. I think that anyone meeting him would come to the same conclusion reached by myself and others, including the BBC’s “Rough Justice” team, Michael Birnbaum QC, Oliver’s long-standing solicitor Glyn Maddocks, and the distinguished broadcaster, Kirsty Wark, namely that Oliver simply was not capable of carrying out such a crime.

Oliver was arrested because witnesses identified one of the two men who carried out the robbery during which the shopkeeper was killed as wearing a distinctive baseball cap. The other man, Eric Samuels, was relatively short and the witnesses also described the two men as being of similar height. Oliver is a large man who is 6 feet 3 inches tall.

Oliver was questioned for several hours in a police station without the presence of an appropriate adult, which he should have had due to his impaired mental capacity, or a lawyer. Eventually, a lawyer was found, but it was only after that lawyer had left the police station, having left clear instructions to be called back if there was to be any further questioning, that the police—in direct contravention of those instructions—pressed Oliver, in the presence of his ex-foster carer but no legal representative, to confess. Within half an hour of persistent suggestion from the police, Oliver had confessed to a murder that I do not believe a reading of the evidence could possibly suggest he had committed. Many of Oliver's answers to the police were bizarre and made no sense whatever, so it is hard to understand how they could ever have been relied upon.

Oliver's lawyer was then called back, and Oliver immediately withdrew his so-called confession. However, in December 1991 he was convicted, almost entirely on the basis of this very dubious confession, and he served 11 years in prison. There was no forensic evidence linking him to the baseball cap nor to the scene of the crime. None of the fingerprints or hairs that had been recovered from the scene or from the cap match those of Oliver. His co-accused, Eric Samuels, who admitted taking part in the robbery, said in interview that Oliver had nothing to do with the murder and was not at the scene. However, this information was never put before the jury as evidence. Samuels' statement was never signed and Samuels refused to take the witness stand.

Samuels was subsequently tracked down and interviewed by the BBC's "Rough Justice" programme for its 2002 episode, "If the Cap Fits". He was filmed during the show's investigation and again described how the cap was taken from Oliver's head by the man who was actually his accomplice—the man who was actually the murderer—and how it had been dropped near the shop. Samuels again refused to sign a statement, this time on the advice of his key worker.

A ballistics expert was also brought in by the BBC, who established that the murderer must have been right-handed; other experts have shown that Oliver favours his left hand for most tasks. Oliver's bizarre confession apparently includes details of how he made a holster for the gun out of string and how he had practised shooting in a forest or a field, but he could not tell the police the location or even whether it was a forest or a field. He was pressed to identify how many bullets he had had and how many were fired, but he clearly had no idea what the correct answer to either of those questions was.

After the "Rough Justice" programme was broadcast, detailed and extensive submissions were made to the CCRC by Oliver's legal team, including by his solicitor, Glyn Maddocks, and his eminent QC, Michael Birnbaum, in the clear hope—indeed, expectation—that the Commission would refer Oliver's case back to the Court of Appeal.

After two long years, the CCRC concluded that there was nothing new to form the basis of a fresh appeal and that therefore there could be no appeal. That was despite a recent change in the law that would have enabled the Court of Appeal to rely on the statements that Eric Samuels had made, in which he completely exonerated Oliver.

The CCRC also ignored the reports of two very eminent psychologists, who explained that Oliver's acquiescence to police questioning was due to his limited mental capacity, and his eagerness to please and be accepted. As Kirsty Wark reported at the end of the "Rough Justice" programme, this evidence of Oliver's mental state, which had never been brought before the original jury, constituted

"fresh new evidence which points to a terrible miscarriage of justice".

I am bringing this case to the attention of the House for two reasons. First, of course, it is because I believe Oliver to be innocent of the crime of murder. Life is not easy for Oliver; life never would have been easy for him, even without a murder conviction hanging over him. Oliver works five mornings a week at a community café as a cleaner; he spends the rest of his time trying to clear his name. Secondly, however, and crucially, the other reason for us to have this debate here today is because the CCRC was established by this House to make it easier to rectify miscarriages of justice, and I do not believe that it has achieved that aim.

Mr Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): My hon. Friend and I are founder members of the new all-party parliamentary group on miscarriages of justice. As he knows, we now have the Westminster commission on miscarriages of justice, led by Lord Garnier and Baroness Stern. Does he believe that we need a fundamental change to the CCRC, both in terms of its structure and its resources?

Sandy Martin: I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention and he is right. I was very pleased to have gone to the first hearing of the Westminster commission on the role of the CCRC just the other day. I think it is making good progress and I hope to see a radical change in the way that we deal with appeals on the grounds of miscarriage of justice.

In my view, the grounds for an appeal in this case are compelling. I am not a lawyer but I have an inquiring mind, and the first three grounds submitted by Oliver's lawyers seem to me to constitute essential issues that cry out to be reconsidered properly by a court.

Ground A is that the admissions made by Oliver in his so-called confession were inconsistent, inaccurate when compared with the rest of the evidence and, on a number of points, simply absurd. Ground B is the report of Professor Thomas-Peter, a well-respected and highly experienced psychologist. That report states that Oliver's

"lack of mental capacity for understanding anything other than the simplest of questions indicates to me that he would be vulnerable to self-incrimination."

He added that Oliver had difficulty understanding double negatives and that, from his reading of the available documents,

"it seems that part of Oliver's defence was based upon his succumbing to intimidation rather than his inability to understand complex questions."

[*Sandy Martin*]

Ground C is police misconduct. I would very much like to believe that the treatment Oliver received at the hands of the Metropolitan police would not happen today. Oliver was not treated appropriately and consistently in relation to his obvious needs and inabilities: he was questioned without solicitors, and was misquoted back to himself by the officers in order to confuse him. References were made during the interview to fingerprints on a can of lager held by the murderer being Oliver's, which was not the case and which the police knew not to be the case. If the prints were Oliver's, they would certainly have been cited in the prosecution's case; if they were not Oliver's, the fact that they belonged to someone else ought to have been enough to acquit him. However, that evidence was never brought to the attention of the court. There is still no forensic evidence to link my constituent to this murder.

Mr Sheerman: Does my hon. Friend agree that in some criminal justice systems, access to all the evidence that was presented by either side at the trial makes it much easier to look at the case later and mount an appeal, and does he believe that is something we should have in our country?

Sandy Martin: I absolutely agree with my hon. Friend, and thank him for his intervention. As far as I can tell, any criminal justice system that does not allow all the existing evidence to be available to both sides of the argument prevents the correct decision from being made in court. I believe the commission needs to look again at Oliver's case, and that if it carefully re-reads the submission from the QC, it will conclude that there is indeed good cause to send this case to appeal.

The recently established APPG on miscarriages of justice has gained a great deal of support in this House. Oliver's pro bono solicitor, Glyn Maddocks from Gabb and Co, who has represented Oliver for over 20 years and is a recognised expert in miscarriage of justice cases, is a special advisor to the APPG. He has been working closely with the newly established Westminster commission on miscarriages of justice, which is co-chaired by former Solicitor General Lord Garnier QC and Baroness Stern. Will the Minister confirm whether the Government will give their full support to the Westminster commission as it undertakes its important work?

The purpose of the Westminster commission is to look at the difficulty in overturning wrongful convictions in England and Wales. Such a review, particularly of the CCRC and its relationship with the Court of Appeal, is long overdue. I hope to have an opportunity to submit the failings of the CCRC's review of Oliver Campbell's case as evidence to the Westminster commission. We need our justice system to be fit for purpose, to identify and punish the guilty and exonerate the innocent, and when there is clear evidence that that has not happened, we need to know why. However, we also have a fellow human being to consider—a man who is still living under licence, with barely enough income to survive and subject to recall to prison at any time. I strongly believe that Oliver has already had to wait too long to have his name cleared. I urge the Minister to write to the CCRC and ask it to review Oliver's case once more as soon as practicably possible, and reconsider its decision not to refer his case back to the Court of Appeal.

No one doubts that the job of the CCRC is difficult; it is constantly being asked to do more with fewer resources. I suspect that when it was set up in 1997, it was never expected that it would receive 1,500 applications each year. In its 22 years of existence, it has reviewed nearly 24,000 of the 25,000 applications it has received, many of which have been completely ineligible. The commission has referred 658 cases to the Court of Appeal, of which all but 10 have been heard in the courts. Some 437 convictions have been quashed, and 198 appeals have been dismissed. It is beyond me, and beyond anyone else who knows anything about this case, why Oliver's case was not one of those referred. However, does the Minister agree that the rate of convictions quashed suggests that a large number of the cases that have not been sent to the Court of Appeal might also have led to convictions being overturned?

There is some concern about the subordinate relationship the CCRC has with the Court of Appeal, and about the difficulty it faces when applying the real possibility test, which it currently uses to decide which cases to refer. I have personally seen from Oliver's case that the CCRC has acted somewhat more as an arbitrary gatekeeper than as a champion for righting the obvious miscarriage of justice he has suffered.

Oliver will be 50 next year, and has been fighting to clear his name for nearly 30 years. Those within the criminal justice system who have had contact with Oliver professionally, including during his time in prison, have had very serious doubts about his conviction. The governor at Wandsworth described him as

"of very low intelligence and childlike in some ways. Knowing him as we do it is difficult to see how he has ended up in this situation".

His probation officer said he had serious concerns about Oliver's conviction for murder. Even the trial judge's report to the Home Secretary at the end of Oliver's trial reflected his view regarding the gross artificiality of the result, and the unsatisfactory nature of the trial process that led to it.

It is right that I pay special tribute to Oliver's legal team, his solicitor Glyn Maddocks and his QC Michael Birnbaum, both of whom have worked tirelessly and resolutely for over 20 years on an entirely pro bono basis to achieve justice for Oliver. Such dedication is rare, but at a time when legal aid is almost non-existent and miscarriages of justice are increasing—surely linked to cost pressures in the criminal justice system—it is an absolutely precious commodity. I hope that many other younger lawyers will be inspired to work on cases such as Oliver Campbell's.

Several people have said that Oliver Campbell's case is the clearest example of a miscarriage of justice that they have seen. I am surprised and dismayed that the CCRC, established by this House with the support of all parties following the recommendation of the royal commission on criminal justice under the Major Government, has failed to enable the correction of what is so clearly a wrongful conviction. I call on the Minister to institute a review of the CCRC's decision-making powers.

11.17 am

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir George. I congratulate the hon. Member for Ipswich (Sandy Martin) on securing this debate on

the decision-making powers of the Criminal Cases Review Commission—which, like him, I will refer to in my remarks as the CCRC, for brevity's sake.

I also thank the hon. Gentleman for setting out Oliver Campbell's situation. I know that the hon. Gentleman is a forceful champion for his constituent, and indeed for his constituency, and I pay tribute to him for that, just as I do to the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr Sheerman) for his commitment and dedication to the issue. I must be a little bit careful when paying tribute—a reshuffle looms, so I am not sure whether paying such fulsome tribute to Opposition Members will help or hinder my career prospects. However, the work they have done is truly impressive and important. Although I am sure the hon. Member for Ipswich appreciates that it would not be appropriate for me to discuss an individual case on the Floor of the House, I welcome the opportunity to discuss the broader issue. I am of course happy to discuss his constituent's case with him outside the Chamber, should the hon. Gentleman feel that would be helpful.

As the hon. Member for Ipswich has set out, the independent CCRC plays a vital and valuable role in maintaining confidence in the criminal justice system. In addition to my tributes to Members present in this Chamber, I pay tribute to the commitment of the CCRC commissioners and staff, and to their work in investigating potential miscarriages of justice. I am sure all Members, both in this Chamber and beyond, share my view that miscarriages of justice are a blight on our criminal justice system; have a devastating impact on all those involved; and can cause people to question that justice system, which we must seek to avoid at all costs.

Since the establishment of the CCRC in 1997, my understanding is that 441 referrals from the commission have succeeded in the courts—I raise the hon. Gentleman by four. Those referrals have resulted in overturned convictions or amended sentences.

Mr Sheerman: The Minister has always been very supportive and listened carefully to everything we have been campaigning on, which I appreciate. Some of us went to visit the commission in Birmingham, and we got the impression that it was under-resourced; that it cannot get investigators because it is right out on a limb in Birmingham and should be closer to the centre of legal affairs in our country, here in London; and that very often the commissioners are part time and work from home. Does the Minister think there is a bit of a problem there?

Edward Argar: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I suspect that some of his colleagues who represent Birmingham seats might slightly take issue with his suggestion that the city is out on a limb. We believe that the approach adopted by commissioners allows for flexibility and the most effective management of case loads, and I will move on to the tailored review shortly. From my discussions with the new chair of the commission, my understanding is that she felt that the resourcing was adequate and appropriate, but that changes are needed to reflect the findings of the tailored review. I will touch on that in a moment, subject to time.

The CCRC is, as the hon. Member for Ipswich alluded to, the world's first statutory, publicly funded body charged with the task of reviewing alleged miscarriages

of justice. The law provides that the commission can refer cases to an appeal court only when it considers that there is a real possibility that the conviction, verdict, finding or sentence would not be upheld were the referral to be made. The hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friend, the hon. Member for Huddersfield, have set out concerns about the real possibility test and whether it affects the rate at which the commission refers cases to the appeal courts.

The hon. Member for Ipswich asked whether the rate of convictions quashed suggests that a large number of the cases that have not been sent to the Court of Appeal might also have led to the convictions being overturned. Those concerns have been aired before and were considered by the Justice Committee in its report on the CCRC published in March 2015. The Committee considered whether a declining rate of referrals was due to the real possibility test itself, the CCRC's application of it or the Court of Appeal's approach to appeals. It found no conclusive evidence of the CCRC failing to apply the test correctly.

We do not feel that it would be appropriate to alter the test simply to demonstrate the independence of the CCRC. Doing so would by definition risk allowing referrals where there was less than a real possibility of a conviction or sentence being overturned. The Committee accepted that the application of the test is a difficult task and is by no means a precise science, but it considered that the CCRC should be willing to err on the side of making a referral where potential miscarriages of justice are concerned. I am assured that is the approach the CCRC adopts, and there must be a realistic chance of success.

Both hon. Gentlemen referred to the work of the recently established commission. I will make two comments on that. First, I fairly regularly meet the hon. Member for Huddersfield, and if the hon. Member for Ipswich would like to join those discussions of the broader issues, as well as meeting to discuss Oliver's case, he is welcome. I look forward to following the commission's work. Without making firm commitments, I hope that the hon. Member for Huddersfield will recognise that I have always been willing to engage constructively since I have been in this role, and I look forward to doing so in future.

Mr Sheerman: Just to put the record straight, the people we met are really good people. I did not want to denigrate them; they are very good people, but they are under-resourced. I got the feeling, talking to them and talking to people in this area, that senior people in the judiciary do not like the system and are not positive towards it. Is that the real key; that some senior judges do not like the process at all?

Edward Argar: The hon. Gentleman is an experienced Member of the House and he is gently tempting me to speculate on areas where I will not tread. I believe the judiciary has full confidence in the process and fully respects the nature of the process. That is reflected in how it engages with the CCRC and the appeals process. He may seek to tempt me, but I fear that on this occasion he has not succeeded.

I note that the CCRC's analysis has identified other reasons for the recent level of referrals, including the lack of common themes across recent cases and changes

[*Edward Argar*]

in approach by investigators. The CCRC continues to review the reasons for a low referral rate, working with practitioners and academics to ensure that they are aware of any potential new causes of miscarriages of justice.

In February the Ministry of Justice published a tailored review of the commission, as the hon. Member for Ipswich will be aware. The review found that the current delivery model as a non-departmental public body is still the most appropriate. The review did, however, make a number of recommendations relating to improving the commission's performance. Those recommendations were in part informed by respondents to the call for evidence, who commented that the commission does not provide as timely a service as they would wish. The commission has acknowledged that although internal targets were met, too many cases were taking too long to resolve and more can be done to avoid delay.

The hon. Gentleman has alluded to the amount of time it has taken the CCRC to look at Oliver's case and the handling of it. The review team found that a single commissioner or a committee of commissioners were making the decisions on the non-referral of cases, despite legislation providing the option for decisions to be made by one or more employees of the commission. The review recommended that responsibility for the final decision on non-referrals in less complex cases should be made by case review managers, rather than commissioners.

Mr Sheerman: Before the Minister concludes, will he give way?

Edward Argar: I am not concluding just yet.

Mr Sheerman: The Minister has four minutes.

Edward Argar: Go on, very quickly.

Mr Sheerman: Does the Minister understand that many of us got into this issue because of cases in our constituencies? In Huddersfield, I had a tragic case like Oliver's. Does he realise that even when someone spends 18 years in prison and they come out having been found not ever to have committed a crime, they get nothing?

Edward Argar: The hon. Gentleman makes a powerful point, which he has made in our previous conversations. I look forward to picking that specific point up in more detail with him. I think we are due to have one of our regular meetings soon.

As with any case, the CCRC would welcome an application to review Oliver's case, if new information can be provided. That would be decided by people who have had no previous involvement in the decision making.

Sandy Martin: I thank the Minister for that. If the CCRC says that there has been no new evidence and refuses to take any further applications, what is our recourse after that?

Edward Argar: My understanding is that beyond that the recourse is via judicial review, which I appreciate is a complex and expensive process. That is why I am happy to meet the hon. Gentleman following the debate to discuss the issue in more detail outside of this place.

The review also recommended that the CCRC and my Department should discuss the possibility of changing the law so that the commission does not have to consider cases dealt with summarily and sentence-only cases. The CCRC currently considers applications relating to summary offences, which often originate in magistrates courts, as well as more serious indictable offences, which are dealt with in Crown courts. The CCRC also considers applications that allege a person has been sentenced incorrectly.

The review recommendation reflects the outcome of the Justice Committee inquiry in 2015, which recommended that the CCRC be given discretion to refuse to investigate cases dealt with summarily, if it deems it not to be in the public interest to investigate. The CCRC is considering and reflecting on that recommendation, but it is of the view that it should retain its function with regard to summary cases, given that it is an area where miscarriages of justice can and do occur. The CCRC has established a working group to consider the recommendations of the tailored review, and I look forward to the outcome of its discussions, especially with regard to what can be done to ensure that commissioners can focus on more complex and serious cases.

I very much support the work of the CCRC. In saying that, I put on the record that I was in no way suggesting that the hon. Member for Huddersfield does not; I know he is deeply involved in this area and has a lot of respect for the staff and their work. Although he is courteously challenging of it, I know that the CCRC welcomes his engagement, which shines a light on its work and raises its profile. The staff enjoy and respect his interest and the focus it brings to their work. I know they would want me to say that to him.

With the appointment of six new commissioners in June, the organisation is well placed to deliver its important work investigating where people are wrongly convicted or where convictions are unsafe. I look forward to carefully considering the results of the work of the Westminster commission that has been set up by the all-party parliamentary group. I hope that I will be in this post this time next week and in a fortnight hence, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman will recognise that although we may on occasions disagree, as long as I am in this post I will always be happy to engage with him and with Members from all parts of the House.

The hon. Member for Ipswich is absolutely right to use his position in this House as a champion for his constituents to highlight Oliver's case, bringing it to my attention as a Minister and also to people more broadly. I look forward, should he wish and should I still be in this role in a couple of weeks' time, to discussing that with him, where he can unpack some of the more detailed points he would want to make on that. It has been a pleasure to respond to this debate, Sir George. The CCRC continues to play a vital role for individuals and also in upholding the integrity of our justice system, which is precious to us all.

Question put and agreed to.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.

NHS Workforce: England

[MRS MADELEINE MOON *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

Eleanor Smith (Wolverhampton South West) (Lab): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the legal duties of the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care for NHS workforce planning and supply.

I am a nurse. My daughter is a nurse. Nursing is in my family and fundamentally informs who I am and what I do. Last November, I triggered a debate about investing in nursing higher education. I am here today to again carry the burning flag for the nursing profession, the wider health and care workforce, and society.

I will start by directly addressing the notion that we should not seek to further clarify the Secretary of State's legal duties and powers. I have heard that the latest legislation sought to remove political interference in our health system. I have heard people say, "Don't make health a political football." Lastly, I have heard that changing the legislation to give the Secretary of State accountability for the workforce would put health and care back under political control—as if our ability to access health and care was ever out of political control.

I am sorry, but those are laughable positions. Which-ever side of the fence we sit on, it is a serious point that health is fundamentally political. It can never not be political, in terms of what we can access and what happens to people. Our great health service was created within a political agenda, and creating it was a fundamentally political act. Supporting our health and care service to thrive will never not be a political decision. Let us be proud of our history, recognise that health is political, and find a solution to the problems we face.

Now that I have addressed those weak positions, let me state that I, and many others across the political spectrum, take no issue with the idea that there should be explicit clarity in the law about the Secretary of State's responsibilities. I am not alone in my gratitude for all that our health and care staff do. They work constantly to provide quality care by putting patients at the heart of what they do. In the NHS and the independent sector, nursing accounts for one in 10 of the labour market of the whole of England. We are, and ought to be, a fundamental force to be reckoned with.

Thanks to the scale and urgency of the workforce crisis, many people have been looking into these issues—some of us would say for far too long, and to poor result. We have a long-term plan for the NHS and an interim NHS people plan, so we have seen some movement in the way that agencies work together. However, we have no understanding of what the social care sector needs, and no assurance of workforce funding, which is entirely dependent on the forthcoming spending review and subject to the whim of a new Prime Minister. We do not have a workforce strategy that meets health and care service requirements, or that projects the future needs of the people who live in this country.

The vacancy rate has reached alarming levels, with almost 40,000 nursing vacancies in the NHS in England alone. That is not the full picture. The extent of the

vacancies within social care and public health is unclear because it is not mandatory to collect workforce data. It is not possible for services designed with staffing built into their planning to run safely and effectively with so many missing staff.

Fewer people are joining the nursing profession and more are leaving. Since the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, more than 10,000 EU nurses and midwives have left the UK workforce. I will not be drawn on Brexit in this debate. However, while we are trying to find our way through the referendum result, frontline staff are propping up the health and care system with no credible assurances that the situation will be resolved. Our professionals are holding on as best they can, but we need to be realistic about what we can reasonably ask of them. They are starting to vote with their feet, and there is not yet the accountability to help us navigate the future that is to come.

This crisis has come about because there is no clarity in the existing legal powers and duties that would ensure that enough staff with the right skills are in the right place at the right time to provide safe and effective care. That is true not just of nursing but of every profession working within our commissioned, taxpayer-funded services, including nurses, medics, psychiatrists, physiotherapists, psychologists, paramedics, pharmacists, social workers, support workers, occupational therapists and dietitians. Literally no one—no one person—is accountable for growing and developing our health and care workforce to meet patients' needs, now and in future.

The Secretary of State's current legal duty is to provide a comprehensive service. The Government may say that the Secretary of State has oversight of the workforce through those general duties and powers. With all due respect, the Secretary of State's responsibilities are too broad to understand what aspects of workforce provision they include. There are also no particular workforce duties within the range of national organisations responsible for service design and delivery. In a health and care system as complex as ours, it is easy for everyone to lose sight of ensuring that we have enough people. Clearly, that is exactly what has happened.

Mr Jim Cunningham (Coventry South) (Lab): Surely two reasons for the number of vacancies are low pay in the public sector generally and the lack of bursary provision to recruit new nurses. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a golden opportunity for many mature women, whose children have grown up, to enter that profession? Recently, even ambulance drivers had to pay extra for their certification—I had a debate on that a couple of months ago.

Eleanor Smith: My hon. Friend is right, and I will touch on the removal of bursaries later.

A huge amount of effort has been required to try to fix this mess. There has been progress in the NHS, but it is too little and too slow. It does not include social care and deals only with the immediate context. Many of us in this House are here to challenge the position that the existing so-called responsibilities are clear and robust enough for use by the Government and the health and care system, and for the public to have confidence that the Government can be held to account—now and in future, since the pressures on the system will continue to grow and change.

[Eleanor Smith]

Yesterday, many of us met nursing staff, having been brought together by members of the Royal College of Nursing, who are all passionate about patient care and public safety. I am moved by their advocacy for the profession, patients and society. I also feel their desperation in the situation they face, trying to keep people safe in challenging environments. Given that professionals have been raising the alarm for decades, hopefully our demands for an end to the boom-and-bust cycle in the workforce will be met.

Even the High Court recognises how vague the current powers and duties are. The legal dispute between the Secretary of State and junior doctors over their contract resulted in a judicial review in 2016. The Court judgment said that, as stated in the National Health Service Act 2006, the objective of “protecting the public”, with a duty on the Secretary of State to take appropriate steps, leaves

“considerable leeway to the Minister as to ways and means” of running the service.

Anyone who looks at the content of the law can see clear holes and gaps. In addition to the Secretary of State having no explicit responsibility, we have other problems with the duties and power of the national guidance. For example, Health Education England is the organisation responsible for developing our workforce, but its hands are tied because it does not have sufficient legal powers or funding to invest properly in the educational provision needed to grow our workforce. HEE can do planning but not supply, which ought to be the responsibility of the Government. The current legal framework is simply not fit for purpose.

Some people might say that Simon Stevens, the chief executive of NHS England, should be accountable for not addressing the workforce needs. The development of the long-term plan provides another clear example of the ambiguity and conflicting expectations playing out in practice. In June 2018, the Prime Minister said:

“Growing demand and increasing complexity have led to a shortfall in staff. So our ten year plan for the NHS must include a comprehensive plan for its workforce to ensure we have the right staff, in the right settings, and with the right skills to deliver world class care.”

That was a clear signal of the Government’s commitment that the long-term plan would address the workforce crisis. On publication, NHS England acknowledged significant workforce issues but said that staffing was additional to service planning and was outside the £20 billion financial package that Simon Stevens was given. Again, NHS England does not have any explicit legal duties that relate to the workforce, so it is not obliged to act.

Just last week, Simon Stevens said there is a need for a “much bigger upturn in the pipeline of new nurses... There has been a big debate about bursaries and their removal, which as we look at the way the student loan system is working, that is clearly back in play as a big question we’ve got to answer as a nation.”

However, the reasons for these supply problems are not within Simon Stevens’s control. They include the reform of higher education for nursing, which has not grown as we were promised. The ability to boost and fund the workforce sits with the Government, and the ambitions set out in the long-term plan will not be met if we do not have trained and qualified staff to achieve those

goals. Although the Government have committed to transforming services, they must also commit to building the workforce we need. To do that, the lack of accountability must be addressed.

A nurse who walks into a shift that is short-staffed has no power to safely and effectively staff services. They have no option but to carry on, yet the buck stops with them when patient care is unsafe. Nurses have no power to recruit more staff, and they rely on Parliament to ensure that the incredible position we find ourselves in is addressed; to fix things not just now, but for the future. I know how heartbreaking it is for a nurse to be unable to give the care they want to. I know the guilt we feel when care is left undone, and the stress of being unable to do our job to the best of our ability. Patients pay the highest price when the number of nursing staff falls too low.

Understanding that the health and social care system is a safety-critical industry should be the starting block for any consideration made by the Government. The Royal College of Nursing and other professional and patient organisations have a clear solution. With cross-party support, they are calling for a legal framework for workforce accountability that sets out who in Government and across the health and social care system are accountable and responsible for workforce supply—recruitment, retention and remuneration.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care should have explicit powers in law for the growth and development of the health and social care workforce across England. Such accountability would ensure that there are enough staff to care for the number of patients, and that there is an incredible and fully funded workforce strategy. These requirements are not an either/or position; we need both. Alongside the Secretary of State’s accountability, there are other ways in which the responsibilities need to filter down across all layers of the health system. Never again would the system be able to sidestep workforce planning when setting a 10-year vision for the future of our NHS. The ultimate aim in clarifying accountability for the workforce at Government level is to ensure that all health and social care services are of a high quality, and that they are equipped to provide safe and effective care to guarantee patient safety. The current pressure faced by the healthcare workforce puts that guarantee at risk.

Successive Governments have missed opportunities to fix the health and social care workforce crisis. Boom-and-bust approaches to workforce supply have been an afterthought, with the focus on glossy new services and sparkly new plans, rather than on worrying about the staff who are needed to deliver them. That has led to a situation in which the system currently defaults to discussing how to fix the workforce gap. We need to plan strategically for what workforce will be needed to deliver the future healthcare services that have been designed to meet the needs of the population.

An opportunity to rectify the workforce crisis is coming right towards us. NHS England and NHS Improvement have finished engagement work on the legislative changes that they feel are needed to make a success of the long-term plan. Their engagement work sets out proposed changes to the remit of the Secretary of State, but currently these legislative proposals are missing crucial accountabilities. It is down to right hon. and hon. Members to expand the proposals when the

law is presented to Parliament. The legislation must include accountabilities for the workforce, because it is too clear an opportunity to miss.

A simple legal change would turn the tide for patients, and support is growing across the political spectrum for a legal fix as part of addressing the workforce crisis. I found myself at a roundtable discussion on this very matter, with a Government Member with whom I share no political allegiance. We found ourselves in full agreement that we must explicitly clarify the responsibility for putting our workforce on a sustainable footing.

As a nurse in Parliament, I commit to seeking the change that is being called for. I hope that others call on Parliament to speak loudly and clearly in adding their voices to ours, and that all right hon. and hon. Members will commit to pursuing change. This is a truly cross-party issue, and rightfully so. There is a crisis and everyone points fingers at others, but ultimately no one is responsible. There are moves to make the system better, but they must be set out in law and strengthened further. There is an opportunity to fix this cleanly and easily. We are not adding burdens, but clarifying mandates. The moment is now—we must commit to ending the workforce crisis once and for all.

2.49 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Eleanor Smith) on securing this debate on an issue that she and I have discussed—her office is near mine in Norman Shaw North—and both care deeply about.

I am glad to see the Minister in his place. He knows my constituency well and understands the challenge of getting to it. In fact, he was the first MP ever to visit me in the heady days before 2010, when I stood as a parliamentary candidate because I thought that coming to Parliament would be a great way of changing the world. I have since learned that that is probably not the case.

The credit should really sit with the people who work in the NHS. In particular, I pay tribute and send my thanks to those who work in West Cornwall Hospital in Penzance, Helston Community Hospital—or cottage hospital, for those of us who grew up there—and other places where NHS staff and others do a fantastic job in really difficult situations, as we have heard. They make sure that people who arrive for whatever reason get the best possible care.

I was keen to take part in the debate because I recognise that things need to be done. We must take responsibility for the way things are at the moment, and although I understand what the legal responsibility is and the reason for the debate, I want to understand a bit more about the solutions, too. I have never thought that all the solutions can be created, thought up or delivered here in Westminster or in any Government Department. Although real progress in integration and improving services on the ground needs to be enabled through legislation, support and encouragement, people in health and social care in Cornwall have got together and worked extremely hard for many years to deliver a system in which pathways and integration are much better than when I welcomed the Minister off the train.

One problem of many is the workforce, which is undoubtedly a challenge. There is also no doubt that the NHS 10-year plan is a fantastic document, but it

depends heavily on workforce. I know that the Minister will agree and will want to ensure that we have people in place. We may not participate in this Chamber, but across Parliament, the bunfight, debate and arguments about the NHS go on, and have been taken up by people in local campaigns and the media. That has created an environment in which people choose not to nurse or do anything else in the NHS because they are misinformed. I know of lots of people who would have gone into or considered going into nursing or social care, but will not do so because the NHS is a political hot potato.

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): On the hon. Gentleman's point about people not joining the NHS to nurse, the lack of bursary is a significant issue. If someone wants to train, the bursary is really important.

Derek Thomas: I am addressing the point the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West made about the importance of working cross-party, as we will in this Chamber. I will come to the bursary later.

Actually, I will come to that part of my speech now as the hon. Member for Lincoln (Karen Lee) has mentioned it. I was one of the MPs who signed a cross-party letter requesting a royal commission for the 70th year of the NHS, because I believe that although we do not have all the solutions, we should set the tone. That would help to open the door of opportunity for those who work in the NHS. I will come to the bursary, which I have already raised with the Minister; I asked him to look in particular at the impact on mature students. Podiatry in Plymouth, for example, will not be taught from September onwards. In the south west, where the incidences of diabetes and other vascular problems are significant, we need podiatrists, so that is a major problem. The reason given is that most people who go into podiatry do it later on in their careers, and one of the challenges arising from the removal of the bursary and introduction of student loans—I voted for that and regret doing so—is that those who take out the loan immediately lose all welfare and can no longer get housing benefit.

For someone with a young family who wants to study, the student loan, or the grant available for mature students, is just not enough. The Minister is aware of my view because I have raised it before, and there is work to do on that. It is not about financial incentives; it is about making it affordable for people to go and do a fantastic job. As the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West rightly said, some people bring so much to health and social care and we need to ensure that we take away every possible barrier without creating unintended consequences. I am sure that the Minister will be pleased to address that point later.

I will talk briefly about how Cornwall is responding. I have been very keen to see what we can do in Cornwall to make sure that people can turn up, get training and work and train on the job. For people in Cornwall, most opportunities for training are outside the area, but as we know, people who go into some professions, including in the NHS, tend to stay where they train. That has always been a problem for Cornwall, which has struggled to recruit the people we need. We have set up a health and care academy using the apprenticeship levy. The academy can offer people training and jobs as healthcare assistants. There, they can do 12 hours per week working

[Derek Thomas]

and studying through the Open University, and will become qualified nurses after four years. As they are already settled in the area and have family there, they are very likely to work for the NHS for the rest of their careers.

That is really positive, but there are some challenges and I have met the Minister to talk about them. One of the challenges is that for hospitals—in this case Royal Cornwall Hospital—to provide that kind of support, they need extra cash. It is not just about the apprenticeship levy, which they want to use and not repay, but about staffing 100 nurses and 100 healthcare assistants at a time, and providing pastoral support and other elements that come with training up staff on a ward or in a hospital. An added pressure is that for a hospital without the staff that it needs, really excellent healthcare assistants are no substitute for fully qualified nurses with a wealth of experience.

There is a problem in this place. I am a skilled craftsman in the building trade but I have put my tools away, despite the desperate need for skilled craftsmen in Cornwall. In this Chamber and across the House, we have lots of GPs and talented nurses. For some reason, we decided to pitch up here instead of continuing in our valuable jobs. I think that we are part of the problem. I am not suggesting that we should all pack up and go home, although we might get more done if we did, so we should consider it.

Eleanor Smith: I get what the hon. Gentleman is saying, but I worked for 40 years in the health service and it was because I saw its deterioration that I came to Parliament to say, “This is what’s happening.”

Derek Thomas: I said that in humour, which is why I talked about my own skill—or lack of. It is a curious thing, though, to hear people talking about the crisis in staffing when so many of them are in this place.

On a more important note, we are in a tricky situation with the challenges around the apprenticeship levy. In Cornwall, we hope to train 200 nurses using the apprenticeship levy over the next two years—that would address the shortage—but we have to recognise that funding is needed and I know that the Minister is looking at that now.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Derek Thomas: I will when I have finished this point. Whatever the solution, we must recognise the added pressure on existing staff.

Paul Girvan: On that point, it is all very well getting nurses into and through training, but in Northern Ireland the NHS is haemorrhaging nurses who are not leaving the profession, but going into agency work, getting paid two and a half times more than they were and working the hours that they want. Not only is workforce planning impossible when people can just work when they want, but we lose continuity of care in wards.

Derek Thomas: I appreciate that valuable intervention. I had a conversation with the former Secretary of State for Health about how, when the student loan was introduced, there might have been a way in which

students had all their loan written off if they gave seven years’ service to the NHS. The advantage of that, to be honest, is that people who had done seven years after qualifying would probably have settled down by then, entered into a home purchase and perhaps had family, so they would have been, first, less likely to clear off to another country and, secondly, kind of tied into the NHS where they were.

In part, that addresses the problem the hon. Gentleman raises. Yesterday, I met a newly qualified nurse from the south-west who found that on Christmas day she was the leading NHS nurse, supported only by agency staff. That must stick in the back of NHS staff’s throat, when they know that extra pay is available to agency staff. Efforts have been made to address that, and there must be ways to do so, but that is what we are getting at today—the workforce challenge.

If we have a workforce challenge, other things will happen, such as agencies springing up and the demand for them. We have to get to a place where working for the NHS as a nurse employed by the local trust is the best and most rewarding place to be, and appreciated by all. We simply do not say often enough how great such people are. We can do so many things locally and nationally to rebuild value, trust and appreciation in those people. The challenge for Health Education England is to look at how we fund local innovative ideas, ensuring there is enough money, as well as flexible support, to find solutions. I discussed that with Simon Stevens, and he seemed alert to the challenge.

As I said, I met nurses from the south-west yesterday, and they were concerned about safety on wards and retention of nurses. We have this bizarre circle spiralling downhill: if nurses do not feel safe, they go to do something that might not be nursing. Unfortunately, in places of low unemployment, lots of other work and employment opportunities are available, often paying more.

Solutions are possible. In Cornwall, I have found that people often do not know what is available. The Royal Cornwall Hospitals NHS Trust and other trusts in Cornwall, my local college and I got together to work on an event in the college called “Work for the NHS+”, which included 15 or more different parts of the NHS, as well as some from social care. They came along to tell students and the general public what the employment opportunities were, the pay and training that could be expected, and what kind of career paths were available. In Cornwall, as in many other parts of the country, there are some fantastic members of staff and people in the NHS and social care who can inspire others. This might sound ridiculous in a debate on shortages on a ward, but when we have such individuals, we must find opportunities to get them in front of people who are thinking about which career they should choose.

I do not know much about the other challenging problem raised by the nurses yesterday, but it is right to mention it. They said that although more nurses are training, training placement opportunities are fewer. They suggested that part of nurse training now is off the ward—obviously that has happened before, but they were concerned about whether that virtual training or simulators were the same. I know that the Minister will take seriously all opportunities to get nurses trained in the best possible way, so I will not dwell on a subject that I do not know much about.

I mentioned the issue to do with podiatry, which is a real problem in the south-west. We must find ways to help professionals, whatever they do, whether therapy, physio or all the things that people do to ensure that we stay well and do not end up in hospital. Podiatry is one of those. We must ensure that people get the training, that they can afford to do so, and that they can have a great career in the NHS or with local authorities. We need to talk to universities about exactly why they are not attracting the kind of numbers they need to justify the courses.

I should have declared an interest at the beginning: I chair the vascular and venous disease all-party parliamentary group. One thing I am being told loud and clear—I have done a lot on this—is that because we have taken the nursing bursary away from older students, they find it difficult to go on the courses that I am describing. That will have a real impact on the numbers of nurses available to do those important jobs. If we do not address that issue, in a place such as Cornwall, where diabetes is a significant problem, the pressure on urgent care will be enormous—if it is not already.

Last week, our general district hospital—the only one in Cornwall—closed to the public, because a spate or outbreak of vomiting and diarrhoea put a lot of people from nursing homes and others into hospital. In that situation, the system rallied and did some amazing work to cope, ensuring that no one who needed care was failed, but it was also an example of why we need to work equally hard, if not harder, to ensure that at the best of times and the worst of times people get the best healthcare available.

The NHS in Great Britain is the envy of the world. We need to be careful always to remember how fantastic our system is. Last week, my brother and his wife came back from Cambodia with stories of trying to get healthcare there—they have two young children—and that reminded me of how fantastic our health service is, as are all those who work in it.

3.6 pm

Karen Lee (Lincoln) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Eleanor Smith) for securing this important debate.

I will start by talking about my lived experience of staff shortages in the NHS. I worked as a nurse from 2003 until 2017, when I entered Parliament. For the majority of that time, I worked on an in-patient cardiac unit at Lincoln County Hospital. Today, I want to paint a picture of a nurse's working day and how difficult that becomes when we have staff shortages. First, however, I pay tribute to all the staff at Lincoln County Hospital—not just the nurses, but all the staff—and to NHS staff who deliver our healthcare right across this country in local communities and in hospitals.

I keep in touch with my former colleagues and still hear at first hand how staff shortages affect them—some stories are quite scary. As an MP over the past two years, I have witnessed an awful lot of patronising pats on the back. I exclude today's debate from that, but we often hear from Members how wonderful our NHS staff are, and yet that does nothing to address staff shortages or to make their working conditions any better. That is what they want; they do not want patronising pats on the back. The 40,000 nursing vacancies are evidence of that stark truth.

As a nurse, when I went on shift, I would be allocated eight cardiac patients. They would have been treated for heart failure, recently had a heart attack or been waiting for an angiogram, or perhaps they were being treated for endocarditis, which is a serious infection of the heart. The staffing was meant to ensure that a single nurse took either the male or the female team, with an extra nurse working between the two sides to support the multitude of tasks that delivering good patient care means. In reality, we often did not get that third nurse, and had to manage without. Some shifts felt like a marathon combined with a sprint—I kid you not, Mrs Moon, it really was that bad. I did love it though.

The medical management of my group of patients would be varied. Many patients were diabetics, meaning that we had to check blood sugars, four times a day for some and twice for others. If four or five out of eight of a nurse's patients were diabetics, that was quite a task. We could even get something called "sliding scale", which meant we had to check them every two hours. Sometimes, honestly, we just chased our tail the whole day.

Many patients needed intravenous antibiotics, which were really time-consuming to prepare, even more so if a patient had a line, a Hickman or a PIC—a peripherally inserted central catheter—because it had to be done aseptically; it just took ages, and the nurse was running around the whole time. As well as that, staffing was routinely topped up with bank or agency staff. I am not knocking them, because we would not have managed without them, but they were not allowed to do IVs, so when we had agency staff on the other side of ward, to be honest we would end up doing quite a proportion of their work as well. That made it really difficult.

Many patients were prescribed controlled drugs, so first thing in the morning, at 8 o'clock, we might have had two or three CDs to do—but trying to get someone else to check the CD was a nightmare. There were just not enough hands on deck, which meant that people were sat waiting in pain for analgesia when they had gone all night and were due that dose. Sometimes a patient needed a blood transfusion, which was a really tricky process. They had to be monitored the whole time, but, again, that was done for one person and there were eight patients, so the nurse was running around all the time. It felt unsafe and the nurse felt really bad because they wanted to deliver good, safe patient care.

A patient might be close to death and need to be monitored, because the nurse could tell visually whether they were in pain, but there were seven others to look after. The relatives wanted someone to sit and talk to them, which of course the nurse wanted to do, but they did not have the time. In addition, there were other tasks such as changing dressings, monitoring pressure areas, and speaking to social workers, physiotherapists and occupational therapists about assessments, as well as discharging patients. The doctor might say to a patient, "You can go home today", but the nurse had seven others to look after. All the patient wanted was for the nurse to do their paperwork and get their meds from the pharmacy. They sat waiting impatiently and the nurse felt bad because the patient could not go home. When the nurse eventually got them out, another patient was straight into their bed and the admission paperwork had to be done. The tasks were endless, but that was the job. We did it and we loved it, but we have to have enough staff to do it properly.

[Karen Lee]

No nurse can deliver care without the healthcare support workers, so this is not only about nurses. The housekeepers make the tea but because the nurses do not have time to sit and talk to the patients and their families, the nurse goes to the housekeeper at the end of a shift and says, "Has anybody told you anything that I need to know?" It is team work. If there are not enough staff to carry out the different roles, staff simply burn out and cannot deliver the care that patients need. Towards the end of my nursing career, in the two years before I came to Parliament, I worked in out-patient clinics because I thought it might be a little easier, but it was not. It never is, but I was starting to get burn-out and I did not want that to happen because I loved the job too much.

We used to work 12.5 hour shifts. We would start a day shift at seven in the morning. At about half nine, if we were lucky, we got a cup of tea, but we literally had only five minutes. At around two o'clock we got our lunch. We had half an hour and we were meant to have another break at teatime, but we never, ever got it because we were running around trying to finish all our jobs, chasing our tails and trying to get everything done. So we would have a break of about half an hour in twelve and a half hours. Then, just when we thought we were going home, it would turn out that the bank staff, the agency staff, had not turned up and we could not simply say, "I am off home." We had to wait until somebody had been found somewhere else in the hospital and somebody was moved from a different ward. Then the handover took half an hour. Instead of going home at half seven or eight o'clock, it could be nine o'clock and we would be back again at seven the next morning. People simply burn out.

Working in our NHS is incredibly hard work in whatever role. It is not well paid, and in places such as Lincoln a few years ago when we had the pay freeze, it was suddenly decided that a consultation would be held and we were asked, "Do you think you ought pay for staff parking?" Of course, everyone said no, so what happened? We all had to start paying for staff parking: £15 a month for staff nurses who had not had a rise in years. It absolutely made us feel undervalued, and that is not acceptable. I am not surprised that people are leaving the profession.

I want to talk now about the crisis in our NHS and about some of the steps we must take as parliamentarians to address it. There are more than 100,000 vacancies in our NHS, including 40,000 nursing vacancies. The "Interim NHS People Plan", released last month, acknowledges that

"shortages in nursing are the single biggest and most urgent we need to address."

I agree with that, but there are many other things we need to address, too. It is true that 80% of shifts from over 40,000 nursing vacancies are covered by expensive bank and agency staff, which highlights the false economy of austerity. It makes no sense financially. I will say this again and again: the removal of the nursing bursary in effect means that nurses are not training. I know I will get the answer back about how wonderful nursing apprenticeships are and how other wonderful things will happen, but the stark truth is that nurses are not

training. So the NHS long-term plan and the talk about all the extra places for nurses is pie in the sky if we have not got the nurses training. It will simply not happen.

I am particularly concerned that applications from mature students have decreased by 39%. People no longer have the support that I had when I trained as a mature student. I was 39 when I started my training. The RCN is calling for the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to be accountable to Parliament for making sure that there are enough health and care staff with the right skills in the right place at the right time to care for patients, based on population needs now and in future. Support for that must be, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West said, cross-party if it is to happen. This or any future Government must ensure a credible, costed workforce strategy. Our healthcare workers must feel confident of delivering the very best care, and our patients must feel happy with the care they receive. A worn-out and demoralised workforce is not what the patients or any of us want to see.

Patients watch nursing staff doing their best to look after them. Some of them used to say to me, "Do you ever stop and take a breath?", and I would jokingly say, "No, but I still don't get thin, do I?" They have to wait their turn longer than they should for the care that they need, and that is not what we want to see. So I really hope that the Minister is genuinely listening and does not give me the usual answers: "We have got apprentices and we have got this and we are doing that, and all this money is going in, so we will get lots of nurses and it will all be all right in five years' time." I want someone to take notice and listen to me as an ex-nurse and make sure that hardworking NHS staff will be equipped to deliver the care that is both safe and effective for them and for their patients.

3.16 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I congratulate the hon. Members for Wolverhampton South West (Eleanor Smith), for Lincoln (Karen Lee) and for St Ives (Derek Thomas) on their eloquent speeches.

The crisis in the NHS workforce is deeply concerning. Its effects are felt nationally, locally and personally. Like others here, I want to pay tribute to the people working at every level of my national health service within the south lakes: the hospital in Kendal, Westmoreland General Hospital, and the district generals that we travel to in Barrow and in Lancaster. Of course, there are the GPs, dentists, paramedics and those providing mental health services. They do an outstanding job, but it is particularly challenging in rural areas, where we have specific problems with workforce planning and supply, which are at the heart of the problems that we are challenged by.

There are several key elements to workforce planning, including accessible and high quality training, as well as affordable training, as has just been mentioned so eloquently. Effective recruitment is another. Alongside both of those is the issue of staff retention. The Secretary of State must surely be held to account for each of those. The huge shortages in the NHS workforce are felt heavily in numerous areas of healthcare provision in the local communities in Cumbria, and I briefly want to touch on a few of them.

The provision of ambulances and ambulance crews has been hit particularly hard. It is vital that we recruit and deploy more paramedics and ambulance technicians. Rural communities such as mine suffer because of the sheer distances that ambulances have to travel to reach patients. According to the review of NHS access standards, it is the responsibility of ambulance trusts to respond to category 1 calls within seven minutes on average. That is a tall order when there are half the number of ambulances per head in the north-west of England as there are in London, despite the fact that my constituency alone is bigger than the whole of Greater London. It leaves communities living in fear for their safety and takes a serious toll on the physical and mental health of our outstanding ambulance crews. Our local paramedics and ambulance technicians are being pushed beyond their capacity. As a result, I have had an influx of local people contacting me about having to wait hours for an ambulance to arrive to give them the treatment that they so desperately need. That is why local health campaigners have been calling on the Government to deliver two new fully crewed ambulances to south Lakeland to stem the crisis and ensure the safety of the community. It is not right that people in Grasmere, Dent or Hawkshead might be an hour away from the nearest available ambulance.

We met the Minister to raise the issue a few weeks ago. He was incredibly helpful and I thank him for his time and his response. I very much welcome the commitment to procure additional emergency ambulances. I understand that as a result of our campaigns an additional £8 million has been allocated to the North West Ambulance Service. That could be good news for south Cumbria, but only if the ambulance service allocates it in the way that we have asked. Ministers should be held to account for whether the ambulances materialise.

Mental health is another element of workforce planning that I want to raise—particularly provision for children. Four years ago the Government promised a bespoke one-to-one eating disorder service for young people in Cumbria. For young people in south Cumbria that promise remains nothing more than words. The specialists have not been recruited and the service still does not exist. I should love it if the Minister would tell me exactly when we can expect our young people to have access to the service. When will the promises be kept?

I welcome the Government's commitment to preventive healthcare, set out in the NHS long-term plan. However, again, promises are not being fulfilled. In our area, cuts to the public health budget mean that the NHS in Cumbria currently spends only £75,000 a year on tier 1 mental health preventive care for children. That works out at just 75p per child per year. Proper investment in public health would ensure enough money for a mental health professional for every school and college, if we could recruit them, keeping young people mentally healthy and making sure that problems did not become so severe further down the line. It would also ease the burden on our massively oversubscribed local child and adolescent mental health services, and relieve the pressure on our brilliant but overworked teachers.

In our area, there is a problem with people moving out of NHS provision to work privately, particularly in the delivery of dental services. More than half of adults in Cumbria have not had access to an NHS dentist in the past two years, while one in three children locally

does not even have a place with an NHS dentist. Much as with ambulances, the impact of the lack of a workforce of sufficient size is felt particularly acutely in rural areas. Insufficient NHS dentistry provision has resulted in families having to make ludicrously long journeys to reach the nearest surgery with an available NHS place. Often, people are unable to make those long journeys, or to afford to make them.

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): The hon. Gentleman raises an important issue about dentistry. There are frightening figures about my constituency showing a lack of take-up of NHS dental treatment among children in particular. That is a real worry. I wonder whether it is reflected in the hon. Gentleman's constituency and whether he agrees that we need at least to tackle NHS provision for dental treatment for young people. It is important.

Tim Farron: Yes, the hon. Gentleman makes an extremely important point. I am certain it is felt across the country. If it is made too difficult to get to the nearest NHS dental surgery—if that is 60 or even 100 miles away, as has been the case on occasion for constituents of mine—people go without treatment, and so do their children.

Last November I managed to secure the agreement of the commissioners to increase the value of the contracts to NHS dentists in Kendal so they could see and treat more patients. "Brilliant," we thought, "that is really good news." When NHS England contacted our local NHS dentists they found that not one of them was able to take up their offer. I was told that the practices were already working to capacity within the staffing resources they had available, and were reporting difficulties in recruiting additional staff. Those staff exist, by the way. They are working in the private sector. The treadmill of a contract that is unfair to patients and dentists, and not fit for purpose, keeps them out of the NHS. As the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill) says, that hits young people particularly.

The reasons for those difficulties include a contract that pays a set amount for a particular type of treatment, regardless of the number of teeth that a dentist treats. A dentist will get paid, on average, £75 for an entire course of treatment including six fillings, three extractions and a root canal. That is not enough to cover overheads. That is a serious disincentive to people entering NHS dentistry. It hits all areas, but particularly deprived areas, and has a massive impact on the size of the workforce. According to the Department's website, the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care is responsible for

"oversight of NHS delivery and performance"

but if he is unable or unwilling to intervene to correct such absurd commissioning we have to ask what real power he has to perform the role. That is the kind of systemic problem that adds up to the workforce crisis we have all talked about and which proper accountability would go some way to solving.

The website states that the other part of the Secretary of State's role is

"oversight of social care policy".

Social care policy is key to NHS workforce planning and supply in England. We all recognise that social care provision is in crisis, and that the crisis gets worse the longer we do not address it. As it grows, so does the

[Tim Farron]

pressure on the NHS, which is left dealing with the serious health problems of those who did not receive the routine care they needed. The Government cannot go on delaying simply because of the personal embarrassment of having failed so far. To be fair, they are not the only ones responsible. Neither are they the only ones who can come up with a solution. We need to reach across divides and look for a cross-party solution.

I have written to the Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government and to the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), the shadow Secretary of State, to invite them to join me so that between us we can constructively use this deadlocked Parliament to reimagine and then redesign a social care system that could provide us with the care we might want for our parents, ourselves or, indeed, in the future, our children. I hope that we can work together to create a new deal for social care and a chance to turn this logjammed Parliament into one of the most productive in history.

The lack in the workforce has a profound impact in each of the areas I have talked about. Common themes and problems emerge: there is a lack of planning, as well as short-sightedness and a failure to invest in preventive care or to understand that providing healthcare is harder in rural areas, as are recruitment and retention. The Government must plan to overcome those specific challenges as part of their overall strategy. The Government, in not taking responsibility for the workforce crisis, are creating huge problems for generations to come. We need accountability, both for the current workforce crisis and to ensure that we invest in long-term solutions beyond the next Prime Minister, the next Government and even the next generation.

3.26 pm

Mike Hill (Hartlepool) (Lab): It is a pleasure to speak under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Eleanor Smith) for securing the debate. Like everyone who knows the NHS workforce, I want to pay tribute to all the people I served, including in acute services, when I was a Unison official in public sector health. Some of the stories we heard today from colleagues who used to work as nurses or as other healthcare staff took me back to those times. I have talked to many a worker, particularly in mental health, and often they are overstretched. The work is arduous and they cannot go off shift, for the safety of the patients. More importantly, at times the environment is dangerous for staff, and I know many people, particularly in acute mental health, who have been subjected to violence in the workplace purely as a consequence of understaffing and lack of resources, yet they bravely battle on to look after the patients in their care.

There is a word that one would never expect to be associated with NHS services in a commonplace way, yet it is frequently associated with the demise or semi-demise, or shutdown or partial shutdown, of NHS units. That word is “unsafe”. It has been used time and again, especially by acute trusts, to justify the stoppage of particular patient-facing functions, including accident and emergency departments. In 2016 it was reported that in 60 towns, including Hartlepool, A&E units had

closed, disappeared or been downgraded. A year later, in 2017, one in six was reported to be at risk, and a further 33 units, in 23 areas in the UK, were affected.

Even today, in the Tory heartlands of Richmond and Northallerton in North Yorkshire, the same is happening at the Friarage Hospital. It is not just A&E provision that is affected but the birthing unit at University Hospital of Hartlepool, and breast screening at nearby James Cook University Hospital in Middlesbrough. They have been mothballed or put into slow decline, with one common denominator: the services were deemed unsafe due to a lack of consultants.

The recruitment and retention of consultants is vital, of course, but so too is the recruitment and retention of nurses and other staff. I mentioned the birthing unit in Hartlepool because last year the maternity centre, at which there were once hundreds of births, reached an all-time low—just three babies were delivered at the unit, with a further five home births in the town. That so alarmed the local authority that maternity provision in the town came under specific scrutiny, with a view to promoting and boosting the use of the birthing unit and improving maternity services in the locality. In fact, the chair of the council’s audit and scrutiny committee—Conservative Councillor Brenda Loynes—is on record as saying that it was

“important to encourage more people to use the Hartlepool unit to keep the service in the town.”

Yet the will of the people, and the pride that comes from having the right to be born and registered in their own town, is continually being thwarted. Only this week a constituent told me that his partner, who was four days over her due date, had recently opted to have her baby at the University Hospital of North Tees in Stockton because there was not a consultant on hand at Hartlepool, even though they are part of the same NHS foundation trust. At her midwife appointment, his partner stated that it was a shame that there was not a consultant on hand in Hartlepool, as her preferred choice was to give birth there. The reply was, “Nobody can have their babies at the birthing centre, as they haven’t got the staff to cover it—not just consultants but midwifery staff.” To the people of my town, who thought that they had seen the back of cuts to hospital services, that will be a slap in the face.

There are 40,000 nursing vacancies in the NHS in England alone, according to the Royal College of Nursing and the other unions—GMB, Unite and Unison. We stand on the brink of a crisis in our NHS. As my brother Andrew has experienced several times, surgery and appointments are cancelled, and wards and units are closed, more often than not because of staff shortages.

Let me be clear: that is not the fault of the hard-working NHS staff, who cannot and do not drop everything at the end of their shift, in the face of short staffing and in the interests of patient safety. It is not the fault of the midwives in Hartlepool, who want to provide a service out of the local hospital. It is the fault of the Government, who have failed to get a grip of the issue and ensure that there are enough health and care staff with the right skills, in the right place, at the right time to care for patients. Their strategy for the NHS has to include taking responsibility for ensuring adequate workforce planning and funding. The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care must have a clear and explicit responsibility for the growth and development of the healthcare workforce

across England. Shame on the Government for not doing so and for running the NHS further into the ground.

3.33 pm

Mrs Sharon Hodgson (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mrs Moon. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Wolverhampton South West (Eleanor Smith) for securing this important debate, and for her excellent and knowledgeable speech. I also thank all other hon. Members who made excellent speeches. They are all very knowledgeable, and some have had long careers in the health service, which really adds to the quality of the debate.

I pay tribute to the approximately 1.4 million members of the dedicated and hard-working NHS workforce, who are responsible for making our health service one of the best in the world. This debate is absolutely not about criticising them or the NHS, as others have said; it is about criticising the Government, who have continued to undervalue the NHS workforce. NHS staff too often find themselves working under unacceptable levels of pressure following nearly a decade of mismanagement and underfunding. They are consistently asked to do more with less. That pressure has led to abhorrent working conditions. Staff shortages in the NHS have spiked consecutively over the past few years. Recent estimates suggest a shortfall of about 100,000 staff, including 40,000 nurses and 10,000 doctors. If the trend continues, it is estimated that the shortfall will more than double by 2030.

We know that staff shortfalls put patients at risk. They prevent treatment and lead to a poorer quality of care. A 2017 study concluded that lower staffing levels can lead to necessary care being missed, patients being more likely to die following common surgery, and lower patient satisfaction, yet hospitals frequently have gaps in rotas and lack medical cover, which prompts significant concern about safety. Does the Minister believe that is appropriate care for patients and their families? If those substantial staff shortages continue, we will face even longer waiting lists and a deteriorating quality of care, and money ring-fenced for NHS frontline staff and services will go unspent due to lack of staff.

The effect of staff shortages is already evident. We have already seen care homes shut, an increase in agency hires, and chemotherapy treatments postponed because of a lack of staff at hospitals across the country. The effect that staffing shortfalls have on patients must not be underestimated, but we must also remember the effect on the staff themselves. NHS staff are consistently asked to take on additional responsibilities, to work harder, to do more intense shifts and to take on an excessive number of patients. Working in an already high-pressure environment without adequate resources or support not only puts patients at risk but damages the mental health of staff, leading to lower morale, poor wellbeing and a poor working life.

Working life is becoming intolerable for some of our NHS staff. It is no wonder that 20,000 nurses have left the NHS since 2010, and that the NHS has seen a 55% increase in voluntary resignations, with staff citing a poor work-life balance as their primary reason for leaving. The number of voluntary resignations due to

health problems and stress has increased threefold in the past 10 years. The recent interim NHS people plan states that people are “overstretched” and admits that people no longer want to work in the NHS. What steps will the Minister take to ensure that NHS staff are retained once they are trained and experienced?

The standards of protection and safety that are rightly expected by staff and enshrined in the NHS constitution are being abandoned. On top of the cuts to staff wellbeing services that have consistently been made across England since the introduction of the Health and Social Care Act 2012, the number of understaffed shifts and overworked practitioners is forcing staff to take time off work and has led to increased requests for employed staff to take on extra shifts. That risks their health and can lead to increased locum use to cover staff rota gaps and vacancies. Staff shortages can have a significant impact on patient and professional safety.

It is welcome news that NHS Improvement will monitor trusts’ use of safe staffing guidelines. However, five years after the Francis report, the action taken on safe staffing simply is not good enough. The exodus of dedicated staff over the past 10 years, staff shortages, long waits for treatment, and frequent cancellations of operations demonstrate that the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence’s suspension of work on setting evidence-based staffing rules in 2015 was a mistake.

One way of ensuring the system has the number of staff it needs would be for England to follow the approach that is taken in Wales and is planned in Scotland, which is to legislate for safe staffing levels, yet the Government have continuously refused to bring forward legislation on safe staffing levels. Will the Minister reconsider that?

It remains unclear who is responsible for interventions in the workforce supply, as the Government certainly seem to be abdicating responsibility. The Government must consider seriously the legal proposals put forward by NHS England and NHS Improvement to amend the Health and Social Care Act to ensure that the workforce crisis is meaningfully and explicitly addressed. Can the Minister explain what impact workforce accountability requirements would have on the current legal framework? Surely the fact that Scotland and Wales have explicit accountability for the provision of the workforce across health and social care but England does not will lead to unequal progress and quality of care across the country and, inevitably, to a postcode lottery for patients.

We cannot tackle this problem if the pool of talented medical professionals in Britain continues to shrink. Safe staffing is not just a numerical issue; it is about having enough staff with the right skills, experience and knowledge. The UK trains only 27 nursing graduates per 100,000 of population, compared with the average of 50 across other OECD countries. The Government have continually undermined incentives to join the NHS workforce, which is demonstrated by their treatment of junior doctors, their introduction of salary caps, their cuts to bursaries and funding opportunities for students, and their hostile approach to those who travel from overseas to join the NHS. Does the Minister recognise that restrictive migration policies act only as a further barrier to tackling the NHS workforce crisis?

Does the Minister also recognise that the Health Education England budget has been cut by 17% in real terms since 2013-14? Applications to nursing training have fallen by 30%, particularly since the nursing bursary

[Mrs Sharon Hodgson]

was removed. The NHS long-term plan set out some ambitious targets, such as diagnosing 75% of cancers at an early stage by 2028, expanding emergency service care and increasing the availability of mental health services. However, without a long-term, fully funded staffing plan for the NHS, those targets are impossible to reach.

The Government's warm words and commitments to increase the number of NHS staff working and in training "as soon as possible" are appreciated. However, legislative action must be taken to ensure that patients and staff are not exposed to unsafe staffing levels, which can have dire consequences for patient outcomes and workforce retention. I look forward to the Minister's response.

3.42 pm

The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mrs Moon. I look forward to responding to the debate, which has been interesting, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West (Eleanor Smith) on securing it.

I listened carefully to my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas). He will be pleased to know that I will be happy to write to him about podiatry; there are some interesting issues about new plans that are being put in place. He will recognise that there are more applicants for university nurse training places this year than in the previous year.

I was pleased to hear the contributions from the hon. Members for Lincoln (Karen Lee) and for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron). I have responded to the hon. Gentleman about ambulances. He will know that there are eight posted in the Cumbria and Morecambe Bay areas, but I am looking with him at procurement there and will be looking to see where the North West Ambulance Service places those ambulances. He questioned whether promises are being fulfilled. I guide him to the implementation framework. He also talked about planning and investment. That is why there is a long-term plan and a people plan, and why moneys are going in to back them up. I also listened carefully to the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mike Hill).

I say to the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson), let us start by agreeing with each other. I think both of us, and everybody in the Chamber and across the House, would recognise and praise the work of everybody who works in the NHS—I have been pleased to do that on every occasion I have responded to a debate in Westminster Hall or on the Floor of the House. The hon. Lady rightly mentioned that the interim people plan recognises the pressures that are being put on staff. What she failed to say, of course, is that not only do we recognise that but there is a whole chapter on addressing those issues and making the NHS the best place to work. She talked a little about junior doctors and nurses in training, failing to recognise that we have just done a deal with the junior doctors that includes a four-year pay deal and resolution of the number of issues they had with the contract review. There are now more applicants for nurse training places than there were in the previous year.

Like many other Members, I attended the RCN member-led event yesterday and heard at first hand about the aims of the campaign from many nurses working in the NHS. I met again a number of the people I met at an event for nurses in training back in November. At the heart of the campaign, as everybody recognises, is the RCN's intention to ensure that the needs and requirements of the NHS workforce are prioritised. I fully support the RCN's focus on the importance of the NHS workforce—recruitment and retention—but I am not convinced that legislation is always the answer, and I am not convinced that changing legislation will necessarily bring about the changes and focus the RCN seeks.

However, given that the hon. Member for Wolverhampton South West secured the debate in recognition of the Secretary of State's legislative duties in relation to workforce, it is probably right that I set out exactly what the legal position is. Through the Care Act 2014, the Secretary of State delegated to Health Education England powers to support the delivery of excellent healthcare and health improvement for patients and the public in England by ensuring that the current and future NHS workforce has the right number of staff with the right skills, values and behaviours at the right time and in the right place to meet patients' needs.

The Care Act 2014 sets out in detail Health Education England's remit and range of responsibilities, including its duty to ensure an effective system of education and training for the NHS and public health. Beyond the detail of the legislation, HEE provides leadership for the education and training system, and ensures that the workforce have the right skills to be able to deliver excellent healthcare in the right numbers. HEE was established to deliver a better healthcare workforce for England and is already accountable for ensuring that there is a secure workforce supply for the future. It has responsibility for promoting high-quality education and training that is responsive to the changing needs of patients and local communities.

The full range of HEE's responsibilities, deliverables and accountabilities are described in its annual mandate, which the Secretary of State is required to approve. The most recent edition of that mandate and HEE's latest annual business plan summarise what it is doing and its achievements. I am pleased to say that, as those who have had the chance to read it will have noted, the mandate for 2019-20 was published last week.

The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West made a point about legislation for safe staffing, but there is already a commitment to safe staffing and to ensuring that the NHS aims to be the safest healthcare system in the world, as it should be. Part of that must come from transparency in staffing levels, which is why the care hours per day data were introduced in 2016. The Health and Social Care Act 2008 (Regulated Activities) Regulations 2014 require hospitals to have the right staff in the right place at the right time, and appropriate staffing levels are a core element of the Care Quality Commission's registration regime. As the hon. Lady will know, all providers of regulated activities must be registered with the Care Quality Commission and meet the registration requirements. The safe staffing requirement is therefore already there, and accountability mechanisms are in place.

Mrs Hodgson: The Minister says that accountability is already in place. Staffing levels may be required and desirable, but what happens when they cannot be met because the staff are not there? Where is the accountability?

Stephen Hammond: The hon. Lady will know that the CQC regime puts directives in place if staffing levels are not there. The local providers are then forced to address those issues. The accountability is there.

Beyond this issue, several hon. Members talked about exactly what we are doing now. There was recognition that the Government have put in place the long-term plan and the people plan. Any reading of those will see that our overarching plan for the health service looking forward recognises explicitly that getting the workforce supply right is key. That is therefore an important part of the long-term plan, which sets out the vital strategic framework to ensure that in the next 10 years the NHS will have the staff it needs. Nurses and doctors will have the time they need to care, work in a supportive culture and allow them to provide the expert, compassionate care to which they are committed.

Hon. Members rightly said that that will not be for this Government; it may well be for the Government beyond. However, the long-term plan rightly recognises by its very nature that what we need to put in place today must continue through the next 10 years to ensure that we have the staffing levels we need.

Karen Lee: A number of us mentioned the nursing bursary. The long-term plan talks about extra places for nurses, but if nurses are not being trained—the evidence shows that numbers have dropped by about 25% to 30%—clearly we cannot have them in place. I seek the Minister's comments on reinstating a nursing bursary so that mature students and other students can afford to train.

Stephen Hammond: I will come to the number of nurses in training and related issues in a moment, to address the hon. Lady's comments.

Associated with the long-term plan is the people plan, which clearly recognises, to reference what I said about Health Education England, the significant role of that organisation in securing the NHS workforce for the future. That is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care commissioned Baroness Harding, the chair of NHS Improvement, to work alongside and closely with Sir David Behan, the chair of HEE, to develop the workforce implementation plan. The interim people plan published in June set out the actions needed to change positively the culture and leadership of the NHS, making it the best place to work, which addresses the issues rightly raised about recruitment and retention.

The people plan commits to developing a new operating model for the workforce that ensures that activities happen at the optimal level, whether in individual organisations, local healthcare systems, regionally or nationally, with roles and responsibilities being clear.

On NHS workforce supply, hon. Members talked about demand for nursing and midwifery courses. The latest available evidence shows that we are starting to see a substantial rise. Data published only last week showed a 4.5% increase in applicants compared to 2018, with that being the second increase in as many years. To build on that, to ensure that we increase the pipeline of

nurses coming into the profession, the Department has worked with NHS England to ensure that funding is available for up to 5,000 additional clinical placements for nursing degrees in England. The chief nursing officer for England has led work to identify and accelerate the availability of such clinical placements. It is vital that universities ensure that they take up offers and provide placements to ensure that places are filled at the end of this year's recruitment cycle. That can happen.

Mrs Hodgson: I acknowledge the 4% increase—it is a small increase—but figures show that the numbers are still down 29% from 51,830 in 2016, when the bursary that covered training was removed. Even with that small increase, we are still 15,000 short of the figure when the bursary was axed.

Stephen Hammond: The figures show an increase in applicants this year. The hon. Lady will know that there are 1.4 applications for each place, and she will have heard me say that we are creating additional clinical placements to ensure that more nursing places are available. I recognise that there has been a drop, but I hope that she applauds the 4.5% increase in applicants this year. That is key.

A number of Members rightly talked about additional nursing roles and support. Health Education England is leading a national nursing associates programme with a commitment for 7,500 nursing associate apprentices to enter training this year. That builds on a programme that has already seen thousands start training in 2017 and 2018.

The RCN is leading work focused on the legislative framework for all professional groups. I should set out that work on the people plan also included examining options for growing the medical and allied health workforce, including the possibility of further medical school expansion, increasing part-time study, expanding the number of accelerated degree programmes and greater contestability in allocating the 7,500 medical training places each year to drive improvements in the curriculum.

For allied health professionals, the long-term plan sets out a commitment to completing a programme of actions to develop further the national strategy, focusing on implementation of the plan. There will be a workforce group to support that work and make recommendations, including on professions in short supply, which would address the podiatry point made by my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives. That is essential.

I do not think that anyone should be in any way complacent, and the Government are clearly not complacent. Many hon. Members will have heard me say that, as well as training the workforce for the future, it is important that we support and retain the current workforce. The interim people plan is committed to reviewing how to make increases in a number of factors. One such factor is national and local investment in professional development and workforce development.

There are examples of good practice in this area across the NHS, and I was particularly pleased when I visited Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust to see how a group of band 6 nurses had created their own in-house training programme, boosting management skills and leading to greater collaborative ways of working. That example of best practice makes the case for national investment in such programmes and for national funding for continuing professional development.

[Stephen Hammond]

Everyone recognises the need to recruit more staff, but it is also fair to put on the record the fact that the number of staff working in the NHS today is at an all-time high—it is the highest it has been in the NHS's 70-year history. Since 2010 there has been a significant growth in qualified staff. [Interruption.] I hear a sigh from Opposition Members, but it is worth making the point that there are now 51,900 more professionally qualified staff, including 17,000 more nurses working on wards. That is a simple fact; it is a piece of data, and we cannot get away from it. I do not suggest that one should be complacent in any way, but we should recognise that there are more nurses and doctors, and the Government are committed to delivering on our promise to ensure that the NHS has the right staff with the right skills in the right place at the right time to deliver the hugely valuable, excellent care that patients deserve.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the legal duties of the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care for NHS workforce planning and supply.

Aquaculture

[SIR DAVID AMESS *in the Chair*]

4 pm

Stephen Kerr (Stirling) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the contribution of aquaculture to the UK economy.

It is a great pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I am very grateful to have secured this debate on a subject that is so important in my constituency. Figures from 2017 show that the value of farmed Scottish salmon alone is higher than the value of all species landed in UK ports, principally due to the high value of Scottish farmed salmon, which was worth just over £1 billion to the UK economy in 2017. It is our single highest earning food-type export and ranks second only to whisky in UK exports in the food and drink sector. Aquaculture as a whole is worth £1.1 billion to the UK economy, and 96% of that is based in Scotland.

Let us look at the broader picture for Scottish salmon. It is an industry that employs 2,300 people, who have an average salary of £34,000, and it generates well over 10,000 additional supply chain jobs and £216 million in tax. When it comes to carbon emissions per tonne of edible protein, aquaculture produces up to 9.8 tonnes of carbon dioxide per tonne of edible protein, compared with 46.34 for chicken, 56.4 for pork, and 337.2 for beef. That is understood globally: the global tonnage of captured fish has plateaued at 90-93 million tonnes per year, but aquaculture continues to grow. In 2016, it produced some 170 tonnes.

The sector is fast becoming one of the key ways of producing protein for human consumption. It is a matter of global food security, tackling hunger and sustainability.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. Aquaculture is important not only to the UK economy but to my constituency. Does he agree that the importance of aquaculture in the UK economy will grow once we leave the UK and the common fisheries policy? It is imperative that we support that essential industry. I want the hon. Gentleman's constituency and Strangford to do well from it, to grow the UK economy, jobs and opportunities.

Stephen Kerr: I agree; there is a tremendous future ahead for aquaculture. My constituency has always been at the centre of aquaculture. The historic fishery at Howietoun was created by Sir James Maitland in 1873. Many of the methods used today in fish farming were developed there. It was part of the Institute of Aquaculture at the University of Stirling until recently, when it was taken over by Michelle Pearson, who is a model social entrepreneur. She has hugely impressive plans for the environmental and ecological enhancement of the site.

The Institute of Aquaculture at the University of Stirling has a growing global reputation as a centre of excellence, and the university has a long history in this field. Even as long ago as when I was a student there in the 1980s, Stirling had a formidable reputation in aquaculture and that continues to grow. It is truly global in its scope. The university is a pioneer of aquaculture as a solution to the challenges of feeding a growing global population. Its contribution should be celebrated.

It has done significant work on aquatic animal health, focusing on aquatic infectious diseases, studying how diseases spread and how to fight them with vaccines and other systems.

Let us not shy away from that issue. Significant environmental issues need to be addressed, including the destruction of natural ecosystems, the acidification of water environments and riparian ecosystems, the general pollution of water that could be used for human consumption, invasive non-native species and the spread of disease to wild populations. Those are real accusations that have been levelled at the sector, but they are surmountable.

Given the current value of this industry to the Scottish and UK economies, and the vast potential promise and future prosperity connected to the industry, we are rightly investing and must continue to invest in this sector. We must push on with the necessary research and development and give the champions at the University of Stirling the space and the resources they need to develop solutions to those challenges. That is why, as part of the Stirling city region deal, the UK Government are rightly and properly investing in the Institute of Aquaculture on the campus of the University of Stirling. The UK Government have already committed to invest £17 million through the deal, to support research by building brand new, state-of-the-art facilities in Stirling.

The University of Stirling campus is also home to the Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre, led by the excellent chief executive Heather Jones. It works to ensure that commercial opportunities from aquaculture research are fully realised. Its first five years of activity are expected to create additional sales of £284 million. It brings industry and academia together, from research and development to retail. It houses the ecosystem of a whole industry, by bringing the whole industry together in one place, acting as an engine, delivering real benefits in the sector, developing markets and partnerships, growing the number of jobs, growing sales, promoting best in class practices, driving up standards and securing the industry for the future.

I strongly urge the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy to co-invest in the Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre, to bring those benefits to the whole of the UK. The Institute of Aquaculture and the Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre are invaluable assets to Scotland and the United Kingdom. They have the potential to become a much bigger global player—a world centre of excellence, putting the UK at the forefront of this important and valuable agenda. I welcome the creation by BEIS of a new seafood innovation fund, announced in last November's Budget; it is a welcome recognition that new technologies and innovations can drive economic growth and productivity across the sector.

As I said, capture fisheries and aquaculture add disproportionate value to the Scottish economy, notably the latter: Scottish salmon is worth more than all wild fish landed into UK ports put together, and it represents 93% of UK aquaculture. Given those facts, I call on the Minister to commit to ensuring a proportionate distribution of innovation funding to aquaculture, giving it at least 50% of the total, and at least 50% going to Scotland.

Jim Shannon: I am aware, and I think the hon. Gentleman is aware, that farmed salmon infect some wild salmon—I have read proven cases in the papers in the last 10 days. Does he fear that the rise of farmed salmon could be detrimental to wild salmon?

Stephen Kerr: That is exactly why I request that the Government proportionately invest in Scottish aquaculture, particularly in research at the Institute of Aquaculture at the University of Stirling. There are solutions to the problem that the hon. Gentleman raises, but they require innovative, scientific research breakthroughs, which come about through the funding of world class research, such as that at the University of Stirling. We need to encourage business investment in research and development. The innovation centre that I referred to earlier is important because it brings together the entire sector.

The UK industrial strategy sets out the bold ambition to increase UK investment in research and development to 2.4% of GDP. That is a good objective. The Government have firmly put research and innovation at the heart of their industrial strategy, setting a grand vision for the UK to become the most innovative country in the world. We need to see better co-ordination of innovation in the sector; that is the focus of this debate.

As we have seen already, the Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre in Stirling has created a £36 million programme of research and development, with £22.8 million from commercial partners and £1.3 million from university finance. Many companies are investing in this valuable sector, but we need it to work better together.

Sir John Hayes (South Holland and The Deepings) (Con): My hon. Friend is speaking with his usual combination of insight and eloquence. He draws attention to a critical matter that I know will be close to the Minister's heart, and that is the marriage between research and development, skills and macroeconomic strategy. If we are really serious about productivity, we have to invest in the competence of the people who work in aquaculture, agriculture and horticulture, and the necessary innovations that he has described.

Stephen Kerr: I completely agree with my right hon. Friend; there is a connection between investment, the resulting gain that we make in national productivity and the benefit that will then accrue to the whole UK economy. Innovate UK, the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the Centre for Environment, Fisheries and Aquaculture Science, the Scottish Government and Marine Scotland all need to work together to create a shared strategy of supporting investment in research and development in this area.

At the very least, we need that shared strategy to be agreed in a spirit of co-operation. The industrial strategy calls for innovation across the board to boost our national productivity, as my right hon. Friend suggested, but it also calls for a new technological revolution in agriculture and food production. UK aquaculture is an innovative sector; there is a big opportunity to utilise big data, sensors, imaging or robotics. It is at the forefront of the productivity challenge, but it needs more investment and interest from the UK Government.

I ask the Minister whether DEFRA will consider investing UK funds to help to support the growth of a vital UK industry such as farmed Atlantic salmon?

[Stephen Kerr]

This is far too important a sector to be devolved and forgotten about. We need an explicit acknowledgment that UK aquaculture is a high-tech, high growth, low carbon food source and direct future funding through the industrial strategy challenge fund to support further innovation in the sector. That would also give us an opportunity to address some of the other issues I have spoken about in terms of environmental sustainability, which can and will be solved through the power of science and innovation.

There is no doubt in my mind about the importance of this sector and I hope there is no doubt—I am sure there is not—in the mind of the Minister.

Deidre Brock (Edinburgh North and Leith) (SNP): The hon. Gentleman speaks a lot about the importance of productivity and R&D and about investment. He will be aware that in the event of a no-deal Brexit Scotland's salmon industry may need four times as many export health certificates as now, which has the potential to cost the industry £15 million. Can he tell us how he thinks that should be addressed?

Stephen Kerr: That is a very good intervention; the hon. Lady is absolutely right. Government and business need to be fully prepared for any eventual outcome in relation to Brexit.

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr Robert Goodwill): We are right on top of that. We understand what would need to be done in the event of a no-deal Brexit in terms of the export health certificates. We are well on top of that and understand exactly what other work would need to be done.

Stephen Kerr: One of the encouraging things about interacting with Ministers from DEFRA is the state of readiness in that Department, which is led by an excellent Secretary of State and ministerial team, in relation to the potentiality of any Brexit outcome.

Deidre Brock: I am delighted to hear that from the Minister and to receive those reassurances. I do not know how much influence the Minister has in terms of local authorities. I know about one department that examines export health certificates in a local authority in Scotland that has been cut considerably. I do not see how it is possible for the Minister to give us complete assurances about export health certificates.

Stephen Kerr: It is illuminating and apposite that the hon. Lady draws the attention of the Chamber to the cuts that the SNP Scottish Government have inflicted on Scottish local authorities. In fact, the UK Government gave a parcel of money that was intended to be passed to local authorities to help them be ready for any eventual outcome in relation to Brexit. The Scottish Government thought better than to pass that money on to Scotland's local authorities and decided they had other spending priorities.

That is not surprising given the fact that this is a Scottish Government that borrows to the hilt on the nation's credit card on the one hand, then has dramatic underspends from year to year on the other. They are

frankly incompetent when it comes to managing Scotland's economy and Scotland's public finances. I am afraid that they are incompetent in just about every field we look at in Scotland; the sooner we can shine a bright light on the performance of the Scottish Government in this matter, and every other matter, the better, because then we can talk about real substance in terms of political issues that impact on the quality of the lives of constituents.

To conclude, I have specific asks for the Minister. Given the fact that Scottish farmed salmon alone is worth over £1 billion to the UK economy, we have got to give aquaculture its proper place. I look forward to the Minister's reply on the issues I have raised. I would like to hear how the Government will ensure Scotland and the aquaculture sector benefit from the seafood innovation fund; that is key. The UK Government is working with the Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre in Stirling, but what more can be done to support that valuable work and promote a UK-wide approach, harnessing our global reputation in this sector? What more can be done to ensure closer working across and between Governments to develop a shared vision and strategy for innovation in the aquaculture sector? Putting aquaculture at the heart of our food security policy and acknowledging what a tremendous innovative and high-tech sector it is, how much more would be possible with the right level of investment and partnering?

In short, the whole point of my speech is to ask the Minister to support the idea of creating a UK-wide sector deal for aquaculture. Can we have one?

4.18 pm

The Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (Mr Robert Goodwill): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling (Stephen Kerr) for securing this debate on such an important subject. I am excited to have so many Conservative colleagues from north of the border shining a bright light on the failures of the SNP Government there.

Aquaculture is a critical part of the UK's food industry. As we have heard, the value of the UK's aquaculture produce is over £1 billion and the industry employs over 3,000 people. Before I respond in full to the debate, I note that policy on the aquaculture sector is, and will remain, devolved to the four UK fisheries administrations. I use the word sector with a proviso: just as with fishing, I take the view that when we talk about the sector, we actually mean sectors. Aquaculture is rich and diverse, comprising a range of activities. In the UK as a whole, this ranges from farmed salmon—Scotland's largest non-liquid export—through rainbow and brown trout to the cultivation of marine shellfish such as oysters and mussels, and more exotic species such as king prawns, with which I know there are exciting developments in my hon. Friend's constituency. Stirling is clearly already at the cutting edge of technology in this area.

I am acutely aware of the key contribution that aquaculture specifically makes to the Scottish economy; it had a sales value of £765 million in 2016 and employs more than 2,000 people. Of course, it is not just those people directly employed in aquaculture who depend on it. The wider impacts across the supply chain are estimated to be around £620 million in gross value

added and 12,000 jobs. The value of aquaculture produce also extends beyond Scotland. According to Seafish figures, its value in the rest of the UK is likely to be around £100 million in revenue and 1,700 jobs.

Aquaculture is a sector with a bright future. Global production, as we have heard, has been growing by nearly 7% per year and it is making an increasingly important contribution to global food security. Overall UK production has risen more rapidly. The biggest percentage growth is in Northern Ireland, as I am sure the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) will be pleased to know, but the largest growth by volume is in Scotland. We recognise that the Scotland is currently leading the way in UK aquaculture, and I hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Stirling says about sharing out the budget proportionally. He makes a good case. England has set out its the aquaculture growth opportunities in “Seafood 2040”. I encourage the Seafood 2040 Aquaculture Leadership Group to engage with Scottish counterparts to seek opportunities for learning and working together.

Sir John Hayes: On food security in particular, my right hon. Friend will know that the best guarantee of food security is to shorten the distance between production and consumption. A significant contributor to that is public sector procurement. Will he give a commitment in this Chamber, as a result of this excellent debate secured by our hon. Friend the Member for Stirling, to look again at how we can maximise consumption of British produce in aquaculture, agriculture and horticulture through changes to public sector procurement?

Mr Goodwill: Certainly, leaving the European Union gives us more flexibility on procurement, but I would like British suppliers and British public services—prisons, schools and so on—to buy British food not because they have to, even though it is more expensive, but because it is the best quality and the most cost-effective source. The way to get more British food on to British plates is to ensure that it is the best and that it is delivered at a cost-effective price.

Henry Dimbleby is leading the first major review of the UK food system in nearly 75 years. He will investigate across the entire food chain, carrying out an integrated analysis of our food system, resulting in a new national food strategy to be published in 2020. Only a couple of weeks ago, Henry attended an aquaculture workshop for the public sector, academia and officials hosted by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I strongly encourage more engagement from the sector and devolved Administrations in this important undertaking.

It is only right to acknowledge the environmental and sustainability challenges that the aquaculture sector faces. They have been brought to the fore by two recent parliamentary inquiries in Scotland, which culminated in a debate in the Scottish Parliament that demonstrated broad cross-Chamber support for the sector, but emphasised that progress must be made on known issues such as sea lice.

At the end of March 2019, 111 aquaculture projects had been approved for funding under the European maritime and fisheries fund, with a value of approximately £14.5 million.

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): There are huge economic opportunities in aquaculture—indeed, Scottish salmon is one of our biggest food exports—but, as my right hon. Friend says, there are some environmental consequences. One of those is the plight of the wrasse, a species of fish found in Cornish waters. Is he aware that Scottish vessels go to Cornwall, kidnap live wrasse from Cornish waters and take them to the North sea to eat sea lice on their farms, which has a big impact on wrasse? Will he ask his officials to look at the impact on and the plight of the Cornish wrasse?

Mr Goodwill: I pay tribute to the work that my hon. Friend did, as my predecessor, in getting to grips with these issues. He is a hard act to follow. I was aware of the wrasse being kidnapped and taken to harvest the lice, and of the impact that has on the ecology in the south-west of England.

Deidre Brock: I am a little surprised to hear the Minister talking about the industry leadership group here, because there is one set up in Scotland, the Aquaculture Industry Leadership Group, which seeks to double the economic contribution of the sector and double the number of jobs to 18,000 by 2030, as opposed to 2040, which I think is the ambition of the group down here in England.

Mr Goodwill: I give the Scottish Government credit for its achievement where credit is due. I hope the groups will work across the four Administrations to ensure that we do not duplicate effort, but work together. At this point, I must pay tribute to the huge investment in the Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre through the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal, which is a clear demonstration of the Government’s commitment to aquaculture.

Stephen Kerr: Does the exchange we have just witnessed not underpin the importance of having a UK-wide approach? Is not the answer a UK sector deal for aquaculture?

Mr Goodwill: We need to be careful that we do not intrude on the devolution agreements, but where we can work together, we should. The best way to work together would be to have Ruth Davidson in Holyrood; I think she would be much easier to work with than some people currently inhabiting that place.

Luke Graham (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Con): My right hon. Friend makes the point about working together, which is very important, and mentions the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal, where the UK Government are also investing in the International Environment Centre. The centre will work with the University of Stirling on these kinds of UK-wide impacts and will not only help Scotland and the whole of the United Kingdom, but lead the world.

Mr Goodwill: It is clear that the UK is at the cutting edge globally of progress in this area, and I am pleased to recognise that.

I reassure those in the industry that EMFF funding will continue to be available until 2021. In December, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State announced an additional £37.2 million for fisheries and aquaculture

[Mr Goodwill]

over the next two years. He also made a commitment that the Government will put in place domestic long-term arrangements to support the industry from 2021, through the creation of four new schemes comparable to the EMFF to deliver funding for each part of the UK. In addition to the EMFF funding, the UK Government's seafood innovation fund is a three-year, £10 million research and development fund, which I can confirm applies to the whole of the UK. The fund will focus on investing in innovative research and development, helping to improve both the environmental sustainability and the productivity of the fishing and aquaculture industries, and will be launched imminently.

The Scottish Aquaculture Innovation Centre at Stirling University, which connects industry with academia, facilitates knowledge exchanges and funds projects, plays a key role in addressing the sustainability challenges through innovative solutions. Further investment of £17 million through the Stirling and Clackmannanshire city region deal to develop the new National Aquaculture Technology and Innovation Hub is welcomed.

Important points have been raised in today's debate, which I hope I have covered. I am optimistic about the future of aquaculture. I want to see a sustainable, profitable fishing and aquaculture industry, to have the greatest possible tariff-free and barrier-free trade with our European neighbours, and to negotiate our own trade arrangements around the world. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State met representatives of the Scottish aquaculture and salmon industry just last week to discuss this issue. We look forward to continuing our engagement with the sector to achieve our common goal: that exports of top quality UK aquaculture products should be able to continue in all scenarios.

Delivering a negotiated deal with the EU remains the Government's top priority, but like any responsible Government we are planning for all scenarios, which must include leaving without a deal. We acknowledge industry concerns about the impacts of a no-deal EU exit, particularly on the continued ability to rapidly transport a premium product to the EU. We and the devolved Administrations have published guidance on the revised export requirements and will ramp up engagement with businesses to ensure that they are clear on those requirements.

Hon. Members have raised many important topics today, and I am grateful to have had the opportunity to close this debate. I have heard voiced today the passion for further developing this dynamic and innovative industry. We have heard about the valuable contribution that aquaculture is making to the UK economy, boosted by Government investment in research and innovation in Stirlingshire. We have heard about the innovative recirculation aquaculture system farm that has recently opened in the region. I will be interested to see what role that technology plays in the expansion of the UK aquaculture industry, and look forward to having an opportunity in future to visit the facility to see the research that is going on and how we can not only reduce food miles in domestic production, but have low-carbon protein delivered to our plates. We have acknowledged the sustainability and export challenges that the industry faces and how the Government are working to support it through those challenges. Overall, it is an exciting time for UK aquaculture and I look forward to seeing the industry continuing to grow and thrive.

Question put and agreed to.

Small and Village School Funding

4.30 pm

Sir David Amess (in the Chair): Just before we start the next debate, there are a lot of colleagues here, and it would be very helpful if, through a note, those who have not already written expressing a wish to speak could let me or the Clerk know, so that I can make sure that no colleagues are disappointed.

Neil O'Brien (Harborough) (Con): I beg to move,

That this House has considered funding for small schools and village schools.

It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. This debate is about two things that overlap but are not the same: small schools and village schools. My focus will be firmly on primary schools. About a fifth of schools are in villages, and on average they have just over 100 pupils, compared with an average of about 400 for schools in large cities. These village schools are good schools; only about 8% are not “good” or “outstanding”, compared with 11% nationally and about 15% in towns and small cities. They are also much-loved institutions, at the heart of their community, and they are where the community gathers for special occasions. Just the other day I was at the Church Langton Primary School fête watching the children do some intense Japanese drumming. I could equally have been at the Foxton family fun day or any number of other wonderful occasions in my constituency.

Village schools are also where people meet each other and the community organises. For example, the campaign for a road crossing in Lubenham in my constituency is being spearheaded by the children of Lubenham Primary School, and I am being bombarded by their very neatly handwritten letters. It is no wonder that people feel that a village loses its heart if it loses its school.

Sarah Newton (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. Like his constituency, Cornwall has many village schools. They make sure that our villages survive, because by having the school there, a younger generation of people come into the village, renewing its life. Without those schools, there is a real risk that those villages could become dormitory towns for second homes or for people who have retired.

Neil O'Brien: My hon. Friend is completely correct. However, rural schools, partly because they are small schools, have been much more likely to close in recent years. I thank the Department for Education for the historical data it provided to me on this, and Pippa Allen-Kinross at *Schools Week* for helping me to analyse it. Since 2010, 61% of schools that have closed and not reopened in another form have been rural schools, meaning that rural schools have been twice as likely to shut as urban ones. Since 2000, 150 rural primaries have closed.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the hon. Gentleman for bringing the debate. What he outlines in his constituency and other parts of the United Kingdom mainland is replicated in Northern Ireland. I know that the Minister does not have responsibility for this, but for the record, is the hon. Gentleman aware that since

September 2010, 98 of the 230 schools that closed in Northern Ireland—42%—were rural, according to *Schools Week* analysis? Does he recognise the difficulties that creates for rural dwellers and socially isolated children?

Neil O'Brien: The hon. Gentleman is completely correct. This challenge affects all of the United Kingdom. For rural schools that closed, the average walk to the next nearest school is 52 minutes, which in practice means driving or getting a bus. There is a cost to the taxpayer for this transport, and a cost to parents and children for driving a long way, so there are all kinds of reasons why we should want to preserve our village schools.

I will turn to small schools more generally, including those in urban areas. I am grateful to the House of Commons Library for digitising older data for me that revealed a dramatic transformation in the scale of our schools over recent decades, and a decline in the number of small schools. The number of pupils at state primary schools in England is roughly the same as in 1980, but the schools that they attend are completely different. In 1980 there were 11,464 small primary schools with fewer than 200 pupils, but in 2018 there were just 5,406. The number of such schools has halved over the decades.

In contrast, in 1980 there were 949 large primary schools with more than 400 pupils, but in 2018 there were more than 4,000, so the number of large schools has quadrupled. The number of really big primaries with more than 600 pupils increased from 49 to 780, while there are now more than 100 what I call “super jumbo” primary schools with more than 800 pupils, which often have playtimes in shifts and hundreds of staff. This is a huge change in the nature of our primary schools, and it is visible in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland too. In fact, since 2002 Wales has seen the most dramatic decline in the number of small schools, followed by the north-west and Yorkshire.

This huge change in our primary schools has come about without any real discussion or political choice. It seems to me a move away from the natural small scale for small children, and there is no obvious policy rationale for it. Small schools are not bad schools. Schools with 200 pupils or fewer are just as likely to be “good” or “outstanding” as other schools. In fact, schools with fewer than 100 pupils, which account for about one in eight schools, are more likely than average to be “good” or “outstanding”, so this is not about academic standards.

I think two different things are driving it. The first is planning, which is outside the DFE's remit. We do not build new small schools, and we do not make developers pay enough for the infrastructure needed for new housing. Instead, our bitty, piecemeal development allows developers to get out of paying for new schools, and we cram more pupils into existing schools, building classrooms on playing fields. Secondly, wider catchment areas mean more car journeys to those schools, and because builders often put schools in residential areas, there are a lot of cars driving into streets that were never intended for them, leading to a lot of congestion. People tell me that makes their village no longer feel so much like a village.

However, the DFE could do some things about the declining number of small schools. We should increase the lump sum element of the national funding formula. Do not get me wrong: the national funding formula is extremely good and has meant that the funding rate per

[*Neil O'Brien*]

pupil in my constituency has gone up twice as fast as the national average. It helps underfunded areas such as mine to catch up with the national average, although there is still a long way to go. It would be very helpful to increase the lump sum—the part of the national funding formula intended to help small schools.

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): Is another problem with the national funding formula that the system of gains, caps and floors—in place for transitional reasons, which we all understand—compounds historical unfairness? While 3% of a very small budget is still quite limited, 1% of a very large budget is still quite a lot for those schools to enjoy.

Neil O'Brien: I think my hon. Friend is correct, and I think we both want to see a faster transition to a fairer overall settlement. However, I want to focus on the point about the lump sum.

Leicestershire County Council was historically a strong supporter of small schools and had a lump sum of £150,000 per primary school. In the national funding formula, that is only £110,000. When consulting on the national funding formula, the DFE acknowledged that that number was lower than the average for most local authorities. As local authorities converge on the national funding formula, as they should, the pressure on small schools may intensify. The proportion of the core schools budget going through the lump sum declined in the last year, and the gap between income and expenditure is much smaller for small schools, indicating a financial pressure. In fact, larger schools have about twice as much headroom per pupil. Small schools are definitely feeling the pinch.

I hope and expect that, under the next Prime Minister, we will see a big increase in school funding. A good way of delivering that would be to increase the lump sum within the national funding formula. About a fifth of primary schools get more than 20% of their income from the lump sum, and for them an increase could make the difference between staying afloat and closing. There has been some discussion about increasing sparsity funding as an alternative, but I am a bit sceptical. Fewer than 6% of primaries get sparsity funding, and only 1% get the full amount; a number of small schools in my constituency that are under pressure would not be eligible. That is one reason why only a third of local authorities have included a sparsity element in their local formulas. Increasing the lump sum, if I could beg the Minister to do that, would be simpler and better. For a little more than £800 million, we could take the lump sum back up to £150,000 and get my village schools back to where they were.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. I support his last point. One of my local authorities, North Lincolnshire Council, made a policy decision not to close any small schools, so the schools in my constituency with 45 or 50 children will remain open. However, the key issue that my local authority has asked me to raise with the Minister is the core funding costs. Admin costs, in particular, for a small school of 46 or 50 children are not dissimilar to those for a school of 100 to 150 children, because the same admin function is still needed. I

therefore think that the point my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) is making is really important, and I want to offer him my full support and say that it is exactly the same point that my local authority is concerned about.

Neil O'Brien: I thank my hon. Friend. He is right and has brilliantly teed up something that I intended to say: the future for small schools and rural schools can be very bright. There are two reasons for that. One is that more and more people want to live in villages, and technology allows people to do that and work from home, rather than having to live in a major city. The other reason is the growth of multi-academy trusts—rather an ugly phrase for families of schools. The growth of those families of schools is enabling small schools in effect to combine the advantages of being a small school—the human scale and the connection to the community—with the advantages of being part of something bigger, which are being able to share resources, people and back-office functions and to learn from one another. Therefore, if we get behind them, village schools can have a really bright future.

I was in one such school just the other day in South Kilworth in my constituency. In many ways, it was a very traditional scene. I was watching the new school hall being built, thanks to school condition improvement funding, and the children were practising their maypole dancing. The fields were ripening around us and the sun was shining. It was a beautiful scene. We could have been time travelling, but that school is a modern school. It is part of a family of schools, which are helping one another to improve. It is a really good school and exactly the sort of thing that we want to keep in our communities. There are these very exciting opportunities opening up for small schools, but we need the Minister's help to relieve the financial pressure on them if we are to fully achieve the potential of small and village schools.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Sir David Amess (in the Chair): Order. The winding-up speeches will start at 5.15 pm, so there is about five or six minutes per person.

4.41 pm

Tim Farron (Westmorland and Lonsdale) (LD): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) on securing this important debate. My constituency has two secondary schools with fewer than 200 pupils, 10 primary schools with fewer than 50 and, by my reckoning, three primary schools with fewer than 30 pupils. They are all really good schools. They are small because the area that they serve is sparsely populated and we live huge distances away from one another. However, small schools are enormously vulnerable.

If a school with a decent-sized population to serve has a bad Ofsted report or a difficult period of leadership, or if there is a dip in the birth rate, that does not kill it, but if a small village school that is absolutely vital experiences any one of those things, that could be the end of it, and the damage to the community is immense. Just two summers ago, we lost Heversham Primary School, which had once had 60 kids. It had a period of difficulty, went down to 11 or 12 kids and was closed. The ongoing damage to that village and its community is huge. Small schools are vulnerable, yet utterly vital.

In my time in Parliament, and in my time as a parent, a local school governor and what have you, and as somebody who worked in education, in teacher education, for many years, I have never known schools' budgets to be as tight as they are today, particularly for small schools, because they do not have the wherewithal to get through difficult periods. I think that what happens is that because headteachers keep quiet, the Government take advantage. Headteachers keep quiet for two reasons. First, teachers do not like to get overly political by talking about the level or lack of funding that their school has to cope with.

Also, headteachers do not want to risk any competitive advantage that they have. If I, as a headteacher, say that I have had to sack three teaching assistants this year, pupils or parents looking at my school will think, "Well, I'll go somewhere else instead." I think that all of us, but particularly the Government, take advantage of headteachers' perfectly understandable reticence about talking about the state of play at the schools they serve so admirably.

I therefore want to pick out what was said by the 16 schools in the Kendal area that wrote a collective letter to all of us. They said that Westmorland and Lonsdale had seen school funding cuts of £2.4 million, which was equal to a cut of £190 per pupil per year, and that that had led them collectively to reduce the numbers of teaching and non-teaching staff and support for the most vulnerable pupils; to make reductions in small group work for children who need additional support, reductions in teaching resources and equipment, reductions in subject choices in secondary schools and reductions in the range of activities at primary schools; and to cut back on repairs to school buildings and so on.

One head of a small school told me that his school income had gone down by £204,000 since 2014. Staffing costs had gone up by £232,000 in the same period. He had got rid of teaching assistants and reduced administrative support time and had had to increase charges for school meals, the breakfast club, music tuition and so on. There were reductions in catering hours and in midday hours. Anecdotally, another head brings her husband in at the weekend, outside his own job, to do all the maintenance and janitor work for the school, because it cannot afford anybody to do that full time.

Underpinning all the problems is the ongoing issue of special educational needs funding, which hits schools of all sizes, but particularly the smaller schools, because proportionally it is a bigger blow. The Government make schools provide and pay for the first 11 hours of special educational needs support. That means that they hit and they hurt and they punish those schools that do the right thing and they reward those schools that do not take children with special educational needs. That is wrong and it needs to be changed.

The quality of experience of a young person at a small school is so obviously so wonderful and so treasured and something that parents will travel out of area to take advantage of. The quality of teaching and leadership and the diversity of skills that are needed to teach in and to run a small school are that much greater, but the failure to fund schools properly across the board hits smaller schools the worst, even though smaller schools, especially in Westmorland and Lonsdale, are the best.

4.46 pm

Gillian Keegan (Chichester) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) on securing this important debate. Access to a high-quality, fulfilling education should not be based on geography. Children do not choose where they live and grow up, so it should never be a barrier to their fulfilling all their ambitions.

The Government have taken important steps to level the playing field through the national funding formula. I recognise that. It moves us towards rebalancing some of the disparities in the old system. We are moving away from more than 100 different funding models across the country, which meant that there was little fairness and no transparency whatsoever. The national funding formula allocates an increase in funding for every pupil in 2018-19; and for the historically underfunded schools, such as those in West Sussex, increases could not have come sooner.

The changes to the funding model will ensure that funding is provided in a more balanced way across the country, not least because for the first time the money that schools receive is comparable across counties and local authorities. However, a key challenge for rural schools, both in West Sussex and across the country, is pupil numbers. This is a more precarious funding model for rural small schools, as there can be significant annual variation in the number of children coming into each year. Some schools have become very worried when just one family are moving out of the area, as they rely on every single child for income.

Sarah Newton: In areas where there are armed forces personnel, such as my constituency, it can be a real problem if, when they are deployed overseas or sent to different parts of the country, the family moves from a small school. It seems very unfair, when people are serving their country and doing the right thing, that the primary schools are adversely affected in that way.

Gillian Keegan: That is a very good point. I had not thought of it, but of course in that kind of area there will be a massive impact as children move from place to place.

I am aware that, for the most isolated schools, the new funding formula has a sparsity factor that aims to provide some funding certainty for rural schools, but as my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough said, very few schools actually qualify for that. It does not cover the financial needs of these schools.

The fixed sum for primary schools in West Sussex has dropped from £150,000 to £110,000, so each rural primary school needs to find more than 12 new pupils to keep the same level of funding as they had. That is incredibly difficult, because it is not possible to get 12 new pupils from these areas. The challenge is on top of the fact that the Chichester district is the fifth lowest funded local authority for primary and the sixth lowest funded for secondary. In the Chichester district, many of our schools fall within the South Downs national park, where new homes are not being built; they are few and far between. That only exacerbates the pressures on our precious rural schools. At Harting Church of England Primary School, the headteacher now predicts the future intake based on families living in the village and surrounding areas, and it will continue to decrease. That is a problem.

[Gillian Keegan]

I understand that many rural small schools are now taking on a greater quantity of children with special educational needs and complex behavioural issues who have often been excluded from other schools. They do that to bolster numbers, because each child brings with them a pocket of funding. Although that funding allows schools to keep their doors open, it does not cover the subsequent additional support that these schools need from teaching assistants.

I recognise that funding for special educational needs has risen from £5 billion in 2013 to £6.3 billion this year. However, schools still face challenges in addressing the rising levels of special educational need, not least in West Sussex, where 13.5% of all pupils require SEN support, which is well above the national average of 11.6%.

Having looked at the school budgets, to me the challenge is clear. Most schools spend more than 80% of their budget on teachers and staff. That is a real challenge, because little is left for essentials, pencils, books and digital equipment. My local schools are using other funding streams to survive. Loxwood Primary School has a weekly cake raffle to raise money for iPads and a wish-list website where local businesses, friends of the school and parents donate items. I checked that website the other day and I saw everything from a paper guillotine to paint brushes and books. The school has just crowdfunded 15 laptops thanks to the generosity of a local charity, the parent teacher association and the parish council. That work is inspiring, but it should not be necessary. Schools such as Loxwood are the beating heart of their communities. The teachers should spend their time educating the next generation, not fundraising.

My constituency is packed with fantastic schools and dedicated teachers and parents who go above and beyond for their schools and students. They maintain exceptional standards despite facing pressure. In advance of the upcoming spending review, I encourage the Department for Education to continue to engage closely with the schools and local authorities, to develop a deeper understanding of the pressure these schools face, and to consider the level of income required to maintain such excellent standards.

These schools are the beating heart of communities up and down the country. They offer the best education to young children and they are the centre of all kinds of community activities. They ensure that our precious village life is maintained.

4.51 pm

Huw Merriman (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) on securing this important debate on small and rural schools. I thank the Minister for everything he has done and will continue to do. He has listened to many MPs on this side of the Chamber lobbying for more to be done for our schools, but we also recognise that almost 2 million more pupils are in "good" or "outstanding" schools under this Government and during his many years as Schools Minister. I want to put on record my appreciation of him.

I have frequently spoken of my schools' need for more funding. I have a 200-square-mile constituency—which you have visited, Sir David—75% of which is an

area of outstanding natural beauty, so we have many small village schools. I am concerned not only about funding for all of those schools, but particularly about Broad Oak Primary School, which is under threat of closure. That is a new experience for me in my four years as MP for Bexhill and Battle. The villagers, pupils, parents, governors and staff are hugely concerned about what will happen. It is a classic case of there not being enough pupils. As was mentioned, the reduction in the block grant makes it harder for smaller schools to continue. Broad Oak Primary School has a capacity of 140, but approximately 80 pupils. That is a problem for my area: we have many schools but not enough pupils.

However, those small schools play a vital role in the community. Broad Oak is a good example. Because it is a small and nurturing school, more pupils with special educational needs can find the right environment for their needs there, but that adds to the cost. While schools receive £6,000 per student with SEN, they often spend an extra £6,000 from their own budget, to provide the proper required education. That compounds the challenge for Broad Oak.

I would appreciate some guidance from the Minister. What can I do to mount a case? I understand that where there are not enough pupils and a school is no longer viable, difficult decisions must be made to support the other schools. At the same time, however, small is good and small needs nurturing.

Paul Girvan (South Antrim) (DUP): It is vitally important to note the contribution that small schools make to rural communities. They can be the heart of a village, holding it together. If the school closes, the village effectively dies. People do not want to move there, because there is no school. They are vital to keeping communities alive. We might save money in the short term, but in the long term it will cost more.

Huw Merriman: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. A village school is the heart of that community. As villages have lost other services, the school is often the only bedrock in a village; without it, we lose the heart and soul of the community. That is why I am concerned about the village of Broad Oak.

Part of the rationale in the consultation by East Sussex County Council is that a number of pupils travel from outside to attend the school. I am a Conservative; I believe in choice. We have championed the ability of pupils and parents to choose the school that is best for them, so that should not be used as an argument for closing the school.

If we require pupils to travel further—pupils from some villages will have to travel to other schools—we have to increase the school's budget for transport. One cost often knocks out another. Further, if pupils rely on the bus service, they miss out on the rich, after-school learning and sporting activities, and the social part of school. Private schools are able to deliver that, but in rural areas we are hampered by the bus service: students have to leave at a certain time otherwise they will not get home. That is a big concern.

I look to the Minister for assistance, to help me make the case that small schools are good schools, so that the villagers in Broad Oak will continue to be able to educate their children in their local school, with pride in their community.

4.56 pm

Derek Thomas (St Ives) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak, Sir David, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) on securing the debate.

I have 56 schools in my constituency, and 40 of them certainly have fewer than 100 pupils—unfortunately, some as low as 30, or perhaps just over. That is a real challenge. The problem, as has been said by my hon. Friend the Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) and others, is that taking that school away means that the community suddenly ceases to function, and that is exactly what has happened in my constituency.

About 18 months ago, the St Martin-in-Meneage Primary School was closed. That was not as a result of what we might call natural wastage—pupils were not leaving the school in year 6, but were taken out by parents because of problems in the school. Everyone concerned was slow to react and it therefore became unsustainable. We lost a perfectly good school and an excellent facility for the local community. As soon as that happened, families moved out and people considering moving in changed their minds.

Other schools in the area are now full, and we have an empty school building that still has to be maintained for that purpose. However, it is much more difficult to reopen a school than to save it. I did all I could, as did the commissioners, but unfortunately we could not win the argument.

I agree with many things that have been said, and I do not want to repeat all of them, but I will make some quick points. The first is on capital funding for small schools. I go to a school every Friday whenever possible. The main issue that I see, and which I hear about from staff and children, is the quality of the estate, and that needs concentrated work.

The Minister's commitment to the subject has already been mentioned, and he has been fantastic. He has been to my constituency considerably more times than any other Minister—to be fair, I except my immediate constituency neighbours, as they live right next door. Early on he visited St Erth Community Primary School, which is in need of a hall, as he might remember. The school has grown, and done everything it can to try to make its existing building work, but it does not have a place in which the school can meet. That reduces the opportunity for assemblies and all the other things we had in our school halls when we were small. Other schools in my constituency are in the same situation, and we cannot find a solution that will allow them to build a school hall. I am keen to hear from the Minister about any capital that might be available for making schools fit for purpose with a clean, dry and warm environment, good toilets and facilities such as a school hall.

It has already been mentioned that although a small school, with 30 pupils or slightly more, may not be able to afford the teaching assistants that it requires, it will tend to attract more children with special educational needs because of its size, the real commitment of its teachers, and their wonderful work. That puts enormous pressure on the schools; I do not like to say it, but they are victims of their own success. They do a great job—I visit them, and they are great fun to be at—but the funding to properly support each child to get the very

best start in life is just not there. As Conservatives, we want our children to have all the opportunities available. I know that the Minister understands that, but we need to win the argument with the Treasury and the Chancellor, whoever that may be in a week or two.

Also mentioned earlier were the armed forces covenant and the impact on schools of having armed forces children. If a child's parent is in the armed forces, a veteran, in the regular forces or a reservist, the school benefits from a premium. However, it does not benefit if—as is often the case in Helston in my constituency—the child's parent is in the merchant navy, because they are not described as being in the armed forces community. As I argued yesterday in our debate on defence spending, the experience of modern-day merchant navy personnel means mums and dads can miss the whole summer holidays because they are away at sea, and they are exposed to threats from pirates and rogue nations. The premium is there to help schools to support children in distressing situations. I would argue that one way of supporting schools and funding them for the work that they do so well would be extending the armed forces covenant to include the merchant navy. I would be very interested to see what the Minister can do to make that case to the Ministry of Defence, and possibly the Treasury.

Finally, my hon. Friend the Member for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice) made a very important point about funding. We expect new money for education, certainly by next April, and we will be grievously disappointed if it is not there. It is really important for money to go where it is most needed. My hon. Friend made the important point that if the growth in funding follows the national funding formula, some schools will benefit far more than others. A very small school that has been underfunded, as happens in Cornwall, can expect far less growth. I would like the Minister to consider that point, as I am sure he has already, because there is a case to be made that funding needs to be targeted at the schools that most need it.

In Cornwall, we have quite a perverse situation. Cornwall Council defends its actions, probably rightly, but to ensure that children with special educational needs are supported, it has had to take funding away from our schools—not only the high needs block funding, but some of the baseline funding. That has left every single school—the 56 schools in my constituency and all the others around the county—with less funding per pupil for a sustained period. That means that when the national funding formula comes into place, our schools will continually and consistently be underfunded until we get the fair and happy funding that we all desperately look forward to.

I need not say any more; I think I have made my point. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to speak.

5.3 pm

Robert Courts (Witney) (Con): It is an honour to serve under your chairmanship, Sir David. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) on securing this critical debate, and I join all hon. Members in their praise for small schools, village schools and rural schools. My constituency has a great many: about 70% of Witney's schools are village schools or rural schools, and 90% of them are rated "good" or

[*Robert Courts*]

“outstanding”. That is a tribute to the outstanding work to all the teachers who have worked so hard to make the quality of education so high. I declare an interest: my wife is a governor at one of those schools—Bladon Church of England Primary School, the village primary school where I live.

As hon. Members have said, we cannot overestimate the importance of a village school. It is the centre of the community—the beating heart, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) said. It might have been where our parents, our grandparents or we ourselves went to school, and it may be where our children go. It is a crucial way to build links with the local community. What makes such schools so special? As has been said many times, their nurturing and caring nature and the amount of attention that individual schools can give results from their relatively small size. However, that is also one of their great challenges.

I have been to the majority of schools in my constituency and spoken to teachers, parents and governors. I have visited assemblies, seen the projects that pupils take part in and attended the school fêtes that often happen during the summer. I have had conversations and really tried to understand the issues in detail. As I am sure the Minister and many hon. Friends will understand, school funding is a complicated issue that repays detailed study—I have certainly tried to study it. Having had all those conversations with teachers, because I very much value that close relationship, I think I can make some suggestions.

West Oxfordshire is an f40 area—a rural area that historically has been underfunded. I do not think that it is terribly helpful to make any cheap political points about cuts; the Minister will tell us that there have not been cuts, because core per-pupil school funding has been protected for the duration of the spending review. However, I make it absolutely clear that my primary schools—my small schools, rural schools and village schools—face significant cost pressures.

There are a number of reasons for those pressures, which I hope the Minister can help with. Some of them may be a result of funding very well-deserved teacher pay rises. Pension costs were another major concern, although I understand that they are now covered. Several hon. Members have mentioned special educational needs provision, which is critical and of increasing concern for our small schools. There has also been a reduction in the spending powers of local authorities; many things that were once covered are no longer free, and schools are expected to pick up the cost. It may not be direct, but the net effect is the same: our excellent schools are trying to do much more, to less effect. In some cases, that may be due to pupil numbers, which are critical because all these schools are functioning on the tightest of budgets. From speaking to the teachers, I am clear that they are making every penny count, certainly in my constituency in west Oxfordshire, but the funding is on a per-pupil basis. That can be a problem, because if the catchment area is relatively small—if it is a village, a rural area or perhaps even a small town—a fluctuation in pupil numbers can cause real concern.

I am grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas), who mentioned military forces. A quarter of the entire Royal Air Force is in west

Oxfordshire, based in Carterton and the whole area around RAF Brize Norton. It is certainly a concern, not just for village schools but for Carterton primary schools, that those personnel are posted, so the schools do not necessarily know from one year to another how many pupils they are likely to have at a particular stage. That causes significant budgeting challenges. Even for the best-run school in the world, not knowing how many pupils it will have makes things harder. In some areas in my villages, there may be a low birth rate, an ageing population, or families moving in and out because they are in the armed forces or for other reasons. That has had a major effect in several villages in my area.

The effect of multi-academy trusts has been very helpful in many cases. The Oxford Diocesan Schools Trust is shared by my constituency and the Prime Minister’s, as she was kind enough to recognise at Prime Minister’s questions last week. The trust has 12 schools in my constituency—small schools such as Bampton Primary, Leafield Primary and Wootton-by-Woodstock Primary. They are doing a fantastic job of providing outstanding education, but all such organisations, whether they are small schools on their own, local authority-run or part of a multi-academy trust, face uncertainty about pupil numbers.

If we are looking for ways to support small schools, one idea that has not yet been suggested is a dedicated funding stream for small schools—let us call it a small schools grant or a small schools loan—whereby schools can bid for funding if they have low pupil numbers or other temporary budget pressures. If a school usually has stable numbers but it has a year in which there is a dip, that will cause it great problems, but if it could apply for assistance from the Government or the local authority by way of a dedicated funding stream, that would be of great assistance, because it would give that school the certainty it needs for that year, which may help it to deal with factors such as a low local birth rate. Of course, it will also deal with money in the long run, because the local authority will not have to worry about things such as schools closing and having to relocate children or support them in that time. The cost to the community of school closures is, as other hon. Members have said, absolutely devastating and must be avoided at all costs.

I am very grateful to the Minister for coming to Westminster Hall to respond to this debate. We are all passionate about our local schools and my suggestion about a dedicated fund is just one that might assist them. I also echo the call made by my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives when he said that we must ensure the funding is in place. Of course I make the plea for more school spending in the spending review, although I appreciate and understand that that is a plea that I should direct at the Treasury and not at the Minister, but we must ensure that it goes to the right place. Our small schools—rural and village schools—provide outstanding education and we must provide the funding they need; I look forward to seeing that funding in due course.

5.11 pm

Mike Kane (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab): As ever, Sir David, it is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) on securing this important debate; it is very important that we talk about the funding of small and rural schools. I also congratulate him on the really powerful speech he made in the main Chamber last year about one of his favourite teachers, who had passed away. For many of us, speeches in the main Chamber do not often stand out, but that was a really memorable one. For him personally, education and standing up for his constituents is very important, and it was great to be in the main Chamber for that speech.

The Minister for School Standards and I have had this debate before. In fact, I said to him today that we should go for a drink some time, because at the moment I see more of him than I do of my wife. That is because we spend so much time either in the main Chamber or here in Westminster Hall discussing school funding cuts and budget pressures. If we are not discussing West Sussex, Cornwall, Stoke-on-Trent, Chichester, or Westmorland and Lonsdale, then it is Liverpool, Merseyside or Manchester—week after week after week.

I want to put this debate in context for Members from rural constituencies who are passionate about their schools, so I say to the hon. Member for Harborough that Leicestershire has had to take £51.9 million out of its budget since 2015. That is probably the root cause of most of the reasons why primary schools in rural or urban areas are facing problems at the moment. Many of the concerns about this issue have been really well articulated today, so well done to all Members who are standing up for schools in their constituencies. However, all the challenges for schools are amplified for small schools, as we have heard this afternoon.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) on his speech, in which he said that small schools struggle because they do not have the economies of scale that some multi-academy trusts or local education authority schools can achieve in urban areas. I think he said that small schools lacked the “wherewithal”.

The hon. Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan), whose constituency is in West Sussex, shares a local authority with the Minister. I have to say with some passion that that authority has had to take £61.3 million out of its school budget since 2015. The Minister will come back and say what the Government have done since 2017, but this is the stark reality. As the hon. Lady said, too few schools seem to receive money from the hailed sparsity formula, which was supposed to be the silver bullet to help schools in rural areas. Maybe the Minister can tell us, through his officials or in writing, how many schools in rural areas are receiving money via this fabled sparsity formula.

It was interesting that the hon. Lady spoke really passionately, as she often does, about a school—I think it was Loxwood school—that had to set up a donations web page to fund a guillotine. That is the state of school funding in our day and age on the Minister's watch. There are parent teacher associations. Who was it who said that schools are the “beating heart” of communities? I think it was the hon. Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas). They are, particularly in rural areas. Unlike many schools in urban areas, schools in many rural areas have PTAs, or they have parishes that help out, but that is the state of school funding; it has had to come to rely upon PTAs, donation web pages and

companies helping out to buy basic products. Of course, one of the other problems that rural schools have is that, being in rural areas, they do not often have huge companies around them, as schools in cities often do.

The Minister has a huge problem. I forget the exact statistic, but somewhere around 100 schools—I will check out the exact number; it has been put on the record before—containing about 70,000 pupils are not brokered. That is another problem that schools in rural areas face. The Government are struggling, through these multi-academy trusts, to get enough brokers to broker those academies. So we literally have to thank the Lord for the Church of England, because if the Church of England did not have its thousands of schools in our rural areas—I also thank the Church for its schools in our cities—this Government's policy would be in real difficulty.

The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman), which is on the other side of Sussex, also contributed to the debate; his constituency is in an area where £37 million has been lost. It is always an honour to play football with him, and recently, we played at Stamford Bridge—I think it was in a game to “Show Racism the Red Card”. It was the only football game that I have ever played in where my boots were cleaner coming off the pitch than they were when I went on. He is an excellent footballer and I congratulate him on standing up for his schools.

The hon. Member for St Ives spoke about Cornwall, where £51 million has been taken out of the schools budget since 2015. He made a hugely valid point about special educational needs practice, which is often overlooked in these debates, even though it is an issue in urban areas, too. Where there is a school with really good SEN practice, parents want to get into that school, but the school has to put the money up front and is disadvantaged because of it.

Sorry—it was the hon. Member for Witney (Robert Courts), in his excellent speech, who talked about rural schools being the “beating heart” of the community. He is right, but I have to say to him that Oxfordshire schools have lost £37 million. He did not want to hear about the cuts, but I am afraid that he has to hear about them from me, because no amount of national funding formula, no amount of sparsity funding and no amount of special funding for rural schools—even though such funding may be a good idea that the Department might wish to look at; I will let the Minister respond to that suggestion—will get away from the fact of the cuts that have happened across the whole of Oxfordshire, in addition to what he said about the pension rises and pay rises, which we still do not have certainty about, and the SEN provision.

The Minister knows that I sound like a broken record on schools funding, but it appears that no matter how many times it is raised or whoever raises it—including his colleagues on the Government Benches—this Government are not listening to the grave concerns of hon. Members, leaders and teachers about the impact of school funding cuts.

It is really interesting. I do not want to proselytise on a party political point, but the leadership candidates of the Conservative party—sorry, what is the Health Secretary's seat?

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): West Suffolk.

Mike Kane: I thank the Minister. The right hon. Member for West Suffolk (Matt Hancock) pledged £15 billion of new schools money in that leadership debate. All the candidates know, from courting Conservative Members over the last few weeks, what the No.1 concern is for Conservative Members, and they have responded to those concerns in the leadership debates.

Across the country, our schools are experiencing £2.7 billion of cuts. There are concerns from teachers, including thousands of headteachers, many of whom protested right here in Parliament, and there are cuts to special educational needs and disability provision, which is an even more acute challenge for small schools, as they cannot amass economies of scale when they are buying additional support and resources.

Statistics from the Department itself show that the number of children and young people in England with SEN, or with education, health and care plans, rose by 34,200, an increase of 11% from 2018. However, research by the National Education Union has found that special needs school provision in England is down by £1.2 billion because of the shortfall in funding increases from the Government since 2015. No doubt the Minister will come back in his speech with what has happened since 2017.

The Government's own data shows that as of January 2018, 4,050 children and young people with EHC plans or statements were awaiting provision; in other words, they were still waiting for a place in education. Over 500,000 children are now in a super-sized class, and there is an unquestionable recruitment and retention crisis in our schools, with the Government having missed their own targets five years in a row. For the second year running, more teachers are leaving the profession than joining it. That has a huge impact on rural areas, especially if we take into account the price that teachers have to pay to afford a house in those areas, not having had an effective pay rise in 10 years. That has really affected the ability to get the quality and calibre of teachers required in rural areas.

Rural areas also suffer—*[Interruption.]* Do I need to wind up, Sir David?

Nick Gibb: You do.

Mike Kane: I am terribly sorry, Sir David; I was just hitting my stride.

Career progression is more difficult in rural areas and for rural teachers, as cities often offer an agglomeration of impacts so that teachers can develop professionally.

Under Labour's national education service, we will invest properly in our schools. Investment will be delivered under Labour's fully funded and universal vision for a national education service that will cover all our schools, both rural and national, that need funding put into them—not just at the spending review, but today.

5.21 pm

The Minister for School Standards (Nick Gibb): It is a pleasure to reply to this debate under your beady eye, Sir David. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough (Neil O'Brien) on having secured this debate, and on his excellent opening speech. The Government recognise the importance of rural schools and the need to maintain access to good local schools in rural areas, which, as hon. Members have said, are so often at the heart of their communities.

I also echo my hon. Friend's recognition of the strong educational standards in many rural schools. Although we know those schools face special challenges, we also know that they rise to those challenges and perform well. In terms of attainment, both primary and secondary, rural schools have on average outperformed urban schools over the past three years, and 89% of rural primary schools have been rated either "good" or "outstanding".

We want to ensure that school funding levels support an education system that offers opportunity to every child in this country. To continue to support all schools, including those in rural areas, the Government have prioritised education funding while having to take difficult decisions in other areas of public spending, as we seek to reduce the unsustainable annual budget deficit from 10% of GDP in 2010—some £150 billion a year—to under 2% now. As a result, core funding for schools and high needs has risen to £43.5 billion this year, and high needs funding has risen to £6.3 billion. However, we recognise the financial pressures that schools face, as described so well by my hon. Friends the Members for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) and for Witney (Robert Courts).

My hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas) reminded me of our visit to St Erth Community Primary School, which I enjoyed. I remember being lobbied by its school council, which was almost as compelling as my hon. Friend in making the case for capital for the school hall. Although I cannot pre-empt decisions that will be made as part of the forthcoming spending review process, we are of course looking to secure the best deal possible for our schools, both revenue funding and capital funding. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough recognises the decisive and historic move towards fair funding that this Government have made by introducing the national funding formula. The NFF is now directing money where it is most needed, based on schools' and pupils' needs and characteristics rather than accidents of geography or history.

Schools are already benefiting from the gains delivered by the national funding formula. It has allocated an increase for every pupil in every school, with significant per-pupil increases for the more underfunded schools, including those in rural areas. For example, as my hon. Friend mentioned, funding for schools in his local area of Leicestershire has increased by 5.5% per pupil compared to 2017-18. That is equivalent to an extra £31 million when rising pupil numbers are taken into account. As he stated, we do direct funding to provide additional support for small and remote schools, especially those in geographically challenging areas that do not have the same opportunities to find efficiencies as schools elsewhere.

The national funding formula provides a lump sum for every school as a contribution to the costs that do not vary with pupil numbers. That gives small schools certainty that they will attract a fixed amount each year, in addition to pupil-led funding. Although there is general agreement that schools face fixed costs, the evidence available suggests that there is no agreement on the scale of those costs, or that they are the same for all schools. In the previous system, local authorities awarded their schools very different lump sums, ranging from £48,480 to £175,000, and there was no obvious reason why local authorities chose those different amounts. It is important to maximise the funding available for the

factors that are directly related to pupils' characteristics, so following our extensive consultations with schools, we set the lump sum at £110,000 for each school within the national funding formula. However, the beauty of a national funding formula is that we can tweak it from year to year.

The formula also includes a sparsity factor, which allocates an additional £25 million specifically to small and remote schools. When the lump sum is coupled with that sparsity factor, it provides significant support for the small and remote schools that play such an essential role in rural communities. A small rural primary school eligible for sparsity funding can attract up to a total of £135,000 through the lump sum and the sparsity factor. Of course, we continue to look for ways in which the national funding formula can be improved; in particular, we are considering how to improve the methodology for calculating sparsity eligibility in future, and we will consider the suggestion my hon. Friend the Member for Witney made of a dedicated rural school funding stream.

Local authorities have a duty to provide sufficient school places for all pupils in their area, including reviewing provision where populations have grown or declined. Consequently, local authorities have the power to close maintained schools; that is a local decision, and neither Ministers nor the Department play a role in the process. However, my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) will be pleased to know that given their importance, we have a presumption against the closure of rural schools. Although that cannot mean that no rural school will ever close, the case for closure must be strong and in the best interests of educational provision for pupils in the area. When a local authority proposes the closure of a rural school, it must follow a well-established statutory process that takes full account of that presumption against closure. That includes a representation period, during which all those affected by the proposals can submit their views and suggestions.

To enable my hon. Friend the Member for Harborough to respond to the debate, I will conclude. Our rural communities are part of the historic fabric of this country, and the schools that serve them are fulfilling a vital and valued service both locally and nationally. I believe that by working closely together, we can make sure we deliver on our ambition to give every child a world-class education, wherever they live.

5.28 pm

Neil O'Brien: I thank all Members who have taken part in today's debate. I know that many Members are not in the building this afternoon, so I am particularly grateful for the eloquent and thoughtful speeches we have heard. I join my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Huw Merriman) in strongly praising our brilliant Schools Minister, who is a relentless and hard-working champion for higher educational standards. If the next Prime Minister has any sense, he will be promoted; if he has very good sense, the Minister will be kept in place, because he is doing a good job.

I thank the hon. Member for Wythenshawe and Sale East (Mike Kane) for his praise for my previous speech in the Chamber. I thought his own speech would have been stronger if he had acknowledged that there has been a real-terms increase in spending per pupil since 2010—an amazing achievement given that we inherited the biggest budget deficit since the second world war. Perhaps if he finds himself in a position of power in future, he can avoid dropping one of those again.

I thank all the Members who have taken part. We heard important points about capital and buildings from my hon. Friend the Member for St Ives (Derek Thomas), and important ideas about smoothing out budgets from my hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Robert Courts). My hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle spoke about the importance of not relying on a bus, because children miss out on after-school activities. We heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Gillian Keegan) about some of the things small schools are doing to cope in an authority where there has been an even bigger drop in the lump sum.

Small schools and village schools are an important part of the fabric that makes up this country. I do not want to wax too lyrical, but I genuinely think that if we continue to lose those schools at the rate we have seen in recent decades, in my lifetime, we will be losing an important part of this country.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered funding for small schools and village schools.

5.30 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Statements

Wednesday 17 July 2019

CABINET OFFICE

European Union (Withdrawal) Act: Common Frameworks

The Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and Minister for the Cabinet Office (Mr David Lidington): I am today laying before Parliament a report, “The European Union (Withdrawal) Act and Common Frameworks—26 March 2019 to 25 June 2019” as required by paragraph 4 of schedule 3 to the European Union (Withdrawal) Act 2018.

The report is available on gov.uk and details the progress made in discussions between the UK Government and devolved Administrations regarding common frameworks in the fourth reporting period covered under the legislation, and sets out that no “freezing” regulations have been brought forward under section 12 of the European Union (Withdrawal) Act.

The publication of the report reflects the Government’s continued commitment to transparency.

The attachment can be viewed online at <http://www.parliament.uk/business/publications/written-questions-answers-statements/written-statement/Commons/2019-07-17/HCWS1732/>

[HCWS1732]

TREASURY

EU Agreements with Third Countries

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Jesse Norman): The Government are undertaking a programme of work to replace EU international agreements with bilateral agreements ready for a UK exit from the EU either in the event of no deal or at the end of the proposed implementation period. This is essential preparation for the UK’s withdrawal from the EU to ensure that the UK can, where relevant and possible, maintain the benefits of these agreements, thereby providing continuity and stability to businesses and individuals.

As part of this programme, officials in HM Treasury and HM Revenue & Customs are working with their international partners to replace EU Customs Co-operation and Mutual Administrative Assistance (CCMAA) agreements with UK-third country bilateral agreements. These agreements will provide a legal framework for the exchange of information between the UK and international partners on customs matters and continued co-operation between the parties’ customs authorities, both facilitating legitimate trade and supporting international efforts in fighting customs fraud. They also fulfil domestic legal requirements for Authorised Economic Operator Mutual Recognition Agreements (AEOMRAs), which deliver important trade benefits to some UK businesses.

In cases where the other party’s domestic law allows, the “replacement” UK-third country CCMAA agreements will include provision for them to enter into force upon signature, often referred to as “definitive signature”. The parties would thus be bound by these agreements

upon signature, although the agreements’ provisions would not have effect until the EU CCMAA agreements cease to apply to the UK. Use of definitive signature in this case would enable the UK and its international partners, in the event of EU exit without a deal, to transfer without interruption key customs agreements that are currently in place by virtue of the UK’s membership of the EU. This is because there will be no change in effect of the agreement due to it being a replication of the arrangement the EU currently has in place with the third country. While many international treaties are expressly subject to ratification, it is also common in both UK and international practice, where practicable, for treaties to enter into force upon signature; In UK law, where a treaty enters into force upon signature, it is not subject to the procedures for parliamentary scrutiny as provided in section 20 of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Act 2010. However, as CCMAA agreements are straightforward bilateral agreements, and rely on provisions in the Taxation (Cross-Border Trade) Act 2018, which has already been approved by Parliament, the Government consider that definitive signature is appropriate in these instances.

The Taxation (Cross-Border Trade) Act 2018 provides the necessary powers for the UK to create a stand-alone customs regime once the UK exits the EU. In particular, section 26 of this Act allows for the UK to share information on customs matters with international partners and therefore provides the necessary legal basis from a UK perspective for the co-operation between parties outlined in the CCMAA agreements.

Once signed by both parties, a copy of each UK bilateral CCMAA agreement subject to definitive signature will be laid before Parliament as a Command Paper in the treaty series for information in the normal way.

Where third country partners’ domestic law does not permit them to be bound by signature, thereby requiring ratification by them, the CCMAA agreement will not use definitive signature but will be drafted to provide for consent to be bound by a two-stage process of signature and ratification.

[HCWS1731]

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

International Criminal Justice: Support and Funding

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (Mr Jeremy Hunt): Today we mark the Day of International Criminal Justice, which provides an opportunity to update Parliament on the UK’s support for the principles and institutions of international justice in the previous calendar year.

Support for international criminal justice and international humanitarian law is a fundamental element of the UK’s foreign policy. The UK believes that justice and accountability for the most serious international crimes is crucial to building lasting peace and security.

The UK Government believe that the International Criminal Court has an important role in pursuing accountability, but only when national authorities are either unable or unwilling to do so. The UK has long

provided political, financial, and practical support to the ICC. We are one of the largest financial contributors to the Court, contributing £9.7 million in 2018. An example of the UK's practical support was the sentence enforcement by the Scottish Prison Service of Mr Ahmad Al Faqi Al Mahdi, who was convicted of destroying cultural heritage sites in Timbuktu.

In 2018, the ICC considered situations from across Africa, the middle east, Europe, south-east Asia and South America, with 11 situations subject to formal investigations, and proceedings continuing in three trials: the Ongwen case (Uganda), the Ntaganda case (Democratic Republic of the Congo), and the Gbagbo and Blé Goude case (Ivory Coast). Al Hassan (Mali), and Yekatom (Central African Republic) were surrendered to the ICC.

The ICC's trust fund for victims plans to launch an assistance programme in the Central African Republic, to provide physical and physiological rehabilitation, alongside material support for victims and their families. The UK contributed funds to the TFV for reparations to victims in Mali.

While the UK continues to support the role of the ICC, reform is required for the ICC to fulfil its mandate as intended under the Rome statute. The UK will work with other states parties, the Court, and civil society, to achieve this goal.

The International Residual Mechanism for Criminal Tribunals (IRMCT) continued its mandate to fulfil the residual functions of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY) and the International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda. The IRMCT delivered an appeals judgment in the case of Radovan Karadžić, the former Bosnian Serb politician convicted in 2016 of genocide in Srebrenica. Karadžić's sentence, increased from 40 years to life, sends a clear message that those who commit atrocities will be held to account. The IRMCT continued to hear the retrial in the case of Stanišić and Simatović and issued a decision in the Šešelj contempt case.

The UK supported the Extraordinary Chambers in the Courts of Cambodia and the Residual Special Court for Sierra Leone through a total contribution of over £500,000. The UK has also been at the forefront of international efforts to gather and analyse evidence of atrocities committed in the middle east. Since 2016, we have committed £950,000 to the UN International Impartial and Independent Mechanism (HIM) to support the preparation of legal cases for serious crimes committed in the Syrian conflict. The UK also led efforts to adopt a UN Security Council resolution establishing an investigative team to collect, preserve and store evidence of Daesh atrocities in Iraq, and contributed £1 million towards its operation. The first mass grave exhumation was in March 2019 in the Yazidi village of Sinjar.

In reaction to the Rohingya crisis in Burma, the UK worked closely with the EU and the Organisation of Islamic Co-operation to secure a UN Human Rights Council resolution to establish a mechanism to collect and preserve evidence of human rights violations to support future prosecutions.

We will continue to update Parliament on our support to international criminal justice through our annual human rights report.

HOUSING, COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Grenfell Tower

The Secretary of State for Housing, Communities and Local Government (James Brokenshire): Two years on from the Grenfell Tower tragedy, my priority is to ensure that everyone affected is receiving the support they need and deserve. The independent Grenfell recovery taskforce continues to provide challenge and advice to the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea (RBKC) in its response to the Grenfell Tower tragedy. I recently received its fourth report, which I am today depositing in the Library of the House and publishing in full at gov.uk, alongside my response.

The taskforce has outlined the progress that the council has made since their last report of November 2018. RBKC have published its Grenfell recovery strategy and committed £50 million over the next five years to develop services to support the recovery. The recovery strategy is also prioritised in the new council plan. The taskforce reports that the dedicated service for the bereaved and survivors is the successful result of the council co-designing the service with its users. I welcome these significant steps forward.

On rehousing, the taskforce has again offered reassurance to Ministers that the council's approach is appropriate and sensitive to the long-term needs of survivors. I am pleased that there has been further progress since I received the taskforce's report with two more families moving into permanent accommodation. However, as I said in my oral statement on 10 June I remain concerned that households are still in emergency accommodation, including one in a hotel.

The taskforce has also welcomed the council's demonstrable appetite to modernise its governance procedures. It cites its implementation of recommendations by the Centre for Public Scrutiny, including establishing a programme of listening forums. The taskforce has also identified the beginning of a culture change initiated by the chief executive and leader of the council.

The taskforce has highlighted developments in the council's approach to community relationships and communications. RBKC has increased the number and means by which it engages with its residents including new meetings between the political leadership and some of those most affected by the tragedy. The taskforce also reports that it is seeing pockets of good practice pertaining to fostering good relationships with service users and the community.

Whilst the taskforce has noted good progress in many areas it is also clear that the council still faces significant challenges. The taskforce has identified that the pace by which the recovery is being implemented is still too slow and that this needs to be addressed. The taskforce has highlighted that strands of the recovery strategy remain in development, as well as the community programme and economy strategy. The taskforce therefore remain concerned about the capacity and corporate capability of the council to drive sustainable change. Although the rehousing programme is nearing completion the taskforce states that the council still faces substantial wider housing challenges. Whilst there is a programme to support and

develop all councillors, the taskforce has noticed occasions where member behaviour has caused it concern. There is a high degree of social capital that the council has yet to fully tap into and the taskforce calls for an innovative approach to harness this enthusiasm. The taskforce has also highlighted that the culture change has still not permeated all levels of the council and silo working remains an issue.

The taskforce has set the bar high for RBKC's recovery. It is important there is ambition and pace in the council's recovery efforts over the next three to four months in responding to the taskforce's recommendations, including:

- Urgently implementing its recovery strategy;
- Fostering a council-wide culture change so that everyone is working together;
- Clearly communicating its recovery plan and develop stronger communications skills;
- Ensuring that the senior team has the appropriate skills and resilience;
- Making a clear commitment to creating a better relationship with its community.

I am assured the council has already set in train action to meet these recommendations. This includes a paper outlining its plans to implement organisational change at the council by 2020.

I will review the process in September, by which point I hope the council will have made sufficient further progress. I look forward to continuing to work with the taskforce.

[HCWS1733]

JUSTICE

Victims of Crime: Code of Practice Consultation

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Edward Argar): Today, I am launching the Government's consultation on revising the code of practice for victims of crime (the code), which sets out our proposals for improving the code.

This consultation is the first step in strengthening the code, one of the overarching improvements to victims' experiences of the criminal justice system which we committed to in the cross-government victims strategy, published in September last year.

The vision we set out in the victims strategy is one of a justice system that supports even more victims to speak up by giving them the certainty that they will be understood, that they will be protected, and that they will be supported throughout their journey, regardless of their circumstances or background.

As part of delivering on that vision one of our key commitments was to amend the code to address its complexity, accessibility and language and consult on a revised version. We also committed to update entitlements

in the code so they are better reflective of victims' needs. This thematic consultation sets out our proposals for amending the code and will inform our second consultation on a revised draft code.

Some of the proposals included in the consultation are:

- Greater clarity around victims' rights, such as a right to be given information about the investigation and criminal proceedings and the right to make a victim personal statement (VPS);

- A statement within the code that victims who do not report the crime or withdraw from the criminal justice process are entitled to the same support as those who do report the crime;

- Creation of a short, user-friendly overview of the code to summarise the key points that all victims need to know (and a separate one for children/young people);

- Creation of a guide for practitioners working in the criminal justice sector on how to apply the code;

- Revising the current categories for victims entitled to an enhanced service to make it simpler, with a greater focus on identifying and meeting the needs of the victim.

However, amending the code is only part of the picture. To strengthen the code we also committed to:

- Introduce improved reporting, monitoring and transparency to strengthen compliance with the code.

- Bring forward proposals for a consultation on the detail of the victims' law, including strengthening compliance with the code and the powers of the Victims' Commissioner.

We are already working with police and crime commissioners and local criminal justice partnerships to improve compliance with the code through improved reporting, monitoring and transparency on whether victims are receiving entitlements. This goes hand in hand with amending the code. On 1 April we issued the first iteration of a framework for compliance with the code.

Once we have revised the code we will then consult on the detail of victim focussed legislation. As part of that we want to strengthen the enforcement of the code to make sure victims receive the services they are entitled to, and criminal justice agencies are held to account if they do not. We also want to explore increasing the Victims' Commissioner's powers to better hold the Government to account. However, to do that we first need to revise the code to make sure that the entitlements victims receive are the right ones in the first place.

In developing the consultation, we have engaged extensively with victims and victims' groups and considered the views and recommendations made by key stakeholders including the Victims' Commissioner and the London Victims' Commissioner. This has ensured the consultation is informed by those who have had direct experience of being a victim, as well as those with frontline expertise.

The consultation is available in full at: <https://consult.justice.gov.uk/digital-communications/proposed-changes-to-the-victims-code/>

[HCWS1730]

Petition

Wednesday 17 July 2019

OBSERVATIONS

HEALTH AND SOCIAL CARE

NHS hospital services in the Consett area

The petition of residents of North West Durham,

Declares that a succession of Government funding reductions has led to fewer services being delivered at Shotley Bridge Hospital; and further that this reduction of services threatens the viability of a community hospital in the Consett Area.

The petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government and the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to ensure there is no reduction of local NHS Hospital services in the Consett area.

And the petitioners remain, etc. —*[Presented by Laura Pidcock, Official Report, 26 June 2019; Vol. 662, c. 769 .]*

[P002482]

Observations from The Minister for Health (Stephen Hammond):

This Government are committed to ensuring that people across the country are able to access the right care at the right time and in the right place. However, it

is the Government's view that Clinical Commissioning Groups (CCGs) are best placed to make decisions on commissioning health services for their communities, based on local need and working closely with local authorities and other partners.

In the Consett area, Shotley Bridge Community Hospital currently provides a range of services including diagnostic services, a chemotherapy unit, outpatients and community based clinics and, rehabilitation beds (inpatient ward) and has a urgent care centre.

NHS North Durham Clinical Commissioning Group (CCG) is committed to retaining a local presence for the majority of services being provided and is working with a range of partners to consider how it can ensure services are sustainable for patients in North West Durham, including those currently provided on Shotley Bridge Community Hospital site.

The Shotley Bridge Reference Group regularly meets to discuss and report on any future plans based on the local clinical strategy for delivering the best care for patients and based the feedback received from the local population. This reference group has representation from the local MP and councillors.

The Government are committed to increasing funding and announced last year that the NHS will receive increased funding of £39 billion by 2023. That equates to a 3.4 % a year real terms increase in funding over the next five years. This long-term funding commitment means the NHS has the financial security to develop its 10-year plan.

Ministerial Correction

Wednesday 17 July 2019

DEFENCE

National Shipbuilding Strategy

The following is an extract from the Westminster Hall debate on the National Shipbuilding Strategy on 11 July 2019.

Stuart Andrew: All of our vision is for a shipbuilding sector that does not need a contract for a couple of non-complex warships; it could also work in the civil sector.

[Official Report, 11 July 2019, Vol. 663, c. 222WH.]

Letter of correction from the Under-Secretary of State for Defence, the hon. Member for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew):

An error has been identified in my response to the debate.

The correct wording should have been:

Stuart Andrew: All of our vision is for a shipbuilding sector that does not need a contract for a couple of **non-complex ships**; it could also work in the civil sector.

ORAL ANSWERS

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MINISTERIAL CORRECTION

Wednesday 17 July 2019

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**not later than
Wednesday 24 July 2019**

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