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Thursday
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PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES
(HANSARD)

HOUSE OF LORDS

OFFICIAL REPORT

ORDER OF BUSINESS

Questions	
Northern Ireland: Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry	513
Brexit: European Union's No-deal Continuity Arrangements	515
Music Licensing.....	518
Unpaid Carers: Support	519
Business of the House	
<i>Timing of Debates</i>	523
Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 Committee	
<i>Membership Motion</i>	523
Social and Economic Impact of the Gambling Industry Committee	
<i>Membership Motion</i>	524
Democracy and Digital Technologies Committee	
<i>Membership Motion</i>	524
Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment Committee	
<i>Membership Motion</i>	525
Inequalities	
<i>Motion to Take Note</i>	525
Referendums	
<i>Question for Short Debate</i>	567
Older Persons: Provision of Public Services	
<i>Motion to Take Note</i>	581

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The first time a Member speaks to a new piece of parliamentary business, the following abbreviations are used to show their party affiliation:

Abbreviation	Party/Group
CB	Cross Bench
Con	Conservative
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
GP	Green Party
Ind Lab	Independent Labour
Ind LD	Independent Liberal Democrat
Ind SD	Independent Social Democrat
Ind UU	Independent Ulster Unionist
Lab	Labour
Lab Co-op	Labour and Co-operative Party
LD	Liberal Democrat
LD Ind	Liberal Democrat Independent
Non-afl	Non-affiliated
PC	Plaid Cymru
UKIP	UK Independence Party
UUP	Ulster Unionist Party

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House of Lords

Thursday 13 June 2019

11 am

Prayers—read by the Lord Bishop of Coventry.

Northern Ireland: Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry Question

11.06 am

Asked by Lord Empey

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the request from the head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service to introduce measures to compensate the victims of Historical Institutional Abuse, as recommended by the Report of the Historical Institutional Abuse Inquiry in January 2017.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Northern Ireland Office and Scotland Office (Lord Duncan of Springbank) (Con): The head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service wrote to the Secretary of State on 2 May, providing her with the historical institutional abuse consultation report, draft legislation and a document that set out the key issues that require ministerial decision. The Secretary of State asked the Northern Ireland political parties to consider these important policy questions and to seek a consensus. She has now received their recommendations and will consider them as a matter of urgency. She is determined to do everything in her power to ensure the victims and survivors get the redress they deserve as quickly as possible.

Lord Empey (UUP): The Minister will be aware that, in addition to the head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service, as he said, all parties at Stormont have asked his right honourable friend to legislate to implement the Hart report, which came out in January 2017. Since this Parliament is effectively lying idle for the next six weeks, could I implore my noble friend to prevail on the Secretary of State to immediately introduce this legislation on humanitarian grounds? Why should these victims suffer all over again because of unnecessary delay? Thirty-one victims have died since the report was published in January 2017. Why should any more go to their graves without receiving justice?

Lord Duncan of Springbank: The noble Lord makes an important point. This is about victims and redress. The issue we face is that the original draft diverges significantly from the consensus reached by the political parties. This will therefore take time to redraft. That is what is being taken forward right now in Northern Ireland by the authorities. Once that is done, it will return to us and we will take it through both Houses as expeditiously as possible.

Baroness Smith of Basildon (Lab): My Lords, this all sounds a little delaying. I trust the noble Lord's judgment implicitly on this, but it is over two years since the inquiry report. We have heard from the noble Lord, Lord Empey, that this delay comes at a very high price for the people of Northern Ireland and the survivors of abuse. Obviously, the preferred option would be a devolved Administration, but I put on record again, because this is not the only example like this, that the Government are not doing enough to ensure the devolved institutions are up and running. I have said that perhaps if the noble Lord was Secretary of State we might see greater progress, which we would welcome. The political parties all blame each other for it not happening. Meanwhile, we have cases such as this where people are dying and struggling through lack of action. There is a moral duty to act. The noble Lord said that work is ongoing. Can he give a commitment to bring back that legislation to this House in this parliamentary Session before any Prorogation, whenever that might be?

Lord Duncan of Springbank: The challenge we face is that, had the political parties in reaching their consensus broadly affirmed the Hart report and all its elements, we could have been taking it forward right now. Unfortunately, there were 13 substantive areas of change that the political parties wished to take forward. These require some time. I cannot give the commitment the noble Baroness would like to hear, but I can say that once we work through those things with the relevant authorities in Northern Ireland we will take it forward as quickly as this House and the other place will allow.

Lord Bruce of Bennachie (LD): My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Empey, is to be credited for his persistence on this issue. I concur with him that neither this House nor the other is preoccupied at the moment. I hear what the Minister says, but people have waited far too long. There is time to do things quickly and effectively when all the political parties are on side. Will he take that on board? Northern Ireland needs a positive gesture right now. Is this not the right time to deliver this, and not delay it any further?

Lord Duncan of Springbank: The important thing to stress is that, were we in receipt of the draft legislation, this House could take it forward very quickly indeed, but we are not. The challenge right now is for the authorities in Northern Ireland that are responsible for this to work through each of the aspects raised by the political parties, to ensure that this can be brought forward in draft. The moment it arrives here we will be able to take this forward very quickly indeed.

Lord Cormack (Con): Would my noble friend accept that there are other victims too? We have discussed in this House those who were brutally treated during the Troubles, many of whom were maimed. Many have died in the last few years. They deserve the same sort of recompense; my noble friend has acknowledged that on the Floor of this House. Will he try to bring legislation that includes them as well?

Lord Duncan of Springbank: I would not wish to see these two elements entwined, because they are quite distinct. However, the issue to which my noble friend refers is very important. I have given an assurance before and repeat today that we must make progress on victims' pensions. He has my word that we will take that forward as quickly as we possibly can.

Lord Morrow (DUP): My Lords, I certainly agree with the Minister when he says that these are two separate, different issues, which are both extremely important. From his reply to the noble Lord, Lord Empey, do I take it that the settled position of the Government is that, since all the obstacles are out of the way and all the political parties are on board, they will now take the necessary action, bearing in mind that some of the institutions have a big role to play here and must not be allowed to get away scot free? I urge the Government to give a clear, unambiguous, unequivocal reply that they will take this issue forward and that this is their settled position, irrespective of what is happening in Northern Ireland and since all the political parties in Northern Ireland agree that it should be taken forward.

Lord Duncan of Springbank: I can give the noble Lord that assurance. We will do just that.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): Is the Minister telling us that the only reason we are not able to consider this is because of a delay in drafting the legislation? The Minister knows that I have great respect for him. Could he not go back to the officials to say that this House, indeed the whole Parliament, is ready to consider this legislation and put a rocket under them so that it comes here as quickly as possible?

Lord Duncan of Springbank: I will be very happy to put a rocket under them.

Lord Rogan (UUP): My Lords, the victims of these crimes and their relatives are grieving. The grief is deep. They simply cannot understand why the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Karen Bradley, has not taken a decision more quickly. There must be no more delays. I welcome the Minister's comments today that he will expedite this matter so that it is dealt with in the quickest possible time.

Lord Duncan of Springbank: We can afford no more delays, so the moment we have this material here, we will move it forward quickly. We will see that justice is served and redress is achieved.

Brexit: European Union's No-deal Continuity Arrangements

Question

11.14 am

Asked by Lord Lilley

To ask Her Majesty's Government what announcements the European Union has made regarding continuity arrangements for (1) air travel, (2) haulage, (3) visas, and (4) safety certificates,

should the United Kingdom leave the European Union without a deal; and what steps they have taken to give reciprocal assurances.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Transport (Baroness Vere of Norbiton) (Con): My Lords, the EU has adopted time-limited regulations covering the aviation market access and safety certificates, as well as road haulage and international rail. The EU has also announced visa-free travel for UK nationals travelling to the EU for short stays after exit. The Government have given reciprocal assurances in each of these four areas, which will provide certainty to businesses and citizens should the UK leave the EU without a deal.

Lord Lilley (Con): I thank my noble friend for her reply. Since Britain may well leave the EU with no withdrawal agreement, is it not reassuring that these reciprocal mini-deals, and many others, mean that planes will fly, hauliers will operate, Airbus wings will be exported and visa-free travel will continue? Will she also confirm that HMRC plans no extra checks at Dover and will prioritise flow over compliance, while France is so determined not to lose trade to Belgian and Dutch ports that it has installed multiple extra lorry lanes at Calais, located inspection points away from the ports and installed equipment to scan moving trains, so that the likelihood of congestion and delays has vastly diminished, to the obvious disappointment of the Liberal Democrat Benches?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The noble Lord is right in that the mini-deals make any potential exit from the EU without a deal less difficult. But they are, as I have said, time-limited and there will need to be further negotiations when they expire. With regard to Dover, the Government are working to enable cross-channel traffic and goods to continue to move as freely as possible. Government departments have designed customs and additional control arrangements at the UK border in a way which ensures that goods will be able to flow into and out of the country, and will not be delayed by additional controls. It is true that on the other side of the channel, the French customs authorities have pulled their finger out and installed additional control points. These mean that delays on this side of the channel will be less; however, they will not disappear completely and we therefore cannot expect trade to continue precisely as it did before.

Lord Rosser (Lab): What will be the consequences for air and road haulage traffic between the UK and the EU under no deal if further arrangements beyond the time-limited period are not agreed with the EU, perhaps because we have, for example, declined to pay the £39 billion currently provided for on our departure from the EU?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The noble Lord is quite right that there are multiple mini-deals. They expire at different times and we will look to the EU to extend them. It is in the EU's gift to decide whether to extend them, as it is in our gift to decide whether to reciprocate.

Any elements of the arrangements surrounding our withdrawal will, I believe, impact on our ability to negotiate these agreements.

Lord Purvis of Tweed (LD): Will the Minister confirm that these are not mini-deals but basic contingency measures, as the Commission itself has defined them? Some will require continuing legislative reciprocity from the UK, which we have not put on the statute book at the moment. They will cover a period of only six months and, as the Commission said, provide for only “basic connectivity” and,

“mitigate to some extent the impact of withdrawal, without however guaranteeing the continuation of all existing air transport services under the same terms as they are supplied today”.

Is it not an outrage that some candidates to be our Prime Minister will receive votes today from Conservative MPs while proposing to enforce this by suspending Parliament, if Parliament does not agree that some of these measures are not in the best interests of our haulage or aviation sectors?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The noble Lord can call these deals what he likes—he mentioned mini-deals—but I would call them the EU air connectivity regulation and EU regulation 2019/501, the basic road freight connectivity regulation. He said that they would mean that transport cannot continue as it does now but the key point, looking at the detail of the deal, is that it is substantially as it is now. However, he is quite right that were these regulations to fall away, which they do on varying dates for various forms of transport, it will be necessary to look hard at what we do thereafter.

Lord Pearson of Rannoch (UKIP): My Lords, does the Minister recall the Government’s Written Answer to me on 6 February this year, which said that if we end up trading on normal WTO most favoured nation terms, EU exporters will pay us £14 billion per annum, while ours will pay Brussels only £6 billion per annum? Might some of that £8 billion annual profit not be useful in subsidising any unforeseen costs arising from leaving the EU without a deal, with billions to spare for other national priorities?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: Unfortunately, I do not recall the Government’s response to the noble Lord of 6 February. Discussions of tariffs are slightly beyond the original scope of the Question, but we expect the EU’s most favoured nation tariff regime to apply to the UK if the UK leaves the EU without a deal. Noble Lords are also aware that this will result in the introduction of tariffs on 60% of current UK exports to the EU.

Lord Forsyth of Drumlean (Con): My Lords, given that all the leading contenders for the leadership of the Conservative Party have made clear that it is important the European Union understands that we are prepared to leave without a deal if we cannot get a sensible agreement, would it not be sensible for the Government to publish, for each department, what plans are in place, how they need to operate and what future additions will be required?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: As my noble friend mentioned, I am sure the EU fully understands that the UK is willing to leave without a deal. Indeed, it is the legal default and it may be that we have no option. The Government are also undergoing extensive contingency planning in the event that we leave with no deal. Further details of that will be available shortly.

Lord Harris of Haringey (Lab): My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Lilley, said that the intention was to “prioritise flow over compliance”. I refer to my interests in the register on these matters. Does that mean the Government are prepared to tolerate unsafe goods, those that violate intellectual property laws and everything else coming into this country, simply to facilitate the mantra of no deal?

Baroness Vere of Norbiton: The Government will certainly not tolerate that. That is why we have designed customs and additional control arrangements to make sure that appropriate checks are made.

Music Licensing Question

11.22 am

Asked by **Lord Smith of Hindhead**

To ask Her Majesty’s Government what recent discussions they have had with Phonographic Performance Limited regarding that body’s increasing of the tariff for their Specially Featured Entertainment licence from July 2019.

Lord Smith of Hindhead (Con): My Lords, I beg leave to ask the Question standing in my name on the Order Paper. In so doing, I make reference to my interests set out in the register.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy (Lord Henley) (Con): My Lords, the Government have had no discussions with Phonographic Performance Limited about this tariff. Collecting societies are private commercial organisations, and the Government play no role in setting their licence tariffs. However, dissatisfied businesses may have recourse to the Copyright Tribunal, a specialised court that adjudicates on the price and terms of copyright licences. I understand that the British Beer and Pub Association and UK Hospitality intend to make reference to the Copyright Tribunal on this issue.

Lord Smith of Hindhead: I thank the Minister for his reply, and I am pleased that this matter has been referred to the Copyright Tribunal since my Question was tabled. It is estimated that the proposed new tariff will cost the hospitality industry an additional £49 million each year—an increase that is simply unaffordable for many operators. PPL collected £250 million last year and raked off £35 million in admin fees, paying its CEO over £750,000. Does the Minister agree that a better way to provide increased payments to copyright holders is for PPL to cut its own expenditure?

Lord Henley: My Lords, it is not for me to comment on the pay of the CEO of PPL; this must be a matter for the members of that organisation. However, I think all agree it is important that PPL, and PRS for that matter, get the best deal for all its members—performers, composers and others who own a copyright—and make sure they get the appropriate amount of money they are owed for us hearing their music.

Lord Clement-Jones (LD): My Lords, does the Minister agree that there is a major danger of misunderstanding what is proposed and what is involved here? The new tariff does not apply to grass-roots live music venues. It is designed to be fairer to small venues using recorded music. It will be phased in for other places and the beneficiaries will be many currently underpaid performers and artists.

Lord Henley: My Lords, the noble Lord makes a very useful contribution. I stress that this is about ensuring that those artists, performers and others receive the appropriate reward for their work.

Lord McNicol of West Kilbride (Lab): My Lords, I am sure this House will agree that artists, especially the less well-known ones, should be paid fairly if their music is played in public. What, if any, are the expected consequences following the delay in implementing the new specially featured entertainment tariff—SFE—which was meant to be implemented on 1 July? Does he know when the subsequent independent review by the Copyright Tribunal will be completed?

Lord Henley: My Lords, I am not going to comment on a case that is about to be before the Copyright Tribunal; that would not be right or proper. Nor can I help the noble Lord on the first part of his question. As I made clear earlier, it is important that these collective management organisations—CMOs—provide the best possible service for their members and negotiate in a proper and fair way with the hospitality organisations that want to use their music.

Unpaid Carers: Support Question

11.26 am

Asked by **Baroness Brinton**

To ask Her Majesty's Government what steps they are taking to ensure that unpaid carers receive the support to which they are entitled.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department of Health and Social Care (Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford) (Con): My Lords, we are committed to supporting carers to provide care in ways that protect and preserve their own health and well-being. Last June, we published the Carers Action Plan, a cross-government programme of targeted work. This included a £5 million carers innovation fund, to encourage innovative and creative ways of supporting carers. We are also working

with local government on a sector-led improvement programme of work focused on implementing the carers Act duties for carers.

Baroness Brinton (LD): I thank the Minister for her Answer. As Carers Week draws to a close, I point out that we owe a great debt of gratitude to the 6.5 million carers in the country who save us more than £100 billion a year, given the costs that we would otherwise have to bear. The problem is that nearly three-quarters of those carers say that they suffer mental health stress as a result of their caring duties, and over 60% say that they have physical health problems. Will the overdue Green Paper on social care put sustainable funding in place to properly provide support for carers and ensure speedy access to health services for them?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: I thank the noble Baroness for her important Question. I suspect that the majority of noble Lords have not only been carers themselves but have benefited from caring. I would not be standing here myself were it not for the caring support of my own family. We should pay tribute to carers up and down the country, without whom we would not have a sustainable health and care system. I assure the noble Baroness that proposals for putting in place sustainable funding to support carers, and considering their employment status, are part of the work that is going on in implementing the long-term plan and preparing the social care Green Paper. I hope that reassures her.

Baroness Wheeler (Lab): My Lords, a growing number of older people are providing unpaid care while trying to manage their own health and care needs, in many cases co-caring for each other with partners, adults or children with learning difficulties. In particular, there is an alarming increase in the number of carers aged 85 and over, who are more likely than other carers to be caring round the clock, be suffering anxiety and be in poor health themselves. What are the Government doing to ensure that these carers are getting the vital social and community help they need? Are they still the priority, as was promised in the NHS five-year forward view?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: I thank the noble Baroness for her question. She is absolutely right that we need to ensure that we target support at those who need it most, but that we also identify those who are carers within the community, because of the burden that we know caring can impose on the health of those who are caring. That is why the Carers Trust has been undertaking research into best practice in identifying carers and targeting support. It is also why the Department of Health and Social Care has been working with local government on a sector-led improvement programme of work focused on the implementation of the carers Act duty for carers. We have just begun phase 1 of this and we are implementing phase 2 to ensure that best practice is disseminated across the system, so we can deliver on the commitments we made within the carers plan.

The Lord Bishop of St Albans: My Lords, I am sure that we all want to encourage stronger family and community life, which is the very bedrock of healthy societies, but there is one group in particular that needs help and that is the 166,000 underage carers in England. Research by the Children's Society suggests that that is just the tip of the iceberg—indeed, a huge underestimate. Many of these young people do not realise that they classify as carers: it is just what they have had to deal with. In many cases it is affecting their schooling and mental health. What are Her Majesty's Government able to do to help and support underage carers in particular?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: The right reverend Prelate is quite right to identify this as a crucial issue. The Government believe that children should be protected from inappropriate and excessive caring responsibilities. We changed the law to improve the way that young carers are identified, and we are supporting schools to support carers and working with the Carers Trust to identify and spread best practice. Just today, working with the Children's Society, which he rightly says has led this project to identify and disseminate best practice, guidance and resources will be published to enable young adult carers to make positive transitions between the ages of 16 and 24. We hope that this will improve the outcomes that young carers experience.

Baroness Manzoor (Con): My Lords, I am delighted by the Carers Action Plan, which is a very important piece of work for many thousands of carers in the country. Can my noble friend say exactly what progress is being made in implementing this plan and how success will be measured?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: I thank my noble friend for this important question. The Carers Action Plan was a real step in the right direction. It has 64 action points and good progress has been made. There will be a progress report in July. Some key steps in it are promoting best practice for local authorities, clinical commissioning groups and other providers in order to give carers much-needed breaks and respite care, which can be the difference between coping and not coping; and providing carer-confident benchmarks for employers who can identify carers within their systems and give them the support they need. Of course, there is also the work I have already mentioned: the £5 million carers innovation fund to find more creative and innovative ways to support carers, who are so crucial to our health and care system.

Lord Patel (CB): My Lords, does the Minister agree that any future proposals for the funding of social care need to be sustainable? Any proposal that requires the burden to fall on those who need social care or their families will not be sustainable and will therefore require contributions from wider society.

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: I completely agree with the noble Lord, Lord Patel, who is absolutely right that we must ensure that we sustainably fund

social care. The Government have provided £3.9 billion more in dedicated social care funding, but we recognise that there is a need for a sustainable financial footing for social care as a whole, which is what we are working towards with the spending review. Nevertheless, carers will continue to play an important part in our healthcare system, as they do within our society. Many people consider that they are making a rewarding and important contribution within their family and community, and we must be grateful to them for that.

Lord Hunt of Kings Heath (Lab): My Lords, the implication of what the noble Baroness has just said is that the work around the Green Paper on a sustainable mechanism for funding long-term care is focused on the medium and long term. If that is so—and I think the Minister could say something about the actual remit of the work—the question then arises: what about the short term? We know that the money she talked about is a drop in the ocean compared to the money that has been taken away from social care, alongside the increasing demographic pressures. Can she tell me whether, as part of the spending review, which I assume will occur at some point, the immediate pressures are also going to be taken care of?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: The noble Lord will know that the spending review has not yet started, so I cannot tell him what is happening in the negotiations. What I can tell him about is the work that has already gone on to improve social care funding: giving local authorities access to around £10 billion more in dedicated funding for social care from 2017-18 to 2019-20; an additional £410 million of new money to improve social care for older people, people with disabilities and children; and £240 million more for winter pressures. However, the noble Lord is absolutely right that it is no good improving the medium to long-term outlook for social care if we do not ensure that we also address the immediate challenges that it faces.

Baroness Thomas of Winchester (LD): My Lords, the right reverend Prelate mentioned one group of carers. I would like to ask about those from the BME community, many of whom do not know about the benefits to which they would be entitled—the carer's allowance, for example, and even the national insurance waivers that come with it. What are the Government proactively doing to support them?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: This is a really important question, because the carer's allowance has increased and is available as a non-means-tested support. I can reveal today that one of the key issues that is being looked at as part of the social care Green Paper is ensuring that financial support and employment status for carers are clearer, so that they can access all the support they are entitled to, but also to try to make things simpler.

Lord Kirkhope of Harrogate (Con): I declare an interest as a former Mental Health Act commissioner. While we are talking about carers, there is a considerable

[LORD KIRKHOPE OF HARROGATE]
number of people who are caring for members of their family who have been suffering from mental illness and are now in the community. Would my noble friend not agree that we should be more concerned to give assistance there as well, rather than merely to those who care for people with physical ailments?

Baroness Blackwood of North Oxford: The burden of ill health, anxiety and depression is an important issue that has been clearly identified, and it can be caused by caring for a loved one. There is specific evidence about the threshold at which the number of hours spent caring causes such challenges. My noble friend is right that we should not only identify those who are caring but signpost them clearly to the support available for carers and make sure that they can access that care easily.

Business of the House

Timing of Debates

11.37 am

Moved by Baroness Evans of Bowes Park

That the debate on the motion in the name of Lord Dubs set down for today shall be limited to three hours and that in the name of Lord Foulkes of Cumnock to two hours.

Motion agreed.

Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 Committee

Membership Motion

11.38 am

Moved by The Senior Deputy Speaker

That a Select Committee be appointed to consider post-legislative scrutiny of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, and to make recommendations; and that, as proposed by the Committee of Selection, the following members be appointed to the Committee:

Campbell-Savours, L; Dykes, L; Eaton, B; Hayward, L; Janvrin, L; Lexden, L; Mallalieu, B; Morris of Aberavon, L; Pidding, B; Shutt of Greetland, L. (*Chairman*); Suttie, B; Wills, L.

That the Committee have power to appoint specialist advisers;

That the Committee have power to send for persons, papers and records;

That the Committee have power to adjourn from place to place;

That the evidence taken by the Committee be published, if the Committee so wishes;

That the Committee do report by 31 March 2020;

That the report of the Committee be printed, regardless of any adjournment of the House.

Motion agreed.

Social and Economic Impact of the Gambling Industry Committee

Membership Motion

11.38 am

Moved by The Senior Deputy Speaker

That a Select Committee be appointed to consider the social and economic impact of the gambling industry, and to make recommendations; and that, as proposed by the Committee of Selection, the following members be appointed to the Committee:

Armstrong of Hill Top, B; Butler of Brockwell, L; Filkin, L; Foster of Bath, L; Grade of Yarmouth, L. (*Chairman*); Layard, L; Meyer, B; Smith of Hindhead, L; St Albans, Bp; Thornhill, B; Trevethin and Oaksey, L; Watts, L; Wyld, B.

That the Committee have power to appoint specialist advisers;

That the Committee have power to send for persons, papers and records;

That the Committee have power to adjourn from place to place;

That the evidence taken by the Committee be published, if the Committee so wishes;

That the Committee do report by 31 March 2020;

That the report of the Committee be printed, regardless of any adjournment of the House.

Motion agreed.

Democracy and Digital Technologies Committee

Membership Motion

11.38 am

Moved by The Senior Deputy Speaker

That a Select Committee be appointed to consider democracy and digital technologies, and to make recommendations; and that, as proposed by the Committee of Selection, the following members be appointed to the Committee:

Black of Brentwood, L; Dobbs, L; German, L; Harris of Haringey, L; Holmes of Richmond, L; Kidron, B; Knight of Weymouth, L; Lipsey, L; Lucas, L; Mitchell, L; Morris of Yardley, B; Puttnam, L. (*Chairman*); Scriven, L.

That the Committee have power to appoint specialist advisers;

That the Committee have power to send for persons, papers and records;

That the Committee have power to adjourn from place to place;

That the evidence taken by the Committee be published, if the Committee so wishes;

That the Committee do report by 31 March 2020;

That the report of the Committee be printed, regardless of any adjournment of the House.

Motion agreed.

Food, Poverty, Health and the Environment Committee

Membership Motion

11.38 am

Moved by The Senior Deputy Speaker

That a Select Committee be appointed to consider the links between inequality, public health and food sustainability; and that, as proposed by the Committee of Selection, the following members be appointed to the Committee:

Boycott, B; Caithness, E; Empey, L; Janke, B; Jay of Paddington, B; Krebs, L. (*Chairman*); Osamor, B; Parminter, B; Redfern, B; Rooker, L; Sater, B; Whitty, L.

That the Committee have power to appoint specialist advisers;

That the Committee have power to send for persons, papers and records;

That the Committee have power to adjourn from place to place;

That the evidence taken by the Committee be published, if the Committee so wishes;

That the Committee do report by 31 March 2020;

That the report of the Committee be printed, regardless of any adjournment of the House.

Motion agreed.

Inequalities

Motion to Take Note

11.39 am

Moved by Lord Dubs

That this House takes note of inequalities in income, wealth and living standards in the United Kingdom since the 2008 financial crisis; and further takes note of the work of the Institute for Fiscal Studies Deaton Review, *Inequalities in the 21st Century*, and the report of the United Nation's Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights on his visit to the United Kingdom, published on 22 May.

Lord Dubs (Lab): My Lords, it is a privilege to open this debate, and I am grateful to the many Members of the House who are down to take part in it. As I prepared for the debate, I was almost overwhelmed by the mass of statistics on the subject of the level of inequality and poverty in the UK, but the one thing that all the figures show is that that level is far too high. There can be no dispute about that. There may be an argument as to whether things have got worse over the past two or three years. That is not necessarily my contention, but clearly the austerity policies introduced in 2010 have had a damaging effect on the people affected by poverty. I believe that the evidence shows that there is a great deal of inequality in the country, and this is having a damaging effect on many people here.

The question for Ministers and other politicians, therefore, is whether this is the price we have to pay for our present overall relatively high living standards. I am totally opposed to that: I do not believe it is a price we have to pay or a price we should pay, and we should reject any policies that continue to further those levels of inequality and poverty.

Many people are simply not comfortable living in a country where the differences between the rich and the majority are so wide. It gives me an uncomfortable feeling when I see poor people in the streets, when I am aware of the figures and the poverty. Frankly, I would not want to be the Minister answering this debate. It is a really tough call for her, but I suppose that goes with the job description. It is not as if the subject has not been debated frequently over many years. It is still vivid in my memory from when I was in the House of Commons seeing Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister asserting, to quote her from memory, that a rising tide lifts all boats. She made a hand gesture to show that if the tide lifted the higher boats, the lower ones would also rise. I was amazed to hear that at the time: it was not true then and it has not been true since. The problem is that a rising tide has lifted some boats but not those at the bottom.

I think it is generally understood that, second only to the United States, the UK has the highest level of inequality of any advanced democracy. Without a redistributive tax and welfare system the situation would be much worse, so it is rather surprising that a contender for the Conservative leadership contest has committed to reducing tax on people earning more than £50,000 a year. I find that deeply shocking. They are hardly the most impoverished group in society, and I hope that the Minister will reject the proposal on the Government's behalf before there are any changes in the leadership at the end of July.

A great deal of the evidence for this debate comes from the recently published introduction to the Deaton review, *Inequalities in the Twenty-first Century*. That includes some close statistics on the problem and will seek to tackle the issues over a further five-year study, so there will be more information to come. Launching the review, Sir Angus Deaton asked a key question:

“There's a real question about whether democratic capitalism is working, when it's only working for part of the population”.

[LORD DUBS]

That is the quote which underlies this debate. If people say that poverty and inequality is a price worth paying, some of us will reject that totally.

There has been an even more critical United Nations report on the impact of austerity on human rights in the UK. It predicts that close to 40% of children will be living in poverty two years from now. I know that the Government have vehemently rejected that report, but it has quite a lot of evidence to sustain it. Another report from a very authoritative source confirms the high levels of child poverty. Professor Russell Viner, president of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, a very reputable body indeed, said:

“The impact of poverty on children can be devastating—not only to their physical health in terms of increased risk of malnutrition, respiratory problems from poor housing and infection—but also their mental health”.

Those impacts are stark. Children living in poverty are more likely to die before the age of one, become overweight, have tooth decay or die in an accident. They are more likely to have poor cognitive, social and behavioural outcomes, and are at greater risk of developing long-term conditions, particularly respiratory conditions, type 2 diabetes, cardiovascular disease and mental health problems. That is a pretty tough indictment of policies that result in child poverty.

In its recently published report, *The State of Child Health: Two Years On*, the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health highlighted its grave concern that no progress has been made towards reducing child poverty and inequality in the UK since the original report, *The State of Child Health*, was published in 2017. The president of the college commented:

“This latest research serves to highlight the importance of tackling poverty if the relatively poor outcomes for child health in the UK are to improve. That means measures such as binding national targets to reduce child poverty backed by a national child poverty strategy, the reversal of cuts to universal credit and the reversal of public health cuts”.

Those are policy points. That is a whole policy agenda coming from an extremely reputable source; I will come on to more ideas about that later.

Meanwhile, millions of people in jobs depend on various forms of charity. We know that there has been an enormous rise in the use of food banks all over the country. Of course, all of us, not only those who arrive here via Westminster Tube station, see rough sleepers in our streets. I always feel deeply shocked and uncomfortable when I see so many people sleeping on our streets and using food banks, and when I see buckets in supermarkets asking people to donate food for the poor.

We have seen a runaway rise in incomes, with those in the richest households almost tripling their salaries in the past four decades. In 2017, pay among FTSE 100 CEOs was, on average, 145 times that of the average worker, compared with just 47 times in 1998. Frankly, 47 times is already a bit excessive, but I do not know how businesses operate when the people at the bottom of the scale realise that the pay of the CEO coming in—although they probably never see him or her; it is usually a him, though—is vast compared with what they get. In addition, real wages are still below the pre-crisis level. In the financial year ending 2018,

the wealthiest fifth of individuals in the UK saw a 4.7% increase in their disposable income, compared with a 1.6% decline for the poorest fifth. That is why I challenge what Margaret Thatcher said many years ago. It had no truth then and has no truth today.

Let me refer to a specific group of people, with whom I have been fairly closely associated, who are doing things for virtually no money: the people volunteering for NGOs working with refugees, especially child refugees, in northern France and Greece, particularly the Greek islands. I have had the privilege of meeting these people. While the newspapers talk about bankers fighting for an extra million or two in their bonus, these people are working for pretty much nothing. They give a year or two of their lives to help and support some of the most vulnerable child refugees. We as a country should be proud that we have such wonderful young people—they are not exclusively from this country, but many of them are British—willing to serve their fellow human beings. Of course, many other people volunteer in our society and do things for their fellow human beings despite the backdrop of the large amounts of money that some people are getting.

Of course, there are other income inequalities, impacting variously on women, the young—with a knock-on effect on their life chances within the housing market—older people, the black and ethnic-minority population, and those with disabilities, with the latter perhaps suffering more than most. We hear a great deal about the gender pay gap, for example.

I want to repeat a proposal that I have made before, which I believe would help significantly: that all tax returns should be in the public domain. Therefore, we would know about incomes and we would be able to see them. This works well in some Scandinavian countries. We would be able to see what people are earning and judge the extent of pay discrimination as it affects women, older people, the black and ethnic-minority population and disability. I should make it clear that when I previously made this proposal, the Government's response was quite unenthusiastic. Nevertheless, I still believe that the day will come when these things will be in the public domain and we shall all know more. It will be better for the whole of society. After all, people know what others earn in the Civil Service and indeed there are various areas of our country where we know what the incomes are and that does not have a damaging effect. Why not put these things into the public domain?

I turn now to housing. It is quite shocking that there are virtually no opportunities for young people to enter the housing market, whether to buy or to rent. Older people managed to buy their homes many years ago and are sitting pretty in houses that have greatly increased in value, while on the other hand there are still too many pensioners who are in dire poverty. However, it seems that we are giving young people very little chance in life. Their incomes are too low to enter the housing market—not just in London and the south-east, although we are particularly aware of this issue locally.

Inequality is not only about income. As the Deaton report makes clear, there is a divergence in life expectancy between deprived and affluent areas in our country and a growing burden of poor mental health among disadvantaged groups. There is also a geographical

divergence between our successful cities and our former industrial towns and coastal areas, a problem which successive Governments have not done enough to tackle.

Danny Dorling, a professor of geography at the University of Oxford, has linked the fall in life expectancy to government policy:

“‘Something began having an influence shortly after 2010’, he said. ‘Older age mortality rose as services for the elderly were massively cut, social services in particular that were aimed to help those living on their own’”.

Let us take one topical example. A male child born in Kensington in Liverpool can now expect to live 18 years less than a child born in Kensington and Chelsea in London. That is a shocking difference and it is not acceptable. How can we live in a country where this goes on?

I know that some people on the other side of the Chamber do not like trade unions, but when we are talking about achieving more equality, trade unions have a significant part to play. The Deaton report said that stronger trade unions can tip power towards employees. In the Nordic countries, between 52% and 86% of all employees belong to a trade union compared to the UK figure of a little over 25%. Having workers on company boards, which is mandatory in Germany, can have a similar effect, curbing inequalities within firms, if not between firms. If workers are given a say in how companies are run, they might help resist downward pressure on wages, press for better working conditions and rein in executive pay at the top.

Inequality cannot be reduced to one dimension, stemming as it does from many forms of privilege and disadvantage. The real question is whether the immorality of increased inequalities in our country is sustainable or whether they should be condemned. I am very much of the latter view, and it is good to see my party bringing forward imaginative and costed solutions which I shall mention very briefly. They include a national transformation fund aimed at rebalancing the economy and a national investment bank with regional arms. I also welcome plans for tackling tax avoidance and evasion, increased corporation tax and a hike in the living wage, with the latter including a more equitable system that benefits younger workers.

As it stands, we on this side of the House are not yet the party of government and a general election may happen later this year, but it could be as far off as the early summer of 2022. I hope, therefore, that the Minister responding to this debate will give some indication of what her party plans to do to reverse the current depressing trends. They are a challenge to us all and to the Government. We have to tackle these problems and I hope that we will do it quickly.

Baroness Goldie (Con): My Lords, we are very tight for time in this important debate, so when the clock shows five minutes I expect the Member to sit down, otherwise I may have to stand up.

11.54 am

Lord Wallace of Saltire (LD): My Lords, I half agree with the Deaton review’s opening declaration that:

“Discussion of inequalities increasingly defines economic and political debate”.

That ought to be one of the central issues of British politics rather than the endless preoccupation with Brexit, sovereignty and making Britain great again, let alone cutting taxes for the rich and cutting services and benefits for the poor, as Boris Johnson is proposing to the apparent delight of Conservative Party members. I noted the article in the *Telegraph* last week by Daniel Hannan MEP, one of the Conservative Party’s leading ideologues. It dismissed the idea of poverty in Britain as being in reality about only inequality, and furthermore argued that inequality is not rising very much and, in any case, does not matter.

Successive analysts of open and democratic societies have argued for centuries that too great a gap between the rich and the poor is incompatible with a peaceful and mutually tolerant national community. The whole idea of a democratic national community requires a shared sense of commitment; a social contract shared by all citizens and between citizens and the state. Too wide a gap between the privileged and the underprivileged, between the very rich and the very poor, undermines this common citizenship. Liberals in the late 19th century and early 20th century invested public finances in state education, pensions and welfare in order to bring the poorest Britons into our national community.

The wildest Chicago School economists have denied the necessity of concessions to democracy in their pursuit of the free market, as we saw in their support for Pinochet’s economic experiments and political repression in Chile. Illiberal democracy offers citizens grievances against foreigners and myths about national history as a distraction, while oligarchs and billionaires use their money to buy influence and distort the political debate. We see illiberal democracy, or populism, played out by rich and privileged men pretending to be men of the people, spreading across the democratic world and now across the Conservative Party in Britain.

I regret that the sometimes intemperate language of Philip Alston’s UN human rights report has allowed the UK Government to dismiss the argument that he makes. It would have been more powerful as a restrained analysis than as the case for the prosecution he has made it. The detailed studies on which it is based, from universities, reputable think tanks and government agencies, are powerful enough on their own. Like the Deaton review, it emphasises the multiple dimensions of poverty and inequality, and the interaction of disadvantages in child care and early years support, education, housing, access to jobs and public transport with low wages and benefits. I welcome the accumulation of data-based studies, including those from the Resolution Foundation and the Social Metrics Commission.

I see inequality and deprivation on the ground in Bradford and West Yorkshire. The most deprived wards in Bradford, whether predominantly ethnic white or Asian, also have the highest rates of crime and violence, the largest number of children growing up in single-parent households, the least access to playing fields and open spaces, and the lowest ranking schools. Last summer, I was driven round a former council estate by one of our local councillors. We saw no representatives of authority—police numbers had been cut and community police teams disbanded—and we saw social housing

[LORD WALLACE OF SALTAIRE]

that had been sold off now rented out for multiple occupancy by private landlords. We saw children who should have been at school playing in the street, and teenagers who looked as if they were dealing drugs. The prospects for social cohesion, let alone social mobility, in such circumstances are dire.

We should also note the regional dimension of inequality in England and welcome the first report of the UK2070 Commission, chaired by the noble Lord, Lord Kerslake. It notes,

“the historic concentration of public investment in London and the wider south-east”,

under successive Governments—Labour, coalition and Conservative—and its link to the concentration of political power in London.

Let us admit that all parties have contributed, over two decades and more, to the problems we now face. However, the Conservatives’ determination to shrink public spending to 35% of national income, against the 40% which was the agreed coalition target, is making economic inequality and social alienation much worse. We could do a great deal to solve such problems with 3% to 5% of our national income, instead of demanding more and more tax cuts for those already well off.

I heard a member of the Cabinet yesterday refer to our “broken social contract”. He is right to use such stark language. If not fixed, a broken social contract will threaten to break our liberal and democratic national community.

Noon

Baroness Stroud (Con): My Lords, I thank my friend, the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, for tabling this important debate. I have huge respect for his work, particularly in the area of refugees.

Whenever the subjects of poverty and inequality are debated in this House, emotions rightly run high. It is for this reason that I founded the Social Metrics Commission—to create robust measurements of poverty to help inform policymakers and provide clear and accurate metrics that all of us, regardless of our political persuasion, can use with confidence to drive improved outcomes for those in poverty. I wanted to bring to an end the battle that has characterised the measurement of poverty and move the debate on to what can be done. I was therefore delighted when the UN special rapporteur chose to use the Social Metrics Commission measure in his final report, and I thank Philip Alston for his recommendation that the metrics be adopted as the UK’s official measure of poverty. Further, I thank the Government for their commitment to taking these new measures forward as experimental stats and look forward to working with them towards them becoming official statistics.

My first point in response to the report is that we need to work together for the sake of building an effective strategy that will change lives. If the work of the Social Metrics Commission taught commissioners anything, it was to believe the best of one another. We had a guiding principle that, wherever we came from politically, we would believe that we all cared about the outcomes for those in poverty. So, while I am delighted that the UN special rapporteur chose to use

the data of the Social Metrics Commission in his report, the tone and accuracy of the report does not match the consensus and accuracy that underpins all that the commission is trying to achieve. If we are to make real progress, we need to believe that we are all committed to the task ahead and that we all want to see that progress.

The second lesson of the commission was to be really careful about what the data is actually saying. The argument that poverty has dramatically increased since the financial crisis cannot be argued from the statistics the UN special rapporteur has chosen to use. It is incorrect to argue from the SMC data that the number of people in poverty has risen since 2008. Despite headlines, in reality the poverty level today is broadly similar to what it was prior to the financial crisis and before austerity policies. What is more, where the HBAI measure showed poverty falling throughout the financial crisis, which always felt counterintuitive, and rising since, the SMC shows that the rate of poverty rose, as one would expect, over the financial crisis, and has remained stable at its pre-financial crisis level. If we want to focus on the real tragedy of the past 20 years, it is that poverty levels have largely been stubbornly consistent, standing between 21% and 24% throughout this period. In fact, the SMC report shows that since 2001, under successive Governments—Labour, the Conservative/Lib Dem coalition and Conservative—while the composition of who is poor may have changed, the number of people in poverty has remained tragically consistent. It is too easy for us in this Chamber and in the other place in debate to say that 200,000 people have moved from one side of the poverty line to the other. However, there are 7.7 million people in persistent poverty who have been so generationally. If we are honest, none of us has really seen the sort of breakthrough here that we long for, and we cannot allow this to be the reality of this generation.

The good news that could have been highlighted is that there are fewer pensioners living in poverty than previously thought. This is a tribute to the hard work done to improve the lives of pensioners over the past two decades by Governments of all colours and shows that concerted policy action can really make a difference. The real value for the UN rapporteur in using the SMC measure would have been to better identify who is in poverty, with a full measurement framework that captures depth, persistence and the lived experience. Much of the inequality that the IFS will focus on in its five-year review is in this space, such as the inequality of mental health outcomes, education outcomes and employment opportunities for those in poverty compared with those who are not, among others. These are among the lived-experience indicators of the SMC measure, and the Deaton review is right to focus here. The UN rapporteur had an opportunity to highlight what has been left out of historical approaches to poverty measurement, particularly disability and full-time work.

12.05 pm

Lord Browne of Ladyton (Lab): My Lords, my noble friend Lord Dubs said in his opening remarks that it was a privilege to open this debate; I am sure

the House will agree that it is always a privilege to listen to him. I pay tribute to him for securing this important debate and for the way in which he introduced it.

I intend to address my remarks to the issue of inequality. The levels of inequality in this country are shameful. The detailed evidence of that is to be found not only in the Deaton review and the research that underpins the special rapporteur's report but, interestingly, in the speech made by the Prime Minister when she took over at No. 10 on 13 July 2016. People can read the detail for themselves, but she made a speech of about 650 words, of which she devoted more than half to describing the challenges she was inheriting from her predecessor, David Cameron; she described him as a "great modern Prime Minister", whose "true legacy" was "about social justice". In contradiction to that description, the country she described in half of her speech was one of burning injustices and inequality, and she restricted herself then to only nine examples; there are many more. I am certain that other noble Lords will deal—and have dealt to a degree—with the evidence in detail. But, in my limited time, I intend to assume that their contributions will comprehensively prove the case for urgent action, as the previous speaker did.

To add to our shame, we know how to deal with these inequalities. I have picked a few solutions at random. On life expectancy, where the disparity between rich and poor is growing, access to healthcare services and education is crucial. Spending on public health has fallen since 2016 and education spending is flatlining. Deprivation is the driver of inequality more broadly, but benefit cuts have continued to be rolled out, and food bank use and homelessness have continued to rise since the summer of 2016. We now have an audit of race disparity in the criminal justice system but, as the deputy director of the race equality think tank the Runnymede Trust said:

"Highlighting the gaps doesn't address the gaps".

We need action, and we have known that we need action for a long time. Social mobility has been virtually stagnant for four years and requires the implementation of at least some of the recommendations of the Social Mobility Commission. On the gender pay gap, women on average still earn 18% less than men; progress is far too slow.

In 2010, we had in place much of the necessary infrastructure to support the programmes needed to address many of these challenges. These public programmes are being pared down, bit by bit. Institutions that protected vulnerable people are being closed, social care services are at breaking point and local government and devolved institutions are stretched far too thinly as more and more responsibility for this is given to them by central government. The social safety net that once provided a guarantee of security against the most extreme level of poverty and deprivation has systematically been eroded to focus austerity on the poorest while giving tax cuts to the privileged few.

In responding to this debate, I hope, as my noble friend Lord Dubs does, that the Minister will engage with these and other solutions, and confirm that a Government still led by a Prime Minister who promised to make a country that works,

"not for a privileged few, but for every one of us",

will increase investment in them. Why is it that the Chancellor's £26 billion reserve, taken from the poor by austerity, is being referred to as a "Brexit war chest"? I have to say to the Minister that I fear disappointment, but I caution her to avoid the responses her colleagues have deployed against the increasing evidence of inequality. She should avoid the Chancellor's inclination to deny the existence of the scale of poverty and inequality; apparently, he does not see it, yet, as my noble friend and the noble Lord, Lord Wallace of Saltaire, pointed out, the evidence on the streets of the communities that we live in is there for us all to see.

Secondly, I welcome the increase in employment, but it is not a panacea for poverty. A shocking 2.8 million people are in poverty who are in families where all the adults are working, and one in six food bank users is working. In particular, will the Minister avoid the response deployed by the Prime Minister at PMQs on 22 May? When faced with the evidence of inequality set against the obscenity that the wealth of the 1,000 richest people had increased by £50 billion in the preceding 12 months, she stated that in every year under the Conservatives the richest had paid more tax. Does she not realise that this response provides evidence of growing inequality, not the opposite? Is she proud of the fact that the richest have increasingly monopolised both the wealth and the income of this country?

12.10 pm

Lord Farmer (Con): My Lords, I too congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, on securing this important debate, which gives us the opportunity to welcome among other things the Deaton review of inequalities.

Sir Angus promises that he and his expert panel will think about inequalities broadly, determine the right mix of policies to tackle them and not be confined to traditional economic measures of income and wealth. Unusually for this country, the review will also explore how family structures drive inequalities. I suspect that this is due largely to the fact that Deaton's academic career was forged in the United States, where academics and respected commentators are able to study and discuss family structure in a way that problematises family breakdown instead of simply accepting it.

Rightly, the IFS introduction to the review describes family as one of the most important aspects of life. Yet the UK Government and academic research community seem remarkably unconcerned that about one in six children—a significant proportion—is born into a household with no father present. This is a considerably higher proportion than in most of Europe and is heavily concentrated among those with less income and education. At least four in five of these children will live in a poor household while they are very young. Almost one-third of their mothers have no educational qualifications.

The Deaton review has promised to determine how living in fractured family settings affects economic, social, emotional and health outcomes for the children and adults involved, and the long-term ramifications. The panel has much existing work to draw from: since 2006 the Centre for Social Justice has been calling out

[LORD FARMER]

the relationship between family breakdown and poverty and has had the courage to say that we can and must do something to try to prevent family breakdown.

The centre's most recent research, which controlled for factors such as socioeconomic grade and ethnicity, found that those who experience family breakdown in their childhood or youth are more than twice as likely to experience homelessness, to be in trouble with the police or to spend time in prison. They are almost twice as likely to experience educational underachievement and not raise their own children with the other parent—in other words, repeating the cycle that their own parents went through. They are close to twice as likely to experience alcoholism, teen pregnancy and mental health issues, and 1.6 times as likely to be in debt and on benefits.

This is not rocket science. Indeed, it is blatantly obvious to more than 80% of British adults, who say that stronger families are important in addressing Britain's social problems—as do an almost identical percentage of divorced people. Does the Minister agree that politicians do not need an unblemished track record in their own family matters to recognise this urgent issue and to do something about it? I am not, of course, thinking about anyone in particular who has—shall we say?—a particularly colourful family life.

Deaton and his team have promised to look at whether growing rates of parental separation and single parenthood are due to changes in either cultural or social norms or to a cluster of disadvantages such as a decline in good working-class jobs and secure incomes—or to some combination of the two. His open-mindedness in the area of underlying causes is to be applauded, as is his willingness to open up the subject of family structure to much-needed scrutiny in the UK policy and research context. I trust that Professor Deaton will follow through and give this neglected driver of inequality the urgent attention it deserves.

12.14 pm

Baroness Thomas of Winchester (LD): My Lords, the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, has helpfully defined what particular inequalities he is focusing on: income, wealth and living standards. It is well known that families with a disabled person are among the poorest in the UK. I am glad that the Government have now accepted the Social Metrics Commission's definition, with its figure of 6.9 million people who are in families where a person has a disability. That person is more likely to be unemployed or in insecure employment and to have been hardest hit by austerity measures. The Equality and Human Rights Commission published a report last year which criticised how the benefits system operates for disabled people, particularly vulnerable claimants who have experienced difficulties with UC, PIP assessments and the benefits sanctions regime, which, it says, have had no tangible positive effect on moving disabled people closer to paid work.

As we have heard, the Government have dismissed the highly critical report of the UN special rapporteur by saying, roughly, "How dare he?" Yet disabled people told him repeatedly about benefit assessments that were,

"superficial, dismissive, and contradicted the advice of their doctor".

The report goes on to say, tellingly:

"Those with disabilities are also highly vulnerable to cuts in local government services, particularly within social care, which has left them shouldering more of the costs of their care. This has driven many families with a person with a disability to breaking point".

The Deaton report must surely look at problems faced by disabled people and their families, because the figures are stark. The charity Scope says that disabled people face extra costs of between £583 and £1,000 a month. A particularly large amount goes on energy costs.

In the limited time available, I want to turn to what the Government could do to help disabled people in the benefits system, which is an absolute lifeline for them. First, the implementation of universal credit is sadly and unnecessarily turning into a nightmare for many people. There are reports from all over the country of how it is not helping vulnerable claimants. Even in relatively prosperous places such as Winchester, I hear from Citizens Advice about a lack of care and flexibility in how such claimants are dealt with. This apparent heartlessness would not be imposed by the staff unless it was built into the whole system.

MPs' postbags and CAB caseloads are full most of all with problems with PIP. Here is a typical example. A constituent of my MP colleague has heavy callipers on her legs due to a congenital hip condition and has had a Motability car for some years. However, on reassessment, she was told that, as she is able to drive, she must be able to walk, so she was refused enough points for the car. When the MP intervened, the car was restored, but just for two years,

"in case your legs get better".

This level of ignorance is unforgivable, but it is not unique.

Citizens Advice in Mole Valley, Surrey, is particularly concerned about mandatory reconsideration, meaning that decision-makers have to examine a claim before a possible appeal. This is still far too much of a rubber-stamping exercise. At the end of January 2019, 81% of new claims and 76% of reassessment decisions reviewed at MR were overturned on appeal. Clearly, therefore, it is not working. It causes delays, stress to claimants and is confusing and poorly understood. Some 73% of cases are overturned by tribunals. We clearly need an assessment of the cumulative impact of welfare policies on disabled people and a levelling of the playing field.

12.19 pm

Lord Ravensdale (CB) (Maiden Speech): My Lords, it is a great honour to address your Lordships' House for the first time, after some weeks of observing and learning. In one of my first, very hesitant forays into the Chamber, I was told by one of the doorkeepers, "You are a Peer of the realm, my Lord. You should bowl in there like you own the place". I hope I am now entering somewhat more confidently—if not quite "bowling in" yet—but what hits me still as I enter this amazing place are the echoes of history and the many great things that have been achieved and accomplished within these walls.

I thank noble Lords from across the House and all the officials and staff for the very warm welcome that I have received. In particular, I thank the noble Earl,

Lord Cork and Orrery, and the noble Lord, Lord Vaux of Harrowden, for all the help that they have given me in settling into the House. It has been a rather daunting but incredible experience.

I will tell noble Lords a bit about myself. I am a chartered engineer; I work for an engineering consultancy firm in Derby with a particular focus on nuclear energy. I am a project director and technical lead, leading teams to deliver aspects of the nuclear steam-raising plant for the Royal Navy fleet and deterrent submarines. I am very proud to work on these critical national programmes. I look forward to bringing my experience in engineering, defence and energy to the work of the House.

Turning to the subject before us, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, for initiating this vital debate on a matter that I am passionate about. Arguably, there is no more pressing issue in our society today than the inequalities that exist and the means of addressing them. When we look at all the upheavals in western society over the past decade—Brexit, the gilets jaunes, Trump—all of these can be traced back to the tear that is emerging in our societies between the haves and the have-nots. In the spirit of maiden speeches remaining relatively uncontroversial, I will keep my remarks much more general and measured than they might otherwise have been and avoid, I hope, provoking too much outrage.

Today, I will focus specifically on the effects that globalisation has had on inequality in the UK and the regions. In this, we must not lose sight of one central fact: when viewed at a global level, income inequality has continually reduced over the past three decades, principally brought about by the lifting of millions—if not billions—out of poverty in India and China. More than anything else, this shows the immense power of capitalism and globalisation to transform lives for the better and transform the world for the better.

There are, however, dark sides to this. One is the effect that globalisation has had on many workers in the West, including in many sectors of the UK. Too often, globalisation is presented by politicians and economists as an unalloyed good, when in fact it has caused huge disruption, many job losses and wage reductions in many sectors of western economies, including that of the UK. It is those at the lower end of the income scale who have suffered most from this. What, therefore, should be done? We should not abandon free trade, raise tariff barriers or protect failing national industries. What we really need is a globalisation that works for all in the economy. I will raise several points here.

First, public discussion must be much more open, as there are costs as well as benefits to globalisation. Secondly, training and reskilling the workforce is going to become ever more important as changing global markets continue to affect old industries. Thirdly, there needs to be much more of a focus on areas outside the metropolis. The Deaton report makes it clear that London has experienced much higher growth than other regions—as mentioned by the noble Lord, Lord Wallace—such as the Midlands, where I am from, and the north. This is partly due to the hollowing out of old industries. Much more must be done to encourage

clusters of new industries to be set up outside the capital and to renew the infrastructure in those places. That is why initiatives such as the northern powerhouse and the Midlands engine are so important. They must get the focus they deserve.

I finish with a question for the Minister: can she assure us that renewed focus will be given to revitalising areas outside the capital and, importantly, that the Midlands will not be excluded from these initiatives? With interest rates at record lows, the Government should seize the opportunity.

12.25 pm

The Earl of Listowel (CB): My Lords, it is a signal honour to follow my noble friend Lord Ravensdale's excellent maiden speech. He lives in the Midlands and his wife is a secondary school teacher in, I think, an inner-city school. He is an engineer and an expert in nuclear physics. His experience and expertise will clearly be invaluable to your Lordships' House. I am sure your Lordships will join me in hoping that we might have many future occasions to hear him take part in our debates and discussions.

I also join in thanking the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, for calling this important and timely debate. I am reminded of the work that the Labour Government did in introducing Sure Start and Every Child Matters—very important measures to improve the life chances of our vulnerable children. The noble Lord referred to the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health's briefing, which is very important. It highlights that two years ago the rates of child infant mortality began to rise in this country. For a second successive year, the rates of childhood mortality have been rising after 100 years of decline.

I will speak briefly about housing. I pay tribute to the Prime Minister for her statement of commitment to “just managing” families, particularly her bravery in speaking to her party about the need for social housing. I especially welcome the lifting of the restriction on local authorities borrowing to build social housing. Some 130,000 children in this country, many of them young children, are living with their parents in bed-and-breakfast and hostel accommodation, and in houses in multiple occupation, as has been described—the highest level since 2003. I hope that, whatever changes take place in the next months, the Prime Minister's commitment to social housing will be carried through. I turn to the Government's Back Benches for support in doing that.

On inequality, the royal college highlights that, compared with similar nations, we have higher rates of infant mortality, lower rates of breastfeeding and higher rates of child obesity. Information from the charity Best Beginnings highlights that if you are from a black or minority ethnic community you are 80% more likely to die in infancy than if you are not. Much of this, as the briefing highlights, arises from poverty.

I join in the call from the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, to think again about the cuts in welfare. I especially emphasise the introduction of the cuts to benefits for people who have more than two children. This results in a cut in their incomes for each additional child of I think £2,850 per year. This is most harmful. I cannot

[THE EARL OF LISTOWEL]

think of any other country that does this—maybe a few states in the United States do. This really needs to be rolled back.

I emphasise the need to care better for our caring professionals. As a parliamentary officer of the children's group, I have seen that the cuts have resulted in the wholesale reduction of early intervention to support families. There are great initiatives such as the Government's troubled families programme, but underlying all this are huge cuts to the early intervention that stops children and families falling into disrepair. Professionals—particularly social workers, but also those working in schools—are having to field families and children who are more and more troubled and disturbed.

We need to recommit, particularly to health visitors, a crucial group of professionals. I have visited with health visitors on several occasions over the last 20 years and have seen that they can get into houses when a child is very young, giving excellent advice to parents and helping those children and families get to children's centres and other settings. However, one in four health visitors has been lost recently. In some areas, only 10% of health visitors can make those early visits at eight weeks. In others, that figure is 90%.

I visited a Leatherhead clinic recently. Speaking to health visitors, I hear the pressure they are under, but all professionals in this area need additional support. I ask the Minister if she can look at what can be done to support health visitors. I look forward to hearing from her; perhaps she might write to me on what will be done about this very important matter. I join in lamenting the situation we are currently in. It will require work from all sides to make good the harm that has come to our most vulnerable families in recent years.

12.30 pm

Lord Hain (Lab): My Lords, I strongly agree with the excellent points made by the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, on globalisation. I share his passion for engineering. In fact, I started studying engineering and then switched to political science and economics. It has been downhill for me ever since.

The report by the UN special rapporteur and the launch of the Deaton review should have been warning shots across the bow of the ship of state, demanding a radical change of course. The new annual report into living standards, poverty and inequality from the Institute for Fiscal Studies will, I am sure, be another volley in the same vein. However, so far, the only response from the Government has been to sound “steady as she goes” and plough on.

Ministers are in denial. They refuse to admit the stark reality of deprivation in Britain today, and they reject any responsibility for making it worse through their austerity policy. Two facts stand out: one charting the startling spread of dire need, the other showing how years of austerity have forced local authorities to take desperate measures to the detriment of their communities.

First, consider the number of food banks in the UK run by the Trussell Trust. There were 80 in 2011 and 400 in 2013. Today, there are more than 1,200—that is

just those run by the Trussell Trust. Seven years ago, a third of a million people received at least three days' emergency food from the Trussell Trust food banks. Last year, that figure reached a record level of 1.6 million. This is incontrovertible evidence of a land haunted by hunger, yet the Chancellor denies that vast numbers of people face dire poverty in Britain today. It is obvious that, sadly, he and his Cabinet colleagues have not got a clue about the misery experienced by millions of families and individuals, many of whom are in work.

My second fact speaks for itself. Since 2010, more than 700 council football pitches have been lost due to council funding being slashed. This is in addition to the sell-off of school playing fields. We keep hearing that exercise is the nearest thing to a magic bullet for promoting health and improved opportunity, but government cuts are undermining the very ground on which we stand, walk and run. In a sane world, Tory leadership candidates would now be unveiling plans for reducing poverty and inequality, but Brexit fever has them in its grasp, so poverty and inequality have played no part.

The Chancellor claims that the UK has started its journey out of austerity, but the fiscal squeeze that George Osborne used to boast about is set to continue remorselessly. The Office for Budget Responsibility has confirmed that the 10-year Tory budget cuts remain in place, a fiscal squeeze that will have taken over £150 billion of spending out of the economy in tax rises and public spending cuts by 2020. This squeeze has led the economy to grow more slowly than in the previous year for four consecutive years, with no improvement in prospect, entrenching massive inequality. The gap between rich and poor is now greater than ever before, in modern times at least.

To my astonishment, I recently read in the *Times* and the *Financial Times* that a Tory think tank called Onward had called for the next Tory leader to spend nearly £200 billion more over the next four years, by bringing national debt down more slowly. The author, Tory MP Neil O'Brien, a former adviser to George Osborne, said,

“it's time to turn on all the taps and make sure that poorer families and poorer areas really feel the benefit of a growing economy”.

Those words deserve to be taken seriously but they are being lost in the Tory leadership contest, where everything, including poverty and inequality, plays second fiddle to Brexit or to unaffordable, opportunistic tax cuts for the well-off. Those will simply widen inequality, all the time deepening the Government's scandalous indifference to the shocking crisis in elderly care and affordable housing.

12.35 pm

Baroness Finn (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, on securing this hugely important debate and for his commitment and hard work over very many years, especially on behalf of refugees. I also congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, on his excellent and insightful maiden speech.

This is an enormously broad debate and we have only a few minutes, so I will limit my remarks to the review that Sir Angus Deaton is undertaking for the IFS.

This helpful and serious review will enable us to examine exactly where we face challenges of inequality and what might be done to ensure that everyone has the same opportunity. Inequality, perhaps even more than poverty, is a very politically charged topic. The idea of people being left behind—whether that is the poorest being left behind by the wealthy, the older generation left behind by the younger, women left behind men or people left behind due to a lack of education—is, understandably and rightly, of huge concern to us as a nation. The idea that inequality may be increasing, and that people may be slipping further and further behind, has rightly been the subject of debate in this place and further afield.

However, there are some facts within the Angus Deaton review that it is helpful to highlight in this debate. First, inequality as measured by the Gini coefficient has remained broadly unchanged since the early 1990s. Despite the conversations happening around inequality, in reality the Gini coefficient, which is most usually used to measure inequality, has remained broadly unchanged since the early 1990s. If we look at a 90:10 ratio, measuring the people at the top of the income field next to those at the bottom, inequality has actually fallen from the early 1990s. Household incomes are more evenly distributed across society than they were in the 1990s. Far from the story of dramatic increases, inequality has actually stayed flat.

Secondly, according to the IFS, overall income inequality has remained stable, as incomes have been topped up by the Government. If we hone in on just incomes, the story is interesting. It is true that there has been a rise in incomes in the top households, with the average high-earning household earning around 40% more than it did in the 1990s, compared to stagnation in the lowest-earning households and smaller uplifts in the middle. The salaries of FTSE 100 CEOs are now a staggering 145 times the salary of an average worker, compared with 47 times higher in 1998. However, due to government policy, for example by expanding tax credits in the 1990s, overall income inequality has remained stable, as incomes have been topped up by the Government. After taxes and benefits, household incomes across the distribution have kept pace, and the poverty rate has remained stable since the late 1990s. However, we all know that money earned from work comes with dignity and security, and that people care about where that money comes from. This is why providing a true living wage to ensure that work really provides for families is key.

It is worth shining a light on other areas where inequality is playing a role in people's lives. One such example is where those on lower incomes experience higher levels of family breakdown. Some 16% of children in the UK are born into households with no father; we know that this has significant impacts on poverty, with single families experiencing a much higher rate of poverty than two-parent households, and on the stability of children's lives, which can trap people in a cycle of generational poverty. Policies which support families and ensure that this support is at the heart of government thinking will potentially make a huge difference to how the next generation grows up.

The Deaton review will provide a fascinating insight into the nature of inequality in today's society. In terms of income inequality and the structure of society, the picture has remained very flat. However, it is vital to understand and unpack fully the social issues related to inequality and the lived experience of poverty and inequality. Only by doing so properly can we ensure policy interventions are able to target most effectively the places where they can make a real difference.

12.39 pm

Baroness Young of Old Scone (Lab): My Lords, I first congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, on his maiden speech. Although I cannot support the electoral method by which he has arrived with us in the Lords, I am pleased he is here, because he is young and we are all too old. We need to hear more younger voices in this House.

It is futile to argue about the conflicting statistics on whether inequality and poverty are getting worse or better. The reality is that more than 20% of people in this country suffer grinding poverty every day. They suffer anxiety about money and work, and endure real impacts on their health and that of their children. The burden falls most on children and the disabled, and those in regions where real unemployment is highest or the available jobs are low paid.

Most of us can have no concept of what it is to deal with daily grinding poverty. I lived and was brought up in a basic working-class Scottish rural household, and we did not have much money. But in my teens I read Walter Greenwood's novel *Love on the Dole*, which absolutely makes real the degrading effects of poverty on individuals, families and communities. It had a profound impact on me, opening my eyes to the horrors of real poverty. So I was very pleased to see the debate in the name of my noble friend Lord Dubs, as it gives us the opportunity to explore something that, for the last couple of years, I simply could not understand: why, when we allegedly have the lowest levels of unemployment for 45 years, is the Trussell Trust reporting that food bank use has increased by 75% over the last five years, and has reached 1.6 million visits annually to March 2019? Other noble Lords have highlighted this. I could not get these conflicting statistics to compute.

The growth of food bank use in this country is frankly unacceptable for an advanced economy, but the employment statistics also need to be challenged. They ignore the 750,000 people on zero-hours contracts, which count as work but, in many cases, do not provide an adequate income and lack job security. They may suit some people, but only some. A Sheffield Hallam University report has also identified that an additional 1 million people do not appear in the unemployment figures, as they are hidden in the weakest economies or parked on incapacity benefits, and that the real rate of unemployment could be higher than at any time since 1997. Please can the Government stop telling us that the unemployment figures show us that we have never had it so good? Can we have more transparency about what actually constitutes employment and whether it really brings people out of poverty? The Resolution Foundation has reported that, "the majority of people in poverty now live in a household in which someone works".

[BARONESS YOUNG OF OLD SCONE]

Can the Minister assure us that the Government accept that poverty and inequality are not being adequately addressed? We do not want a response that is a war of competing statistics; we want a recognition that long-term poverty exists and needs tackling. Can the Minister assure us that benefit payments need to reflect the true cost of living and that the flaws in universal credit, such as the five-week wait, the two-child limit, the freeze on child payments and the advance loan system need to be fixed? Will the Minister assure us that work needs to be secure and genuinely reflect a living wage; that genuinely affordable housing—not the Mickey Mouse definition, which is far from affordable for people on low incomes—would help; and that the programme of work on regional disparities needs to be addressed with more vigour? I hope the Minister can satisfy the House on these issues.

I hope the Minister will also take this opportunity to dissociate herself from the appalling announcements by candidates for the Tory party leadership. I looked at the work of the Resolution Foundation—not exactly a left-wing, Trotskyist organisation—which has calculated that 83% of Boris's tax reductions for people earning over £50,000 a year would accrue to the richest 10%, particularly to richer pensioners such as me. I do not want this tax cut; I want it to go to people living in genuine poverty. The announcements that are part of this campaign do not give confidence that the Conservative Party is intent on tackling the crying shame of poverty and inequality in this country. I hope the Minister can reverse that impression.

12.45 pm

Lord Adonis (Lab): My Lords, a bedrock of modern civic equalities is good-quality public services. The recent development doing most to sap the bonds that tie us together as a national community is the declining quality of our public services, which have been reducing in quality for the first time in a generation. Reversing that, in practical terms, service by service, should be the work of Ministers and Governments over the period ahead. I hope the Minister can give the House some practical, concrete instances of what the Government will do to turn back the impact of austerity policies since 2010. It is no good willing the ends without willing the means. Looked at public service by public service, there have been sustained and serious cuts in quality.

One thing I am proudest of the previous Labour Government for doing is substantially increasing spending on state education, including real-terms, year-on-year, per-pupil increases and a significant increase in school capital spending. Unless pupils have decent quality buildings to be educated in, they will not get a decent education. The noble Earl, Lord Listowel, rightly referred to Sure Start, nurseries and centres for under-fives. These have been systematically closed and cut back since 2010 and that simply needs to be reversed. It is not warm words that we need from Ministers, but concrete policies to bring back Sure Start centres, open under-fives centres that have been closed, reverse the cuts in the school capital programme and have year-on-year increases in per-student funding. Average

fees at the school which the next Prime Minister may well come from are £39,000 a year, while we have seen year-on-year cuts in the real-terms funding for students attending state schools.

The figures speak for themselves. Total spending per pupil in English state schools, at this year's prices, has been reduced by £500 in the last eight years from £6,378 to £5,872. The school capital programme, which 10 years ago was driving the Building Schools for the Future programme, aiming to rebuild or modernise every secondary school in the country and all primary schools that were short of places, has fallen from £8.8 billion in the last year of the Labour Government to £5.2 billion this year—a 41% drop. As the noble Earl said, the number of Sure Start centres has been dramatically slashed. Large parts of the country have no under-fives service whatever. One of the greatest cross-party achievements over the past 25 years was regarding services for under-fives as every bit as much a part of the education system as conventional schools.

Closures of GP surgeries are reaching an alarming level. The number of GPs per 100,000 people shrank last year, for the first time since the 1960s, after 40 years of sustained increases. Last year, 138 doctors' surgeries closed—a record number in recent decades. The inequity in life chances and opportunities between students who go to university at the age of 18 and those who go into apprenticeships has been a long-running problem in our society. That, too, has got worse over the past 10 years. Funding for universities has been protected, albeit through increases in fees, while the number of apprenticeships has dramatically fallen. Last year, the number of apprenticeship starts, at 375,000, was 26% lower than three years before. Despite the introduction of an apprenticeship levy, the actual number of apprenticeships has fallen dramatically.

Public transport in local communities, so vital to the life chances of poorer people in particular, has suffered really serious cuts in the last 10 years, particularly to bus networks. For young people seeking to establish themselves in local communities up and down the country, bus services matter more than anything. Local bus fares have increased in real terms by 36% over the last 13 years and many services have got worse. They have worsened everywhere except London, which started with the best services and has managed to maintain them.

Libraries are dear to the hearts of many noble Lords. The level of library closures has been scandalous: 737 have closed since 2010 and over 500 more are kept open only by volunteers. Warm words are not enough. Unless we systematically reverse these cuts in public services—with a real-terms increase in education spending, an end to cuts in GP surgeries, a cap on bus fares outside London and guarantees, which I think must come through new regulations, that services will not be cut—inequality will get steadily worse in our society.

12.50 pm

Lord Freeman (Con): My Lords I am very pleased to follow the noble Lord, Lord Adonis, particularly his remarks about transport. He and I have a lot in common in our support, and the relevance of transport to this debate is well accepted. I congratulate the noble

Lord, Lord Dubs, on initiating this debate. It has been very important so far, and the quality of the debate and the quality of advice have been much appreciated.

I want to comment briefly on inequities in the United Kingdom, which are often inherited. It is the duty of any politician—anyone speaking in public—to address that inequality. We should be encouraging our young people, in particular, to aim for the stars and not be put off or offended by what they see as the difficulty of making progress in their careers or in their education. The first concern is: are families discharging their duties properly, encouraging their children to go for proper qualifications, whether at school, university or in experience in public life, so that they can make a real contribution to society and ensure that their contribution is listened to properly? Families have a real responsibility in making sure that inherited disabilities, in terms of promotion, property and education, are diminished.

Secondly, schoolteachers have a specific responsibility. We must encourage teachers to identify which of the children under their guidance are likely to be discouraged simply because of inherited perceived disadvantage. Thirdly, individuals like us sometimes do not applaud enough the achievements made by our children, our grandchildren and others we know, to ensure that discrimination in terms of promotion and achievement in life are nullified. We as individuals have a real responsibility to encourage ambition and make sure that there are few roadblocks to a successful career.

Role models have a real responsibility, certainly on television. They must lead in guidance and example to children, those in education and those in employment so they are determined to make a success of themselves and provide leading models to society.

Finally, we parliamentarians have an especially great responsibility. I am glad that in your Lordships' House we see schoolchildren regularly enjoying visits to Parliament. That is one way of making sure that we can do something about inherited inequities—we do not want schoolchildren in particular to think that your Lordships' House and those in authority somehow have an unnecessary advantage and domination over their lives. I very much welcome those in the Galleries, not only in your Lordships' House but also in the other place, listening to this debate. I hope they will gain something from it and be reassured that we as a House are absolutely determined to make sure that inherited disadvantages are put behind us.

12.55 pm

Baroness Bryan of Partick (Lab): My Lords, I sincerely thank my noble friend Lord Dubs for enabling this debate, which tackles a burning issue that is not getting enough attention due to the current political climate. As he said, there is so much to say on this issue that it is necessary to concentrate on just one thing.

The Deaton review refers to the gap in life expectancy between affluent and deprived areas. This gap has widened significantly over the last 15 years. In 2001, women born in the most affluent areas lived on average 6.1 years longer than women born in the most deprived areas. In 2016, this gap had grown to 7.9 years.

My own home city of Glasgow has the unenviable reputation of having the lowest life expectancy for men in the UK, but it is not just cities versus suburbs. In East Dunbartonshire, an affluent suburb, women have the longest life expectancy in Scotland. Right next door in West Dunbartonshire, which includes areas of deprivation, they have the lowest. Until recently, we could at least say that, while there was still a gap, most people of all backgrounds were living longer, but these improvements have stalled and for the first time in 35 years we are seeing some reverse.

This information on the differences in life expectancy is not new. The issue of socially and economically determined health inequalities has been on the agendas of different Governments for decades. Resources have been put into tackling smoking, poor diet and lack of exercise, but the gap continues to widen.

The Deaton review also refers to deaths relating to drugs, suicide and alcohol. He uses the term “deaths of despair”. This type of death has been rising in the UK and affecting people in middle age. While deaths from cancer and heart disease fell among men and women aged between 45 and 55, deaths from despair increased. Add to that the incidents of mental illness. The joint strategic needs assessment publication in August 2017 pointed out that:

“Stable and rewarding employment is a protective factor for mental health and can be a vital element of recovery from mental health problems. Unemployment and unstable employment are risk factors for mental health problems”.

The trade union leader Jimmy Reid, who is still held in great esteem in Scotland, used his inaugural speech as rector of Glasgow University to describe:

“The feeling of despair and hopelessness that pervades people who feel with justification that they have no real say in shaping ... their own destinies”.

The lack of skilled, well-paid and permanent jobs and the nightmare of surviving on disability or jobseeker's allowance have contributed to deaths of despair.

Does the Minister accept that austerity has contributed to increasing the gap in life expectancy, and does she agree that it is misleading for the Government to claim success in job creation if someone is going into a job that is precarious, low-paid and lacking dignity and could ultimately end in a death of despair?

1 pm

Lord Liddle (Lab): My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend Lady Bryan on her speech. Although we come from different Labour traditions, on this issue we share common aims and values. I also thank my noble friend Lord Dubs for introducing this debate. He is one of my heroes: not only do I aspire to his longevity, I aspire to remain as committed to politics and helping to improve people's lives as he continues to do in the second half of his 80s. I also congratulate the Cross-Bench contributions of the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, in an excellent maiden speech, and the noble Earl, Lord Listowel, who always makes a moving contribution in this House.

We have had a lot of analysis and a lot of numbers. I should like to focus on some things that ought to be done, rather like my noble friend Lord Adonis, who talked about public services.

[LORD LIDDLE]

First, the Government must reverse the cuts to benefits for children and disability payments which have occurred under universal credit. There is nothing wrong in principle with the idea of universal credit, but the fact that for working-age people benefits have been held below inflation, while my benefits as a pensioner have continued to rise above inflation, is a scandal and must be reversed. This should be a top priority for any Government of any colour. Secondly, we must look at our system of taxation of property and wealth. Council tax is unfair. It does not tax property in an egalitarian way and we need to look at the taxation of wealth as a whole because of the enormous inflation in wealth that has occurred, partly as a result of quantitative easing. We must have new systems of tax to pay for the improvements in public services of which my noble friend Lord Adonis spoke. Thirdly, we must tackle the scandal of executive remuneration. There is a lot of talk about this. Business says that it wants to act, but we need radical corporate governance reform to deal with this problem, about which there has been far too much talk and far too little action.

Most importantly, we must recognise that the noble Lord, Lord Kerslake, who is not in his place today, chaired the UK2070 Commission, which has done an excellent analysis of the flaws in the economic model in the United Kingdom and what is contributing to poverty and inequality in our country. The driving force of this, in my view, is the problem of regional inequality and the disparities that it causes. In the past 10 years, the rate of growth in London has been 3%; the rate of growth in the north has been 1%. If this continues, we will have a very divided country indeed. It results in impossible pressures. Young people who are on lower wages than they were in London are forced to pay very high rents to live and do their jobs here. Their incomes after housing costs present a real problem. Obviously there must be radical reform of the housing market.

In terms of action on the north and the regions, part of the answer is infrastructure investment, which has been mentioned, and part is trying to move out of London some of the sources of energy in our economy in culture, research, enterprise and innovation. A crucial point is that made by my noble friend Lord Adonis about education. Now, 60% of children in London have a chance of going to university. In my county, it is 30% to 35%. We must establish a political consensus that those problems need tackling, and I fear that I do not see that happening in the Conservative Party at the moment.

1.05 pm

Lord Davies of Stamford (Lab): My Lords, I add my congratulations to my noble friend Lord Dubs. He always thinks very carefully before he takes any initiative in this Chamber and regularly brings to our attention some of the moral issues which lie behind the decisions we take and the work that the Government do. That is an extremely valuable contribution, as was his speech today. I agree with an awful lot of what he said, not least what is in my view the moral obloquy of cutting

taxes at a time when we are reducing spending on vital public services such as social care, the NHS and, as my noble friend Lord Adonis just explained, education.

It is important to be rigorous in a debate such as this, and we must distinguish clearly between the two subjects of inequality and poverty, which too easily get mixed up. They are in fact very different concepts and can well contradict each other, or there can be trade-offs between them. A policy designed to cut inequality may well produce more poverty. For example, tax rises may have that effect. On the other hand, a policy designed to reduce poverty—for example, tax cuts—may actually increase inequality. One must be careful what one is doing here.

The second proposition I put to the House is that there is no way in which you can intervene directly on inequality. It would be a nice idea if you could, but actually you cannot. You cannot have the state laying down people's income or how much capital they should be allowed to possess. I do not think anyone is seriously suggesting such a thing. You could of course introduce something like a Cuban revolution, or a Chinese revolution, when people appeared to become more equal but at the expense of starvation. I do not think anyone is likely to be tempted by that approach.

Equally, you cannot increase levels of taxation unreasonably, because people will just go abroad—they will disappear and take their businesses with them. My eldest son, who is the only member of my family who pays tax at a 50% marginal rate, tells me that there is something very psychological about that rate. His employers are very keen for him to relocate to the United States and he would gain considerably from doing that. He does not want to do that, but he feels—and he speaks for a lot of people, because he has contemporaries who are similarly fortunate in their incomes—that people have a psychological barrier about 50% and if you go beyond that, you get some very counter-productive effects. One must be very careful about not making that sort of elementary mistake.

The fact that you cannot really deal with inequality directly is perhaps not so tragic, because I do not think that inequality is anything like as important as poverty. Some people will immediately think that that is just my personal normative preference. I hope that I can persuade the House that it is rather more than that; that it is rather more objective.

The fact is that if most human beings were as concerned—let alone more concerned—about where they stood in a relative table of income and wealth as they are about the absolute purchasing power and wealth they enjoy, they would logically be as satisfied with the thought that some wealth or income had been taken away from somebody else as they would be by knowing that they were themselves going to be made richer in absolute terms. That is such an absolute absurdity that I do not think anyone would seriously contemplate the idea. It would also be a threat to the whole concept of human rationality, so I do not think that we need fear saying that it is poverty, or the reciprocal of poverty—wealth, the purchasing power of individuals—that concerns people most. Nobody cares very much if someone else has a Lamborghini,

but I do not think I speak only for myself when I say that I would be very upset if someone took away my modest motor car. I have absolutely no desire whatever to have a Lamborghini; I would not know what to do with it if I did.

Pursuing that view, we must maximise growth and therefore be more able in future to deal with the demands of both our public services and our private aspirations. If we do that, we will almost certainly increase inequality. That has always been the case. There is a sound economic reason for that: growth requires investment, which requires taking risks—some of which are very high—but no one will take those risks unless commensurate rewards, which can be very high, are available. So, in a period of successful growth, people become disproportionately rich. That has been the case throughout the economic history of the world. Of course, it is equally true in India or China as it is here or in the United States. We just have to live with that.

In those circumstances, the best policies that we can pursue are the indirect ones. I agree totally with my noble friend Lord Dubs about transparency, workers' directives and publishing individuals' income and tax statements. I believe very much in workers' directives being on the remuneration committee agenda in public companies. Private companies and private equity firms should take the same responsibility for disclosing their profit and loss account, cash flow and balance sheet. Moreover, we should continue in line with the Labour Party's glorious record—such as on education—especially in passing the Equality Act, which made life so much easier for people. Last week's news that 60% of Oxford and Cambridge entrants now come from state schools is a return on the investment we made 10 years ago.

1.11 pm

Baroness Verma (Con): My Lords, I start by thanking the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, for securing this incredibly important debate. As he and other noble Lords have said, this issue is incredibly complex. Inequalities come in all shapes and sizes.

I want to focus on something that brought this issue home to me. During the recent mayoral elections in Leicester, I came across a large part of my city's population that cannot read and write in English or speak it. For that very reason, they are unable to engage some of the services that may be available to them. I saw this predominantly among communities where women, in particular, were at home and did not know what social care or healthcare they could access. It was really worrying. Today, in the 21st century, every single person in this country should be able to communicate for themselves if they require something so that they can engage socially or communicate if they fear something. Coming across a large population of such people in my home city worried me.

Next Saturday, my mother will celebrate her 80th birthday. She has been in this country for nearly 60 years; she came here when I was a baby of nine months, so work that one out. She was determined to be part of the society that she had come to because it offered her so many options for liberal living. When I was campaigning in Leicester, I was concerned at the

huge population not taking advantage of that liberal living. They did not have the ability to go out and access jobs or engage with their children's school lives because they could not communicate. These are all barriers to equality and opportunity; I know that we have also spoken a lot about austerity today.

Lord Davies of Stamford: I agree with every word the noble Baroness says. Is not part of the solution that FE colleges in cities should be obliged to provide teaching of English as a foreign language?

Baroness Verma: If you are a citizen of this country, you should have access to learning English. If you do not come into this country with English skills, you should be able to access them.

I am deeply worried that cultural discrimination already exists in some communities; I put my south Asian community at the forefront of this issue. We reinforce it by not enabling people to break out; they do not know where to go or how to fight the inequalities that they face both internally and, no doubt, externally. I mentioned my mother because my dad was a typical conservative Sikh; he did not want my mum to learn to drive or go out on her own to night school. When he passed away very suddenly 12 years ago, my mother had to cope. Thank God, she did exactly what good mothers should do: ignore what their husband says. She went out, learned to drive, learned English and was able to communicate. Today, 12 years on, my mother can toddle off and do what she wants, when and how she wants, and nobody can stop her. However, I fear that isolation and inability will stop too many people across the country, particularly from my community, when they find themselves having to learn to cope. I fear for my community.

To finish, I hope that my noble friend the Minister will encourage colleagues across government to ensure that the discussion around the need for English to be learned in this country is made relevant.

1.17 pm

Lord Lea of Crondall (Lab): My Lords, in the time available, I want to give the IFS a very big tick for the quality of its scoping study. I very much look forward to the four-year cycle coming to a conclusion.

In the 1970s, I was a member of the Royal Commission on the Distribution of Income and Wealth, chaired by Lord Diamond, who some people may remember from Harold Wilson's Government. We were very keen to make sure that people understood that we needed a parallel data system for wealth, alongside that for income. Wealth is characterised by land, one of the three factors of production; the others are labour and capital. Indeed, in macroeconomic terms and in terms of Treasury public accounts, getting more from land is one way to do a lot of the things that Members here have said should be done without putting up everyone's rates of income tax and other taxes.

I remind colleagues of the brilliant exposé on land ownership in Britain published in the *Guardian* only three or four weeks ago. Now, land creeps into the nature of our economy in a different way. A lot of

[LORD LEA OF CRONDALL]

companies used to borrow money from the banks for investment; now, more than 50% of banks go into land-related lending. We can see this characteristic in Britain where we are reinforcing inequality. The *Guardian* piece shows that little has changed over the past 1,000 years. Many members of the aristocracy and the landed gentry are descendants of the Norman barons. You had to be a friend of someone in the family of the Duke of Normandy—this was the Norman conquest—to own a lot of land in Britain, and that is true today. It is the same people. Some 17% of English land is not registered with the Land Registry while more than 50% is inherited and has never been bought or sold. Half of England is owned by less than 1% of the population. The home owners' share adds up to just 5%, so a few thousand dukes, baronets and country squires own far more land than all of Middle England put together. I thought that this House might be the place to put that on the record because I have not noticed any of the hereditary Peers making that point.

The scope of the IFS review is important in another way. It talks about trade unions and collective bargaining, and of course I declare an interest. People have to acknowledge that you need a balance in the labour market and the capital market, which can come about only if you recognise that initiatives such as workers' representatives on remuneration committees would do a lot to change the tone of the virtue signalling in boards of directors, so that it is not just about short-term share prices. The IFS mentioned this in its synopsis. The country may be going to the dogs, but one thing which must be done to avoid that is to look carefully at the imbalance of incentives in how our economy works.

I turn to education. Yes, I am of the school of thought which says that if you say Eton costs £40,000 a year—I do not know whether that is right—you are investing £200,000 and you get a return on that capital. There is no doubt about that—they are not in the business of philanthropy. They are taking away other people's playing fields. They want a return on capital to protect their difference. That is what investment in public schools is all about.

I am very pleased that most of these points are covered by the IFS review and I look forward to realising the ambition of the synopsis. We are not reaching any conclusions today; we are just saying that extra things can be added to it. We will see what it concludes at the end of the next four years.

1.22 pm

Baroness Prashar (CB): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, for securing this very important debate and I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, on his insightful maiden speech.

The fact that the IFS Deaton review was set up to understand inequalities and identify the right mix of policies to tackle them is a powerful indication of how dire the situation is. It rightly says that we need a coherent approach to respond to inequalities and not one that is fragmented and piecemeal. The United Nations report paints a very bleak picture of life for many of our citizens. The report also shows that the costs of austerity have fallen disproportionately on the poor, women, racial and ethnic minorities, children,

single parents and people with disabilities. It is a grim picture for a country that is the world's fifth-largest economy.

We have to ask ourselves: are we comfortable with the kind of society we are becoming—a society where we are witnessing extreme hardship, the normalisation of food banks, homelessness and child poverty, and growing divisions in health, wealth, life chances, family environment, regions, political influence and so on? Austerity measures, cuts in public expenditure, particularly at the local level, and changes to the benefits system are causing extreme hardship and destroying the very fabric and cohesion of our society. Libraries, youth clubs and other public spaces, some of which are the glue for social cohesion, have either shrunk or gone. The consequences are evident for all to see.

Universal credit is a case in point. The UN report notes that the Government are taking an experimental “test and learn” approach to universal credit. This has led to the devolved Administrations and local authorities having to set up contingency measures to protect claimants and off-set the worst consequences of its features. The UN rapporteur said that he was struck by how much of their mobilisation resembled the sort of activity one might expect for an impending natural disaster or health epidemic. Now that the benefits are all rolled into one, it leaves claimants who are trying to keep a roof over their heads and make ends meet vulnerable to high costs.

Delays in paying benefits are turning people to desperate measures. The knock-on effects of these are manifold on family life, working life, health and so on. The strange phenomenon of poverty is that it increases costs. The poverty premium effect means that people on low incomes pay more for the things they need as they are unable to pay up front or use a direct debit. Saving costs and improving or streamlining systems are laudable objectives, but if they end up having a detrimental effect on those they are trying to help and causing more hardship for the most vulnerable, we need to take stock. Can the Minister tell the House what steps are being taking to improve the universal credit system and to remedy the shortcomings highlighted by many, including in the UN report? Furthermore, the prevalence of inequalities and division is all too evident. Rather than denying or repudiating the facts, should we not be channelling our energies into developing a deliverable agenda to tackle these divisions and inequalities?

1.27 pm

Lord Morris of Handsworth (Lab): My Lords, this is a timely debate because the Government regularly deny claims of poverty on the grounds that employment is rising. In his statement on poverty in the UK, Professor Philip Alston, the UN special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights, described that response from Ministers as an “endlessly repeated” mantra. He said that they have overlooked the fact that 14 million people, a fifth of the population, are living in poverty and that the levels of child poverty are,

“not just a disgrace, but a social calamity and an economic disaster”.

Ministers have described the report as “barely believable”. The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has said that she would lodge a formal complaint with the UN. The denial is based on rising employment figures, but last year the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reported that the number of people with a job but living below the poverty line has risen faster than employment.

Another concern set out in the report is the Government’s embrace of technology and automation. The digital-by-default feature of universal credit excludes people without internet access or, indeed, the basic skills. Professor Alston said:

“We are witnessing the gradual disappearance of the postwar British welfare state behind a webpage and an algorithm”.

Applicants for universal credit are referred to libraries if they do not have any technology of their own, but first you must find your library. Statistics from the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy show that since 2010 at least 478 libraries have closed, 8,000 librarians have lost their jobs and council spending on libraries fell by £66 million last year. Yet libraries provide access to computer resources for those who have none, schoolchildren living in crowded conditions find peace to do their homework, and rough sleepers and elderly people can read a newspaper to keep in touch and—for some—keep warm. They provide a community resource for meetings. Libraries are as much a social service as a source of knowledge or to serve a love of reading.

During his visit to British cities, Professor Alston coined the expression—which he took back to the United States—that food banks, which Ministers have often dismissed as nothing to do with austerity measures, represent a new turn in poverty. The Trussell Trust reports that in the year ending March 2019, 1.6 million three-day emergency food parcels were given to people in crisis, an 18.8% increase on the previous year. Professor Alston reminded us that the UK is the fifth-largest economy in the world, yet the Joseph Rowntree Foundation reports that 14 million people—a fifth of the population—live in poverty, while 1.5 million are destitute and unable to afford basic essentials.

We have now moved to a point where we are beginning to have a debate on and a real appreciation of the issues. I cannot begin to understand how this Government can ignore Professor Alston’s report. We read and hear daily examples of what he reports and we witness them every day, not least, as we were told earlier, as we walk from the Underground into this building and pass people who are homeless and destitute. This is not fake news—it is the reality for millions of our citizens and we can take no pride in it.

1.32 pm

Viscount Hanworth (Lab): My Lords, a stark appraisal of the state of the nation was provided in November 2018 by the report of the Australian economist Philip Alston, in his role as the United Nations special rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights. His critique was met with surprise and disbelief by leading Conservative politicians, who were unable to recognise the truth of his assertion that our inequalities are dividing Britain as never before and that current social policies are causing widespread misery and distress.

Given that the measure of average per capita real income has been increasing throughout most post-war years, it was unimaginable to these politicians that the hiatus in the growth of the economy that we have been witnessing since the financial crisis could have driven so many into poverty.

The dismissal of Alston’s findings was all the more startling for coming from the politicians responsible for years of unnecessary austerity, who have made savage cuts to the welfare budget in the process of imposing the so-called regime of universal credit. However, among European nations, Britain has one of the highest levels of inequality. As measured by its Gini coefficient, its inequality is exceeded only by that of Romania, Bulgaria and Lithuania, all countries with high levels of rural poverty.

As has been mentioned, it has been revealed that 14 million people, a fifth of the population, live in poverty. Four million of these are more than 50% below the official poverty line and 1.5 million are destitute and unable to afford basic essentials. Local authorities, which have traditionally played a major role in providing housing and sustaining the welfare of our citizens, have been starved of resources by destructive government policies.

The social divisiveness that characterises contemporary British society is the antithesis of the solidarity that characterised the wartime years and the early post-war years, which is still in the memory of many of us. That solidarity was gradually eroded over a quarter of a century, partly in consequence of perpetual industrial strife. When Margaret Thatcher came to power at the end of the 1970s, she was able to declare war on the unions that had been a major factor in maintaining the incomes of working people. It was during this period that the inequalities in income that we see today began to emerge. The large reduction in taxes of high-income earners that were a feature of the Lawson budgets of 1986, 1987 and 1988 were factors in a rapidly increasing inequality which occurred at a time when the wages of working people were stagnant.

The defeat of the unions was assisted by the process of deindustrialisation that proceeded throughout the Conservatives’ period in office. It was hastened by the insistence on maintaining a high value of the pound, which made it unprofitable to export manufactured goods and made imported goods cheaper and more attractive. The deregulation of Britain’s financial markets in 1986 at the end of the second Thatcher Administration began the process of a rapid divestment of Britain’s ownership of its commercial and industrial assets, from which our financial sector continues to profit. This process was responsible for elevating the value of the pound, which was further to the detriment of British industry. It also sowed the seeds of the financial crisis of 2008, the dire effects of which still dominate our economy and society.

British workers have been denied gainful employment while the richest members of society, who reside mainly in the financial sector, have seen runaway growth in their incomes. The present-day Conservatives have adopted the social and economic nostrums that prevailed during the Thatcher Administration. They have continued to place public services in private hands and sought to

[VISCOUNT HANWORTH]

address the crisis in housing with help-to-buy measures that serve only to raise house prices and enrich construction companies. The help has been aimed at young, middle-class families of a kind who might comprise the sons and daughters of Conservative politicians. At the other end of the income spectrum, they have imposed the so-called bedroom tax, aimed at increasing occupancy of the wholly inadequate supply of social housing.

At present we do not have the high levels of unemployment that beset the middle years of the Thatcher Administration. Instead, large numbers are employed in the low paid, insecure and demeaning jobs of the trickle-down economy, also described as the gig economy.

The absurdities of Brexit pose a further threat to the livelihoods of working people. If a hard Brexit materialises, the foreign owners of British industry will curtail their investments, if they do not cease their operations altogether. The effect will be a further impoverishment of a large proportion of our population and an increase in inequality in Britain to an extent not seen since the early years of the 20th century.

1.38 pm

Baroness Osamor (Lab): My Lords, I welcome the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, and congratulate him on his maiden speech.

This debate is timely given the recent promises by a Tory leadership candidate to cut taxes for the richest in our society and for large corporations. He clearly had not read the Deaton report and/or had not recognised, as the IFS and Professor Deaton have highlighted, that we are at a moment of crisis for democratic capitalism.

I am from Tottenham in Haringey. Once upon a time in Tottenham it was the minorities and the working classes who were marginalised, but today it feels as though everybody is cut off, due to government cuts, apart from the very few with access to unearned income through sizeable property or shareholdings.

Given that we have only a short time to speak in this debate, I would like to highlight three key issues for the Government to respond to. The first concerns the regulating of international markets. Most expert commentators agree that the US is the least equal country in the world. The Deaton review refers specifically to a healthcare system that creates monopolies and delivers huge profits to private health providers while also creating significant public health issues, such as the tragic levels of opiate addiction across poorer communities in the USA.

Why, then, have the Government in recent weeks been trumpeting the idea of a trade deal with the US, a deal which many commentators are saying would simply entrench the monopoly position of superstar businesses and place an even greater premium on shareholder value? Will the Minister explain what consideration, if any, has gone into the questions posed by the Deaton report about the need to ensure that the private sector is not just taking without making? I am talking specifically about new taxes on unearned income, new incentives for longer term investment and

new regulations to control private sector monopolies. Should not any policy-maker who is interested in tackling inequality be focused instead on continuing to support the good work of our colleagues in Brussels to develop incentives for longer-term investment and to tame private sector monopolies?

My second issue is income disparity. Most of us in this Chamber will be aware of the Prime Minister's high-profile commitment to tackling race and inter-generational income disparities. This is an issue that the IFS Deaton report will be picking up over the next five years, and which I raised on 11 March at the UK Voluntary National Review parliamentary event concerning the UK's annual sustainable development goals report to the UN. I am particularly keen to ensure that we in this Chamber are updated on what the Government are doing to understand and address the extreme variations in attainment when broken down by ethnicity and region; what effect, if any, the Equality Act 2010 has had on reducing race income disparities in the workplace; and the current status of the SDG report.

My third issue is reforms to the social contract. Last November, Professor Philip Alston commented:

"British compassion for those who are suffering has been replaced by a punitive, mean-spirited, and often callous approach ... elevating the goal of enforcing blind compliance over a genuine concern to improve the well-being of those at the lowest levels of British society".

At the time, the Government rejected Professor Alston's findings and said that they would lodge a complaint with the UN. Will the Minister update us on the status of that complaint and the ongoing discussions between the Government and the UN in relation to Professor Alston's report?

I shall close on a positive note. The Deaton report reminds us that 200 years ago, democratic capitalism faced a similar crisis. Salaries, life expectancy and living standards were falling for everyone other than the landowning classes and the large industrialists. By the end of the 19th century, Parliament had passed a series of reforms to ensure greater democracy, improve the rights of workers and place restrictions on wealthy landowners and industrialists. These reforms also paved the way for the establishment of the welfare state under the Attlee Government. Let me be clear: our challenges now are quite different from those of the 19th century. Never before have we had a system which enables such vast wealth to be accumulated so quickly by so few people, and never before have we had a system that threatens the very existence of humans through global environmental destruction. I hope that this Chamber will pick up the baton from those previous incumbents of the two Houses. I implore us to establish a working group to work with Professor Alston and Professor Deaton so that we can take urgent action to initiate debate and legislation as their research develops.

1.44 pm

Lord Sawyer (Lab): My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend Lord Dubs on initiating this very important debate at a crucial time in our nation's development. I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, on his

excellent maiden speech. I am sure we will hear a lot more from him in future. I am pleased to see my noble friend Lord Brookman in his place. He has spent a lifetime fighting poverty, but he does not speak a lot.

I have read some of the important papers that are being discussed today and have listened carefully to the debate in the House. There have been some very powerful, riveting speeches by Members on this side including my noble friends Lord Hain, Lord Adonis, Lord Morris of Handsworth and many more. They made a powerful case against the Government's policies. I think it will be almost impossible for the Minister to give an adequate reply, but I know she will have a good try.

From my perspective, it is interesting that on the other side of the House, there has been no real acceptance of the unequal society that we on this side see. The response has been very muted and not much has been said. There have been a few contributions about the family, which is understandable from that side of the House, but it has not responded in the way that we have to the terrible dilemma we are in. The divisions around this policy are deep and, in a sense, they reflect the divisions in society. We are fractured and broken in many ways. This debate shows exactly where we are.

I always seem to get stuck at the end of these debates when all the good points have been made, so I try to think about whether I can say anything of interest or whether I should sit down—I do not really mean that. We ought to look at the situation more carefully. Members opposite should look more carefully at the other side as well.

We should look more carefully at the Scandinavian countries—which are not all Labour; there are conservatives as well—and the way they approach this kind of problem. In the Netherlands and in Scandinavian countries, deliberate action is being taken by central government to intervene against poverty and inequality. In Finland, there is a much more articulate response to the well-being of the whole population, with strong interventions, particularly in education and housing. Finland tops the World Happiness Report—surely, there is something that politicians on the other side can learn from that. Similarly, the New Zealand Government are focusing on their well-being agenda. Interestingly, it seeks to change people's mindset regarding the importance of well-being and of GDP. Governments here could look at that carefully. Closer to home, we have the Welsh Government's Well-Being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015, which many people, including me, have spoken about in this House. It is already making big advances for the people of Wales. We need public bodies to take into account the social impact of their decisions, not just the economic impact. It is very important that we try to change that pattern. Perhaps the Minister will say something about that.

The language around this debate is often very angry and polarised. That is completely understandable, but I take a different angle. We need to find a shared language and shared goals, as they have been able to do in the Nordic countries. We could start to look at them. I know we are not heading there—we are just debating the Conservative Party. I wanted to say this because it needs to be said. We could start to see the

elimination of power, not just as a set of policy proposals but as a central value in society around which other things can be built.

1.49 pm

Lord Judd (Lab): My Lords, we all want to put on record our appreciation of the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, for once more having challenged us with this important debate, and for the effective and sensitive way in which he introduced it. He of course mentioned refugees and asylum seekers, and we must never forget that they are a real priority in this area. There is another group about whom we do not talk often enough in this House and who have special needs, and that is the Gypsy, Roma and Traveller community. We perhaps need a debate on that issue.

What have we learned from this debate as we near its conclusion? There are too many depressing realities: close to 40% of children predicted to be living in poverty in two years' time; too many people over 65 living in relative poverty; millions of people who are in work dependent upon various forms of charity to survive, and much of the work in which they are involved degrading and dehumanising every day. We have heard about food banks, rough sleeping, falling life expectancy for some, decimation of legal aid, denial of benefits to severely disabled people, and difficulties for others in accessing benefits. We have heard about the whole issue of loneliness and failing transport, which particularly affects the rural poor, and the impoverishment of single mothers and those with mental health problems. I am glad that we have also heard about the impact on poverty of shrinking library services.

Surely these realities raise the fundamental question of what kind of society we want to be. Surely we should get back to the ideal that every single child, wherever and of whomever they are born, should have the right and opportunity to discover his or her talents and develop them to the full. This is not only about preparing them to fit into the economic machine but helping them to live, for example through education as distinct from just training. Training is of course crucial, but so is education. Why should everyone not be able to appreciate Mozart or Beethoven, rather than this being reserved as a right only for some?

We clearly need to see a reassertion of the importance of dignity and self-respect in employment; here I believe the reassertion of the role of trade unions is vital. We need a multidimensional approach, covering education, health services, mental health support, quality of employment, youth and community services, and decent, attractive environments. People need space around them in their immediate living situations in which to play and recreate. Surely we want a society based upon solidarity and inclusiveness rather than the one we have, which is too often based upon self-assertiveness, acquisitive selfishness and greed.

1.55 pm

Baroness Janke (LD): My Lords, I too thank the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, for securing this debate, and for highlighting the very unequal treatment of refugees and asylum seekers, particularly children.

[BARONESS JANKE]

It is shocking to many British people that, in the 21st century, we should have 14 million people in poverty. The fact is that, as the fifth largest economy in the world and a leading centre of global finance with record low levels of employment, one-fifth of the UK population is in poverty, and 4 million people are more than 50% below the poverty line.

Historically, the UK has had a proud record regarding its strong social security safety net, yet this has been systematically eroded. My noble friend Lord Wallace spoke about the social contract between the state and the citizen, where people in former times found a resource base to support them when they were afflicted by one of life's major catastrophes, as many of us have been, or will be, in our lives. Now, people find that there is little more than the support of volunteers and charities with limited resources to provide for their basic needs. How can a country such as ours not be shamed by such a state of affairs, with our benefits service likened to the 19th-century workhouse made infamous by Dickens? As the noble Lord, Lord Morris, said, there is no pride in it at all.

I very much value the work done by the noble Baroness, Lady Stroud, particularly her cross-party work on the Social Metrics Commission, and, as she said, I hope we will work together to take action. The noble Baroness said that poverty is persistent. That is right; it is very difficult to get rid of poverty altogether. However, it is clear from many reports that recent policies have undermined the poorest, the most underprivileged and indeed the most vulnerable people. Not only the reports mentioned here but reports by Human Rights Watch, the Joseph Rowntree Trust, the Resolution Foundation and the Child Poverty Action Group all testify to this.

The noble Baroness, Lady Bryan, highlighted the vulnerability of women, who have been put at particular risk by many of these recent policies. Women earn on average 17.9% less per hour than men and make up 60% of workers receiving low pay. Single-parent families, of whom 90% are women, are more than twice as likely to experience poverty as any other group. Half of the total number of children in one-parent families are in poverty. The noble Lord, Lord Farmer, talked about family structure and repeating cycles, which are very much a feature of poverty unless help can be provided to enable people to escape that harsh situation.

Policies such as the benefit cap and freeze, the two-child limit and the introduction of full job-seeking requirements for single parents of children as young as three have had a stark impact according to the Alston report. In August 2018, two-thirds of those who had benefits capped were single parents; single parents in the bottom 20% of income will have lost 25% of their 2010 income by 2021-22.

As my noble friend Lady Thomas has said, disabled people are disproportionately affected. Nearly half of those in poverty—6.9 million—are from families in which someone has a disability. They have also been some of the hardest hit by austerity measures. Changes to benefits and taxes mean that some families are projected to lose £11,000 by 2021-22—more than 30% of their income.

I very much appreciated the thoughtful contribution of the noble Baroness, Lady Young of Old Scone, on people in work and the transparency of employment statistics. It is incomprehensible to me that, with a low unemployment rate, 4 million workers live in poverty, and that 60% of people in poverty live in a household where at least one parent works. Some 2.8 million people live in poverty in a household where both adults work. So I join the noble Baroness in calling for more transparency and analysis of what is going on with low pay, insecure employment, tech industries and zero-hours contracts,

The noble Baroness, Lady Prashar, and the noble Lord, Lord Adonis, drew attention to the fact that local services have been dramatically cut. I believe that this has contributed greatly to the misery of the poor in our communities. Support services that used to be the lifeline for those in poverty have been almost completely removed, including youth and community services, social care and debt counselling. Libraries have been closed in record numbers, as the noble Lord, Lord Judd, mentioned.

Children, too, are disproportionately affected. The noble Earl, Lord Listowel, mentioned that cuts to public health, early intervention and early education are putting many children at a severe disadvantage. Equally, schools often have to fill a gap by providing food for hungry children. Often clothes, toiletries and even basic equipment are provided by teachers out of their own pockets.

The number of food banks, as many noble Lords said—the noble Lord, Lord Hain, in particular drew attention to this—has massively increased. Reasons given for this include incomes not covering the costs of essentials, benefit delays and benefit changes.

I am particularly concerned that we in this Chamber take these matters very seriously, and I urge the Government to take action, particularly with revitalisations outside London, as the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, said in his maiden speech. The noble Lords, Lord Wallace and Lord Liddle, contrasted the differences in the welfare of people in different parts of the country.

I also believe that it is essential that the forthcoming comprehensive spending review takes full account of the desperate situation for so many of our citizens and recognises that urgent action is needed. The priorities must be to rebuild an effective social safety net and to restore services in the community so that needs can be assessed locally and support provided to people where and when it is needed. We must also make work pay by ensuring that working people are paid enough to be independent and self-sufficient and not suffer the humiliation and desperation of grinding poverty.

2.03 pm

Lord Davies of Oldham (Lab): My Lords, this has been an excellent debate, led by a superb opening speech from my noble friend Lord Dubs, whom I congratulate on securing this important debate on such a significant subject. Of course, we all enjoyed the maiden speech of the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale. He will know that there is a limited number of engineers in the House and we are very pleased to see him supplement their number. There is no doubt that he

will get a warm welcome from them, and from all of us who recognise that a great need of the British economy, if it is to improve, is to see engineers in positions where they play a more significant part in companies than many of them do now.

We should also recognise the significance to this debate of the work of the IFS—not only what it is promising to do in the long term but its reports thus far, which have identified that among the wealthier nations the United Kingdom is second only to the United States in economic inequality. One would think that it would be a priority for a Government to address that, yet we have to recognise that over the past decade, far from making it a priority, the Government have exacerbated the situation. My noble friend Lord Hain emphasised how much the policy of austerity was born not just of seeking to create a more secure economy but of the ideology of a Conservative Government: the belief in a smaller state.

Just at a time when the Government need to make a contribution to the welfare of society, we have had a decade of massive reduction in the power of public authorities. Even the Conservative authority of Northamptonshire has been brought almost to bankruptcy. There could not be a clearer case of not recognising the crucial role that local authorities are destined to play in our welfare.

Of course, there have been a number of contributions in this debate on health and education matters, in particular the collapse of Sure Start, and on services that local authorities can no longer provide. This, of course, has increased the pressure on less well-off families.

That is against a background where less well-off families are facing two big problems. One is that there has been an effective wage freeze for more than a decade, so that while it is true, as noble Lords have pointed out in great abundance in this debate, that the chief executives of the top FTSE companies have seen a massive increase in their resources, wages have effectively been frozen. Is it surprising, therefore, that there is enormous anxiety and concern among so many people?

In addition, there has been a sustained onslaught on benefits. My noble friend Lord Liddle identified universal credit as something that has caused great concern. My goodness, the Government have been seeking for several years to introduce fully universal credit, and they are still struggling with the fact that the premise on which it is founded has crucial weaknesses. The cost is borne by people with limited resources, so is it surprising that people find it extraordinary that the Government think that they can take a five-week delay in the payment of necessary benefits and not be in considerable distress? We know that the Government are rethinking aspects of that most important benefit, which has contributed significantly to the demoralisation of so many people.

Even the Government's proudest boast, which is that unemployment is at a historically very low level, masks the fact that a large percentage of people in employment are in the gig economy, where their jobs are not permanent and the number of hours they can work in a week—and therefore their earning power—is limited. But they have the great merit of depressing

the unemployment figures, so the Government can congratulate themselves on that. However, it has little to do with the welfare of society.

As for Brexit, we already know that the Government have committed considerable resources to a no-deal outcome. They had to, because it was easy to identify some of the immediate consequences of leaving Europe without a deal. It looks increasingly likely that that is the future for this country, and the Government will have to think again about substantial additional resources to cope with the many problems that are bound to occur if we leave Europe without a deal. We must all hope that proves not to be the case, because all our leading politicians express that hope, but they do not give us great encouragement that the hope will be translated into reality.

Our society is broken in that respect. There is a lack of trust between the people and those whom they elect; there is a lack of trust, too, between the people and those who sit in all kinds of positions of authority over them in circumstances where failure stalks the stage.

I am grateful that this debate has ranged widely. A number of contributions have been thoughtful and have not concentrated too much on government policy. However, from this Dispatch Box, I can discharge my duty as spokesperson for Her Majesty's loyal Opposition only by identifying the last decade, for which this Government bear responsibility, as having created the circumstances that are causing so much anxiety, distress and unhappiness among the British people.

2.12 pm

Baroness Barran (Con): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, and echo noble Lords' gratitude to him for introducing this debate, which has undoubtedly stimulated an interesting and important discussion in your Lordships' House. I shall do my best in the time available to me, which I appreciate is a great deal longer than that available to your Lordships, to respond to as many of the points raised as possible. I hope noble Lords will forgive me if I have to write on some of them. I also thank the team from the UN for taking the time to visit our country last November and for speaking to individuals who face very difficult situations. I thank, too, the Nuffield Foundation and the researchers at the Institute for Fiscal Studies for the ambitious and important research agenda they are undertaking. We look forward to receiving the Deaton review and hope it yields findings that will enable us to continue our progress in this area.

I also join other noble Lords in welcoming to his place the noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, and congratulating him on his maiden speech, which brought an elegant combination of expertise and humility. It was doubly impressive as there were apparently no notes—a great skill.

As we have heard from several noble Lords, the UN special rapporteur's report was highly critical of both levels of poverty and the policy intentions of this Government. I must refute the impression given in the report that there has ever been an intention to impose policies that damage the prospects of the poorest of our citizens. This Government introduced the national

[BARONESS BARRAN]

living wage, supporting the wages of the lowest-paid to grow by 8% above inflation between April 2015 and April 2018. The percentage of jobs that are currently low paid, just below 18%, represents the lowest level for 20 years.

We take poverty and inequality very seriously and are committed to improving the living standards of all in our society. However, as my noble friends Lady Stroud and Lady Finn and other noble Lords explained, when we look at the data it is striking how little overall inequality, be it absolute, relative or among children, has changed during the past 20 years. I thank in particular my noble friend Lady Stroud and her colleagues on the Social Metrics Commission for introducing metrics that reflect the way we live: we have income; we have assets; and we have expenditure. For disabled people in particular, as the noble Baroness, Lady Thomas, pointed out, we need to recognise that there are fixed costs that go with disability. That is an important and helpful way forward, as is the commission's focus on persistent poverty—the noble Lord, Lord Davies of Stamford, would probably agree with that.

That poverty and inequality are stuck is in spite of the efforts of Governments of every hue to change it. I share the view expressed by the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, and the noble Baroness, Lady Prashar, about the unacceptability of the levels of inequality; I just wanted to note that it is very hard to shift.

In common with other EU countries, we recognise that we face major challenges. The noble Lord, Lord Davies of Oldham, referred to real wages. While they have grown every month for the past 13 months, we all know that they remain at a similar level to 10 years ago. Whatever the overall statistics on inequality may or may not tell us, there are clearly groups in our society struggling to make ends meet, including some single parents and many with a disability.

Equally, we should not ignore the findings of the world happiness survey, which puts the UK at 15th in the world. As noble Lords pointed out, that is somewhat behind Finland but it is very helpful to refer to the concept of well-being.

A number of noble Lords, including the noble Lords, Lord Ravensdale and Lord Wallace of Saltaire, and my noble friend Lord Freeman, talked about the importance of strengthening the social contract, having a sense of aspiration and believing that we and our children have opportunities. The noble Lord, Lord Dubs, referred to his experience and that of refugees. As the daughter of a refugee, I can certainly vouch for the importance of being brought up to believe that anything is possible.

As noble Lords know, this Government believe that the best way out of poverty is through work and we are rightly proud of our record since 2010, with 3.6 million more people in work and a seven percentage point increase in the employment rate for the poorest 20% of the workforce. We have supported this increase in employment by increasing minimum wages and the personal allowance. That means that a person working 35 hours a week on the minimum wage takes home £13,700, an increase of £4,500 on 2010.

I shall now try to answer some of the questions raised by noble Lords and finally set out some of the important actions initiated by government, which we hope will help to address some of the structural issues that contribute to both inequality and poverty. I want first to defend the Government's stance in seeing employment as a critical component in resolving these issues, because it goes not just to the financial rewards that employment can bring but to a sense of social glue, connection, well-being and aspiration, which I think all your Lordships agree are critical.

The employment rate today is at a record high. The female employment rate is also at a record high of 72%. Since 2010, the employment rate of lone parents has increased by more than 10 percentage points and is now at 69.5%. Over the same period, youth unemployment has almost halved and a number of your Lordships, including the noble Baronesses, Lady Young of Old Scone and Lady Bryan of Partick—she and I were introduced on the same day, so it is a delight to be in a debate with her—talked about zero-hours contracts. Some 2.6% of all people in employment were employed on zero-hours contracts as their main job between October and December 2018.

As I touched on already, real wage growth has been flat over the past 10 years. The noble Lord, Lord Ravensdale, referred to the impact of globalisation. My noble friend Lady Verma is, I point out—if I have done the maths right—almost a perfect age; it sounds very similar to my own. She talked about barriers to accessing employment for people from black and minority-ethnic communities and those without English as a first language. We fully fund all adults to take English and maths to level 2 and from 2020 we will fund them for basic physical skills which, I know she will agree, are a critical factor. There has also been a disproportionate increase, compared to history, in employment of people from black and minority-ethnic communities, particularly in the high-skilled roles. I am sure your Lordships will share my pleasure in that.

The noble Lords, Lord Hain, Lord Browne and Lord Adonis, talked about cuts in public spending. I will cover this in more detail, but I just remind your Lordships that this Government inherited a uniquely difficult fiscal situation in 2010. However, the Chancellor has reaffirmed the five-year public spending plan, which has resource budgets growing at an average of 1.2% above inflation from 2019-20 compared with real cuts of 3% a year in the 2010 spending review.

Several noble Lords—the noble Baronesses, Lady Thomas, Lady Prashar and Lady Janke, the noble Lords, Lord Liddle and Lord Judd, and the noble Viscount, Lord Hanworth—talked about universal credit. We continue to spend more than £220 billion on the benefit system, and we are spending an additional £1.7 billion a year on universal credit, increasing by £1,000 the amount that 2.4 million households can earn each year before their UC begins to be withdrawn. The noble Baroness, Lady Prashar, asked for examples in which we are changing, reviewing or improving on the system. I will highlight two things: we are starting to test the system of more frequent payments following feedback from claimants and then will roll out more

widely what works. I stress the really critical role of the work coaches, who are now receiving training on how to spot people who might be particularly vulnerable and do everything they can to make sure that they get the support that they need.

The noble Lords, Lord Hain and Lord Morris, and several others talked about the usage of food banks. Noble Lords will be aware that my right honourable friend the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions has acknowledged that there were problems early on with the rollout of UC but now more than 85% of payments are made on time, which compares very favourably with the legacy system. We believe that there is need for more robust data on trends in food insecurity and we are working with experts at the Office for National Statistics and the Scottish Government to introduce a new set of food security questions in the family resources survey from April this year. Obviously, we in this House look forward to the report next year from the ad hoc committee that has just been established on food poverty.

I turn to child poverty, a subject raised by several of your Lordships, including the noble Lord, Lord Dubs, the noble Earl, Lord Listowel, and the noble Baroness, Lady Janke. A child is five times less likely to be in poverty in a household where all adults are working. Today there are 665,000 fewer children living in workless households. In 2018, the Government announced an extra £1.7 billion for work allowances, which directly helps children living in the poorest households. We are also making investments, as your Lordships know, in the NHS, childcare and other areas which—if time permits—I will touch on.

My noble friend Lady Verma and the noble Baronesses, Lady Bryan and Lady Janke, talked about women and the gender pay gap as well as the role of women in the workforce. We should recognise that the gender pay gap brings visibility to the problem that we are facing: it shows unacceptable growth in the pay gap over time, but currently, at 8.6%, the gender pay gap is the lowest that it has ever been and we are determined to see it come down further.

My noble friends Lord Farmer and Lady Finn stressed the importance of family life and focused particularly on the importance of both parents playing a positive role in a child's life. As he knows better than I do, there is so much research now on the impact of sustained stress on the development of a child's brain and what that does to their life chances, particularly in the first 1,000 days. This is absolutely critical. We know that children living in single-parent households are almost twice as likely to be in poverty as those in couple households. There is not a sudden increase in this rate, but we are doing a number of things both directly and financially, as I have already touched on. More broadly, we published the domestic abuse Bill, which we hope will help address the experience of not only victims of domestic abuse but of their children. Our commitment to increasing mental health expenditure, our work on drug and alcohol and our support for free childcare are also crucial.

I am running rapidly out of time, but I want to touch on the concerns raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Thomas, about the PIP awards for disabled

people. I hear the concerns that she raises, but I note that a greater proportion of people are receiving the highest level of PIP awards today compared to its predecessor, the disability living allowance. I am not able to do justice to all the other areas that have been mentioned, so I will make my closing remarks and then write to your Lordships with the rest of the answers to the important points that have been raised.

As many noble Lords pointed out, reducing inequality and poverty is about not just supporting living standards today but building and investing for the future. I wondered whether the noble Lord, Lord Adonis, had caught sight of my speech when he made a similar point. We want to build an economy that enables individuals to reach their potential tomorrow.

I will touch briefly on three areas where our investment today will help to build a more equal society. As I just mentioned, the data show that where a child is growing up with one parent or just one parent working they are more likely to be in poverty. That is why we have introduced 15 hours of free childcare for disadvantaged two year-olds and doubled the hours of free childcare for working parents of three and four year-olds. In 2019-20 we spent almost £6 billion on childcare support, which is a record amount, and more than 700,000 disadvantaged two year-olds have benefited from the free education places we introduced in 2013.

The noble Lord, Lord Adonis, and others criticised our record on education. We have committed to spending an additional £900 million in our schools in 2019-20 and have protected the pupil premium. The crucial thing is that the investment is starting to pay off. The gap between disadvantaged pupils and others has closed by about 13% at key stage 2 and nearly 10% at GCSE since 2011. We know that higher qualifications translate into higher-paid work—not a quick win, but an important one.

A number of noble Lords raised secure and affordable housing, which is at the root of a sustainable standard of living. The Government have committed more than £9 billion in this spending review period to the affordable homes programme to deliver 250,000 new affordable homes of a wide range of tenure, including social rent. The Prime Minister has also announced a further £2 billion of new funding in the affordable homes programme.

Finally, the NHS has always been the country's most beloved public service, there to provide outstanding care whenever it is needed. The Government have introduced a long-term plan backed by the biggest cash boost in the history of the NHS, providing it with the certainty to plan for the next decade. These reforms might not show up in the inequality and poverty statistics today, but they are laying the foundation for an economy and society that deliver a higher standard of living for everyone—an aspiration that I know every single noble Lord who has spoken in the debate shares with me.

2.32 pm

Lord Dubs: My Lords, I am grateful to all noble Lords who played a part in this debate. I am bound to say that I found their contributions interesting and thoughtful. I will reflect even more on the subject

[LORD DUBS]

when I have had a chance to read them again in *Hansard*. I thank the Minister for the way she responded to the debate, even if I did not agree with her about everything.

I feel that there was a broad measure of agreement that the situation is not good regarding inequality and poverty. Nobody dissented from that, but the prescriptions for dealing with it are where we differ. All I say is this: the test of the debate lies not in the quality of the speeches, good though they were, but in whether it will have made a difference. I hope it will. It is up to the Government to do something about it.

Motion agreed.

Referendums

Question for Short Debate

2.33 pm

Asked by Lord Soley

To ask Her Majesty's Government what assessment they have made of the impact of the increased use of referendums on the functioning of representative democracy in the United Kingdom.

The Earl of Courtown (Con): My Lords, before the start of the short debate, I remind noble Lords that Back-Bench speeches are limited to three minutes, so when three minutes is shown on the Clock you have gone on too long.

Lord Soley (Lab): My Lords, I seek to put this Question before the House on the use of referendums in the British constitution because it is a very important issue. I know that we are time-limited, as we have just been reminded. I will try to keep my remarks very tight.

I have been increasingly concerned over the use of referendums in the United Kingdom. I do not like referendums. I think we do much better under Edmund Burke's representative democracy, where MPs and Governments can be thrown out if the electorate do not like them. Perhaps it is easy for me to say that because I was never thrown out, although the Minister did try on one or two occasions in my neighbouring area to organise that, just as I tried to organise his. It was a joint project.

By and large, referendums do more harm than good. There are, of course, exceptions. If you have a position where maybe you want to reinforce a constitutional change that has been widely discussed and then largely agreed it can make sense, but it is always worth reminding people, as many have, that dictators often use referendums to reinforce their position. Fortunately, we have not been in that position and I do not think we will be.

We know that the other problem with referendums, which really lies underneath my debate, is that they can be incredibly divisive. The mess we are in on Brexit is because a referendum was called on an issue that, frankly, had not been one of the top political issues in

the United Kingdom until it was called. There was no alternative policy to put if the referendum was lost, which it was. Although I thought that we would vote remain and I did myself, I was not surprised that it was lost, because the Brexiteers' strapline of "Take back control" is very powerful. I do not take the view that people who voted leave did so because they had not thought it through, because the arguments were weak or dishonest or because of immigration. It was much more basic: that strapline went to the heart of what many British people felt about being able to make their own laws and to sack their own Governments.

One can argue the toss about that, but one thing we cannot argue about is the fact that the Brexit referendum, three years ago now, has done enormous damage to this country, both in the United Kingdom and overseas. It has damaged us politically and economically. I noticed that the retiring Foreign Office official in Singapore made that point today about the damage it has done to us. The problem is that, even if it was discussed well—people will argue the toss about that—it is a very complex issue to decide in a referendum. Although you can argue that it was a simple question, it was on a very complex argument that had many different strands to it, which made it very difficult for people to decide. My view is, as I have said already, that if MPs are able to debate widely and come to a conclusion, the public make their views known if they do not like the outcome that MPs have come to, just as they have made their views very well known about the House of Commons and its behaviour over the last three years.

The other point that is very important in the context of the Brexit debate is that the two main referendums on this issue, in 1974 under the Harold Wilson Government about membership of the European Community and the more recent one on the European Union, were called not because there was a great demand for it in the country—there was a demand, but not a great one—but because the political parties in government were divided and could not deliver an outcome themselves. What the second one did, which the first did not, was aggravate the division, so the divisions in the country now run not just between political parties, organisations and companies but within families. You get arguments in families, particularly younger people tending to argue that we should stay in and the older generation tending to argue that we should come out. There are many variations of that and I am not claiming that it is a hard and fast rule, but it is an important point.

One of the things this indicates is that there is no sure-fire answer to the question, "Will we hold another one?" I have tended to the view that we should not, but I am driven to the position that, because of the mess we are in, we might have to hold one to get us out of it. But I would add this caution: I am by no means convinced that the answer you will get if you hold another referendum in the reasonably near future will be very different. It might come to the same conclusion, or conclude that we should stay in, or go back in, perhaps by an equally small margin. If that happens, the split in the United Kingdom stays.

Moving that argument forward to one that has concerned me deeply from the beginning of this, what happens in Scotland? The Scottish referendum was really well debated and there was a great deal of information. Everybody agreed that the debate was really good and the case for an independent Scotland was lost with a big majority. Did that mean that the argument went away? No, it did not. It has come right back and the same argument will happen again. With referendums such as this, in the way they have been called, the danger is that we go on having referendums without having a solution to the problems that led to them.

Again, I argue very strongly that we should not use referendums when we can use the representative democracy system, which is better. Without going into it, I would simply say that in the case of the United Kingdom, if you think that coming out of the European Union has been a problem, think of how much more difficult it will be if Scotland chooses to come out of the United Kingdom, to which about 80% of its exports go. Imagine if that was somehow decided on a narrow majority either way. It would be a disastrous situation for Scotland and the rest of the United Kingdom, so we should not think of going there. I will not go into it now, but there is a much stronger case for the United Kingdom to develop a more federal structure. In a way, we had that with the Acts of Union, but it was limited to courts, religion and one or two other issues. We could develop a modern federal system which might solve the problem rather better than referendums, which deliver an outcome which might be on a knife edge either way.

I commend the very good Library paper on this debate to Members. It pinpoints a number of the arguments raised by the Select Committees of both Houses and the independent review of referendums carried out in July last year. Those arguments are very strong. I do not wish to lay them out; they are in the excellent Library paper and I would rather draw people's attention to that, so that people can look at it and decide what to do. The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 lays down a number of conditions in which a referendum could take place, for example, on constitutional issues. One of the points made on a number of occasions was that it ought to be a clear issue where the argument would be very clear either way. That was one of the conclusions of the independent review of referendums.

What troubles me is that there has not been a significant discussion in all of this about whether there should always, or in most cases, have to be a certain percentage of the vote cast in order to make it a legitimate referendum. Think what happens if you have a referendum on an issue such as Scottish independence or Brexit and the numbers turning out are only 20% or 30% of the electorate. Think also what happens—this troubles me greatly—if there is not a clear majority. If there had been a clear majority with the EU referendum in 2016—by that, I mean a majority of 3 million or more, with 55% or 60% of the electorate voting either way—we would have far fewer problems than we have now. I hope the Constitution Committee will want to look at this again. If they do, I hope they will look at those questions of a minimum turnout and whether there should be a maximum.

This debate is very important. I am sorry about the time limits; I have attempted to be as brief as I can. We cannot leave this matter for long. We will have to return to it, so I make a plea for the British system to be used, with representative democracy, and MPs and others being thrown out if they get it wrong. That seems to be a tried-and-tested procedure.

2.44 pm

Lord Norton of Louth (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Soley, on raising this important issue. I wish to raise two problems with referendums.

The noble Lord raised the issue in the context of representative democracy. In a representative democracy, electors choose those who will govern on their behalf and can then hold them to account for their actions. The problem with a referendum is that there is no accountability. Electors cannot hold themselves to account for the outcome of a referendum. A referendum is thus, strictly speaking, an irresponsible act.

Once a decision is taken, it is left to others to implement. This leads to the second problem. We know how people vote in a referendum, as there is a formal, recorded outcome. We do not know definitively why they voted as they did. Politicians may think they know. The EU referendum is a case in point. We hear politicians claim that people did not vote for a hard or a soft Brexit, when what they mean is that they think electors voted in a way that aligns with their preference. They cannot prove it.

The result is that it leaves those who are responsible for acting on the outcome in a difficult, if not impossible, situation. I have previously likened the UK's membership of the European Union to a marriage, a marriage of convenience, arranged late when the previous preferred relationship was not proving fruitful. Now electors have voted for a divorce. That is the starting point. How do you divide the assets? Who gets custody of the children? Those responsible for negotiating the terms of the divorce know definitively only that a divorce has been agreed.

I have previously expressed opposition to referendums on grounds of principle, but we are now faced with referendums as a part of our constitutional architecture. We cannot undo their use, but we need to think through how we handle them in future, as the noble Lord, Lord Soley, indicated. We need to learn from not just the EU referendum but earlier ones as well. Will the Minister tell us what thought has been given to a generic referendums Bill? We need such a measure before we embark on another referendum.

2.46 pm

Lord Adonis (Lab): My Lords, unlike the noble Lord, Lord Norton, I am not against referendums in principle. If you look at different systems of democracy around the world, some are excellent with referendums, and some are excellent without them. Arguably, two of the best-governed countries in Europe are Germany and Switzerland. Germany has a ban on referendums in its federal constitution, while Switzerland has referendums as a part of its everyday democracy.

[LORD ADONIS]

Switzerland is arguably the most successful of all European countries in terms of peace and prosperity. It has had 306 referendums over the 170 years and that has not been a problem. Reconciling the Government and the governed, and direct and representative democracy, is a constant issue in democracy and Switzerland wrestles with those issues. However, it has managed to do so successfully.

Therefore, in my view, the issue is not one of principle. As a country, we are moving towards a midway point between Germany and Switzerland. We are making referendums a normal part of the machinery for amending our constitution but not a part of our ordinary system of government, in the way that Switzerland has. That is a perfectly defensible proposition in principle. The issue on which I completely agree with the noble Lord, Lord Norton, and my noble friend Lord Soley is that we need to take stock, in light of experience, to ensure that this is done successfully.

The three key elements which need to be in place, and which we need to learn from the European referendum, are: first, that referendums must be on clear and viable propositions; secondly, that they must be regulated properly; and, thirdly, that you must have a competent Government to respond to the referendum and seek, as competently as possible, to find a way forward thereafter. We are in this elongated car crash in respect of the EU referendum because there was no clear and defined proposition on the table; the referendum was terribly regulated, indeed barely regulated at all; and we have had the most incompetent Government in post-war British history seeking to wrestle with the referendum result.

My strong advice to the Government is that they become competent, regulate referendums properly and put only viable propositions before the people. I know the Minister will agree with all three of those propositions.

2.49 pm

Lord Pendry (Lab): My Lords, I congratulate my colleague and noble friend Lord Soley on introducing this debate, but it is unfortunate that it is such a limited one. I have said in earlier debates on this issue that I am not a general supporter of referenda. Nevertheless, as a student I was fascinated by the views of Voltaire, Bentham, Locke and Hume, but in particular by Jean-Jacques Rousseau's concept of direct democracy in the canton states—specifically, the notion that messages from the electorate should be communicated directly to the elected. This concept dimmed in its attractiveness, however, when one realised that, at the time of Rousseau's writing, his ideas on democracy related to cities such as Bern with a population of 8,000, Basel with 12,000 and Geneva with 17,000—and they hardly relate to the kind of referendum that we had in 2016. Still, at university I was fortunate enough to attend seminars at All Souls by Sir Isaiah Berlin after his launch of *Two Concepts of Liberty*. As I result, I think I got a more rounded picture of the questions of sovereignty and democracy.

What has become clear to me in the three years following the 2016 referendum is that if a referendum is to be held, it must offer a choice between options that are clear, and it must be debated sufficiently and

truthfully so that the electorate can make an informed decision. The 2016 referendum involved neither of these things, which has left us in a democratic crisis. The population was offered a binary choice on what was effectively an open-ended question, with the option to leave the EU given without stipulating in what manner. As a result, the information available to the electorate to inform their choice was deeply flawed, and in the past three years the whole fabric of what was on offer in 2016 has been shown to be a sham. An obvious example is of course Boris's bus, but we will not go into that.

There was also talk in that campaign about the EU commissioners as faceless bureaucrats. This neglected to mention the positive role that UK commissioners have played in the Commission since 1973, including Lord Soames, Lord Jenkins, the noble Lords, Lord Tugendhat and Lord Patten, my noble friend Lord Kinnock, the noble Baroness, Lady Ashton, and others. Does anyone really believe that they were working against the best interests of the people in this country?

Finally, it is clear that there needs to be another referendum to get us out of this mess. After all, democracy is the only way in which we can rectify this by democratic means. As my time is up, I say this: remember that there are 2 million youngsters who were not allowed to vote in the last referendum. But they can now and the future of this country is about them, not us.

2.52 pm

Lord Robathan (Con): My Lords, by chance we had the Swiss ambassador in front of our committee today to discuss various things. Switzerland indeed has frequent referendums, but with a very different system from ours. It has a devolved, federalist system of cantons, and it works very well; we have parliamentary representative democracy. I think that those who want referendums are generally misguided. I agree entirely with the noble Lord, Lord Soley, who said that occasionally we may need them, but generally they are not at all a good idea—in fact, they are a shocking idea.

Luckily, I was not here in 2015 when the referendum Bill came forward, so I claim no responsibility—although I cannot quite remember whether I may have been able to vote on one amendment at the end. Those who ask for a second referendum must have taken leave of their senses. The poison that was injected into the body politic in 2016, and is still there, would be exacerbated yet further and more poison would be injected. Moreover, what would be the result? If it went the other way and people voted to remain, there would be uproar and accusations of “We was robbed” by those who voted to leave the first time round. Personally, I think it would be more likely to go the same way and that people would vote to leave again, which begs the question: what would the question be?

When I asked the noble Lord, Lord Newby, the leader of the Liberal Democrats in this House, what the question would be, answer came there none. I am afraid that the Liberal Democrats have form on this. In 2008, Mr Nick Clegg started a petition, saying,

“It's time for a REAL REFERENDUM ON EUROPE ... Only a real referendum on Britain's membership of the EU will let the people decide our country's future”.

Let the people decide, he said. Various Members who are currently here will remember that, on 26 February that year, some 50 Liberal Democrat MPs stormed out of the Commons in a frankly risible stunt to protest that they were not allowed to discuss having a referendum on the Lisbon treaty.

I am sure the noble Lord, Lord Wallace, will remember that the Liberal Democrat manifesto 2010 said they were,

“committed to an in-out referendum the next time”,

there is “fundamental change”. In 2016, Sir Vince Cable, who I believe is still the leader of the Liberal Democrats, said:

“The public have voted ... it’s seriously disrespectful—and politically utterly counter-productive—to say ‘Sorry guys, you got it wrong, you’ve got to try again’”.

Very unusually, I agree with what Nick said in 2008 about respecting the people’s decision. Very unusually, I agree with Vince Cable about respecting the people’s decision. Politics gets a very bad press, and probably the main reason is that the public do not believe that politicians tell the truth or are consistent. I will leave it at that and hope that the Liberal Democrat speaker—my former colleague in the Ministry of Defence, with whom I got on very well—will dwell seriously on those comments.

2.56 pm

Lord Parekh (Lab): My Lords, we have had 13 referendums so far; three were national and 10 regional. This means that referendums have become an accepted practice and anyone who wants one from now on cannot be denied it on the grounds that it is inconsistent with parliamentary democracy. It is an established constitutional fact. In addition, there are several good reasons why a referendum has a place in a democracy. In a liberal democracy, the political class tends to be self-contained and it is quite important that people should be able to speak directly, unmediated by any institution. In that sense, a referendum serves as a safety valve in a liberal democracy. It also vitalises parliamentary democracy because, from time to time, when the people speak and assert their sovereignty, parliamentary institutions are made accountable.

My good friend the noble Lord, Lord Norton, said that the difficulty with a referendum is who the people are accountable to. In a parliamentary democracy, parliamentarians are accountable to the people, but who are the people accountable to? Ultimately, there is an absolute premise for that authority. If I said that they were accountable to themselves, because they have to pay the price for the decisions they make, that answer should be sufficient. As Aristotle said, the wearer knows where the shoe pinches, so there is no responsibility beyond the people’s experience.

Given that, in short, a referendum is a part of our political life, the question is: what can we do to regulate it, so that we know when to implement it and on what issues, how great a majority should be required on that issue and what the preconditions are for a sensible referendum? All our referendums so far, bar one, have been noncontroversial. The EU referendum of 2016 became controversial, partly because its outcome is inconsistent with what the liberals and parliamentarians

expected. That kind of clash between Parliament and the people had not happened on any of the earlier referendums.

Now that it has become controversial, it is very important that we should think in terms of a constitutional convention. That convention cannot be drafted by Parliament because it would be seen as a party—Parliament deciding its own future. The convention has to be done by Parliament in collaboration with the people. That is the kind of convention that the Scots had. Here, it is important to bear a simple point in mind. With a referendum, you create a kind of political system in which the country is ruled by Parliament in collaboration with the people. Just as we have the collaboration of Parliament and the sovereign, governing the country together, the situation would be that Parliament and the people govern the country. The people would express their views through a referendum, and Parliament through other ways. A referendum can therefore never be entirely advisory, nor can it be totally binding. There are ways in which its position can be defined, but I should have thought that one way in which we can look at the outcome of a referendum is where it is neither binding nor entirely advisory.

2.59 pm

Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe (Lab): I am also grateful to my noble friend Lord Soley for introducing this debate. It is a great pity we have so little time. One of the reasons for that is that we do not organise business democratically in this House. Maybe others will have the guts to try to turn it over, and maybe we will use a form of referendum to determine what we should be talking about, our priorities, on which days we should speak on them and for how long. If we can do that for ourselves, we should then be prepared to trust the people out there and do it for them. Much wisdom was spoken by my noble friend Lord Parekh about what we need to do.

The first big change we should make for any future referendum comes back to the accountability of individuals; they should be required to show publicly how they voted, as we do here. That would be a major move towards getting people to start acting responsibly and playing a part. We have to move on this because, make no mistake, this was not the last referendum. There will be many more demands for other ways to be involved in parliamentary activities, and we should not be afraid of this.

Representative democracy itself is at risk, because so many MPs now act like delegates rather than the representatives they used to be. If they are doing that, they are not playing their former roles. Instead, we should be looking for a participative democracy, because we now have the technology, which is being used in many different ways and will develop even further. The public out there will use it. Millions vote every Saturday evening in entertainment programmes. We may not be involved, but they are doing it; they want their say.

Some 6 million people signed a petition to revoke Article 50 and we have totally ignored it, yet they were moved to do it. A host of changes are being made to how people participate in society and through social media.

[LORD BROOKE OF ALVERTHORPE]

Parliamentarians and the parties are way behind. People should look at what Tony Blair said on this recently, as he is on the cusp of the coming change. If we do not move with it, we will be swept away by it. The people will take it and then we will have real trouble.

3.01 pm

Lord Cormack (Con): My Lords, I entirely agree with what the noble Lord, Lord Brooke of Alverthorpe, said at the beginning of his brief speech. He said it is ridiculous that we have such a short time to debate such a major subject. It is important that we try to take a grip of the parliamentary timetable. The House will rise at about 6 pm today; there is no reason at all why we should not rise at 7 pm or 7.30 pm, so that people have a proper opportunity to discuss this most important subject. We are grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Soley, for bringing it up.

I want to make one real point and it is this: referendums are inimical to representative democracy, but we have to accept, as the noble Lord, Lord Soley, and my noble friend Lord Norton, said, that they are now part of our system. We need a referendum Bill, becoming a referendum Act, to regulate how they are held. We should first specify that there has to be a certain turnout for a referendum to be valid. Secondly, there has to be an agreed threshold before the referendum can take effect. We had that in 1979 with Scotland. When I came out of Lincoln Cathedral on the morning after the referendum in 2016, one of my fellow congregants said to me, “Even in my golf club we need a two-thirds majority to change the constitution”. We are all, individually and collectively, at fault for not doing that before the 2016 referendum. In any referendum Act, we should certainly do that.

There should be a final provision in such an Act to say that, when an issue has been decided, it cannot be brought before the people again for a specified time. That might be three, five or 10 years, but it would be ridiculous to create a situation in which you could have a referendum at the whim of a group of people. On that issue, I therefore agree with my noble friend Lord Robathan; that is why I have not supported a second referendum. It would be confusion worse confounded to have one. But I believe in parliamentary democracy. Parliament’s will should prevail. Where there is a referendum, it should be carefully determined and regulated. Most of the referenda that we have had in this country have, in effect, been to ratify a decision already taken in Parliament.

3.04 pm

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): My Lords, I agree with the noble Lords, Lord Cormack and Lord Soley. In my view, referenda are incompatible with our parliamentary democracy. I have always been against them. As other noble Lords have said, we have always associated referenda with Switzerland, which has an entirely different constitution from ours. The Swiss are the experts on them.

In 2018, the Swiss held 10 national referendums on a range of issues, including financial regulation and agricultural policy, so they are the real experts. In April,

however, the Swiss supreme court took a historic step, overturning a nationwide referendum result and ordering a re-run, for the first time ever, on the basis that the information given to voters was insufficient. The court concluded:

“Given the tight outcome of the vote and the seriousness of the irregularities, it is possible that the result of the ballot would have been different”.

Even Switzerland, the country that relies more on referenda than any other, recognised that basic danger of irregularities—insufficient information and unreliable results. Natural justice says to put the question again.

Since our 2016 referendum, there has been massive evidence of wrongdoing in how the campaign was conducted. The official leave group has been fined by the Electoral Commission and is being investigated by the Metropolitan Police. There have also been allegations of overspending and, of course, Russian involvement. The multiple falsehoods on which the leave campaign was based are now beyond doubt. There is no rational or democratic reason why a 52:48 vote, in these circumstances and on a constitutional issue, should be treated as the last word. The 1979 Scottish referendum had exactly the same result, 52% to 48%, but it was not binding or brought in because there was a threshold in that referendum. It was decided that the constitution could not be changed because of the threshold, yet it was probably less important than the EU referendum.

As I said, I am not a fan of the use of referendums. They should be kept out of our constitution as far as possible. However, if there is to be another, more powers and sanctions should be given to the Electoral Commission to regulate them and ensure that they are conducted properly. I agree with noble Lords who have suggested there should be a Bill. If constitutional issues are at stake, thresholds should be put in place.

Finally, I recommend that we take account of the recommendations of the Venice Commission of the Council of Europe. It has provided a framework to ensure that referenda are consistent with our democratic system. It covers everything including the age of voters, funding, the role of the media and thresholds. If these guidelines are followed by the Electoral Commission, it would help to ensure that future referenda are carried out to the highest possible standard and in accordance with the law. To uphold our democratic principles, we need to learn from the disgraceful events of 2016 and ensure that they do not happen again.

3.07 pm

Lord Wallace of Saltaire (LD): My Lords, I say to the noble Lord, Lord Robathan, that I was never a fan of my party’s behaviour on referendums. They require a great deal of care. I entirely support what has been said about the need to define much more tightly how and in which circumstances referendums are used.

We are now in an awful mess. We have an institutionalised two-party system, in which both parties appear to be irrevocably split, so it does not work. We have a number of people saying that the referendum has given us the will of the people, but we are a representative democracy. We have had three years in which those who led the leave campaign—Liam Fox, David Davis and Boris Johnson—were given responsible

positions to try to implement the will of the people, and have failed to. So we are stuck. What we need, therefore, is a debate on our constitution and a concern for how to educate our masters, in a society that has failed over generations to have political education in schools or any sense of civic responsibility, so that we understand that democracy is a dialogue in which the people and the political elite hold each other to account.

That leaves us all with the requirement to talk about how we understand the British constitution. As has often been said, our constitution requires government by good chaps. When we have a large number of people in our political elite who are not exactly good chaps—I make no reference to any particular contenders for the Conservative leadership—it becomes difficult to make the constitution work or to maintain its conventions when they are challenged. The fact that we are three years away from a referendum campaign which was fought on the principle of restoring parliamentary sovereignty and we now have contenders for the Conservative leadership outbidding each other in their determination to dissolve Parliament, or at least to suspend or prorogue us so that executive authority can be used to drive through a hard Brexit, demonstrates what a mess we are in.

Democracy is a dialogue between citizens and the political establishment. That requires responsible political leadership. It also requires checks and balances which we only have in a conventional form in Britain, unlike the written constitutions of the United States, France, Germany or other countries. It requires responsible parties, and that has clearly broken down. It requires the re-establishment of a relationship between the public and the political elite which re-establishes trust. We all understand how that has broken down. After this very short debate we need to address, publicly, the issues of how we reshape and re-explain the British constitution.

3.11 pm

Baroness Hayter of Kentish Town (Lab): My Lords, as the noble Lord, Lord Norton, suggested, in contrast to an election, where a political party stands on a manifesto and then has responsibility to implement it, with a referendum, there is no responsibility on those proposing change either to offer something viable—in the words of my noble friend Lord Adonis—or to take the reins afterwards and implement the decision. Yet the public expect a referendum to be implemented. But when proponents of change make unachievable promises, such as Boris Johnson's,

“There will continue to be free trade”,

after we leave, or David Davis' UK-German deal including,

“free access for their cars ... in exchange for a deal on everything else”,

and then wash their hands of how to fulfil those promises, even when appointed to do so, we are in trouble.

Worse, Boris Johnson is now threatening not even to pay the money we owe—although he agreed to it when he was in Cabinet—and says that he would take us out on 31 October, deal or no deal, whatever the cost to our economy, to our citizens across the EU or, indeed, to peace in Northern Ireland. All this is on the excuse that the promises he made in 2016 were blessed

by the public so must be honoured. That is a bad example of taking a decision by referendum. As the House has heard, these are highly complex, non-binary issues: not just whether to leave, but how to leave; whether to retain a competitive, non-protectionist economy based on environmental, worker and consumer protection or to move to an unrestrained, low-standard economy of the Trump variety. The referendum never discussed the “how” question, with the range of options, and the time needed to plan and adjust. That is partly the nature of the beast of a referendum, but it is partly due to the dishonesty—I have to use the word—of one side, which either misled the public and pretended it was easy or were too thoughtless or stupid to find out or care.

This particular referendum, on a complex economic, political, diplomatic and security issue, is testimony to the clash with our normal parliamentary democracy, where normally Governments are responsible for implementing the promises that they made in a general election. In this case, the costs to the economy are enormous. The uncertainty for business is costing billions. Reduced investment and preparations for no deal are costing hundreds of millions. Manufacturing representatives said today that a no-deal Brexit would be “commercial suicide”. The Cabinet has been warned that we are unprepared for a crash out. There is bewilderment among the CBI, BCC and Federation of Small Businesses at home and, as we have heard, Governments across the globe.

This referendum, and government incompetence, could lay waste to our economy. It is hardly a good advertisement for governing by referendum.

3.14 pm

Lord Young of Cookham (Con): My Lords, I congratulate the noble Lord, Lord Soley, my constituency neighbour in another place for many years, on securing this debate. He has chosen a highly topical subject, the tension between parliamentary democracy on the one hand and referendums on the other, a subject which will engage the attention of my noble friend Lord Norton's politics students at Hull for generations to come. I commend the noble Lord's opening speech and the contributions of all noble Lords who have taken part in this brief but high-quality debate.

To answer the question the noble Lord posed, I refreshed my memory of the two-and-a-half-hour debate held in this House on 19 July last year, not just to remind myself of my views on the matter but to pick out some of the key messages. I was struck by what the right reverend Prelate the Bishop of Southwark said:

“Binary questions do not resolve complex matters of public policy”.—[*Official Report*, 19/7/18; col. 1352.]

My noble friend Lord Norton also spoke in that debate, using words which seem identical to those he used today:

“referendums are in conflict with responsible government ... Decision-making through referendum is, strictly speaking, irresponsible”.—[*Official Report*, 19/7/18; col. 1356.]

I was struck by what the noble and right reverend Lord, Lord Eames, said. He contrasted the Good Friday referendum, when everyone knew exactly what was proposed, with the EU one, when they did not. The latter point was made today by the noble Lords,

[LORD YOUNG OF COOKHAM]

Lord Adonis and Lord Pendry. A point made in that debate, re-emphasised just now by the noble Lord, Lord Wallace of Saltaire, was that democracy is a conversation, a dialogue between Parliament and people, not an instruction from one to the other. Many noble Lords suggested then, as my noble friend Lord Cormack did today, that referendums should be a final step not the first step. If it is the first step, it should be advisory.

I do not know if any noble Lords listened, as I did, to Lord Sumption's insightful Reith Lectures on law and the decline of politics. His assessment of the question posed by the noble Lord, Lord Soley, is well worth quoting:

"A referendum is a device for bypassing the ordinary political process. It takes decision making out of the hands of politicians, whose interest is generally to accommodate the widest possible range of opinion, and places it in the hands of individual electors who have no reason to consider any opinion but their own".

He went on to say that:

"A referendum obstructs compromise by producing a result in which 52% of voters feel entitled to speak for the whole nation and 48% don't matter at all",

and that this was,

"the authentic language of totalitarianism".

The noble Lord, Lord Soley, mentioned the role of dictators in referendums.

I do not go as far as Lord Sumption and as the noble Lord, Lord Adonis, and many noble Lords have argued; I believe that there is a role for referendums in our democracy. What is crucial is the relationship between the two—a point just raised by the noble Baroness, Lady Hayter. It was interesting that half the speakers in today's debate served in another place and are well able to judge and comment on this tension. I believe, as the noble Lord, Lord Adonis, said, that there is a valid case for referendums on certain issues, for example on self-determination—whether people want to stay under the jurisdiction of this Parliament. A recent example of this includes the 2014 referendum on Scottish independence, or, if it were ever called, a referendum in Northern Ireland on a united Ireland.

More generally, in a representative democracy it is important that citizens are engaged in politics. We rely on citizens to vote for their elected representatives in Parliament, Assemblies and councils. Referendums can take this engagement with citizens to a higher level. Citizens can directly vote on matters and see that their participation has real policy implications. They can see direct changes on issues that matter to them. Referendums can indicate public support for policy decisions and, if well-managed, can maintain the public's faith in democracy. If less well-managed, they can have the opposite effect. The noble Lord, Lord Soley, mentioned the damage to our reputation overseas and to our cohesion domestically. The noble Lord, Lord Parekh, said that referendums can be a safety valve, but they can be the opposite if they are not well managed.

Turning to the 2016 EU referendum, the subject of the noble Lord's speech, I note with interest that recent statistics show that public support for referendums has fallen from 76% before the 2016 referendum to

55% now, possibly because referendums, as the report from UCL published in July last year concluded,

"cannot replace the institutions of representative democracy. Citizens do not have the time or the resources to participate in all the policy decisions necessary for the functioning of a complex modern democracy".

Many noble Lords have this afternoon displayed their discontent with referendums, and about the one in 2016. There have been accusations of "wrongdoing", to quote the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes, and that the referendum was "ill-informed" or "irresponsible". My own view is that there was in fact a case for the EU referendum and I believe the result was valid.

This important constitutional issue of our membership of the EU has divided our two main parties and our nation for 45 years and, in the two most recent elections for the European Parliament, the party that won wanted us to leave. However, as the noble Lord, Lord Soley, pointed out, none of the major parties at general elections have provided an outlet for that view, so seeking to resolve it through a referendum seemed eminently sensible, and Parliament agreed. The European Union Referendum Act 2015 was fully debated and approved by both the House of Commons and your Lordships' House. There was a high level of engagement from the public, with a 72% turnout. My criticism of David Cameron is not that he called the referendum, but that he did not win it. As a foot soldier, I accept some responsibility for the outcome, but I say in passing that under any other Labour leader the result might have been different.

What has subsequently happened has shown the risk of running referendums alongside parliamentary democracy, as Parliament, as the noble Lord, Lord Wallace of Saltaire, pointed out, has so far been unable to convert the referendum result into actually leaving the EU. A majority remain Parliament finds itself at odds with a predominantly leave country, possibly because, as my noble friend Lord Norton implied, there is a debate about why exactly people voted as they did. On this impasse, I refer again to the report from UCL's independent commission on referendums. This highlights that referendums must be used as supplementary tools alongside the institutions of representative democracy; they should not bypass or replace the democratic institutions that exist in our representative democracy.

That committee went on to argue, as many noble Lords have argued this afternoon, that there must be appropriate time for debate and political discourse, and the questions put to the public should be carefully considered. The UCL report suggests, as noble Lords have done, that referendums should be held at the end of the decision-making process, so that eligible voters can choose between developed alternatives. This seems to me a sensible ideal, even if it is not always possible to achieve and certainly did not happen with the EU referendum.

I was interested to read the conclusions of the Public Administration and Constitutional Affairs Committee in the other place:

"Confusion as to the possible consequences of a referendum result serves only to heighten the potential tensions between referendums and representative democracy and risks increasing the public's disenchantment with politics".

I think that provides a useful one-sentence response to the question posed by the noble Lord at the beginning of our debate.

A number of noble Lords, including my noble friend Lord Cormack and the noble Lords, Lord Foulkes and Lord Soley, asked why a supermajority was not required in the EU referendum. The referendum did not include a threshold requirement or a supermajority requirement and although I was not in the House at the time, I understand that no amendments for such requirements were debated during the passage of the Bill. That was in keeping with previous referendums in the UK, the only exception being the 1979 referendum on devolution. Without going into great detail, I draw the attention of the House to the UCL report on referendums, which set out in more detail why such thresholds are not necessarily a good idea.

A number of noble Lords asked for a referendum Bill before we embark on any further referendums. There will of course be an opportunity to scrutinise a referendum Bill before any future referendum, because any referendum requires a new Act of Parliament. This Government have made it clear that they have no plans for any more referendums—though the policy of the Opposition on that subject remains as yet unclear—but I say in conclusion that should any future Government think of holding a referendum, today's debate will have provided food for thought before they finally push the button.

Older Persons: Provision of Public Services

Motion to Take Note

3.25 pm

Moved by Lord Foulkes of Cumnock

That this House takes note of the case for the provision of free public transport and television licences for older persons as a means to alleviate loneliness and isolation and of the case for maintaining well-funded public services to support care for the elderly.

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock (Lab Co-op): My Lords, I am particularly grateful to my noble friends in the Labour group in the Lords for agreeing to bring this topic forward and for asking me to speak to it. It is a really important issue, as is indicated by both the number of Peers wishing to speak and indeed by the distinguished nature of those who have put their names down for the debate—I said that to ensure their support.

The subject is one I care very deeply about. I have had a long-standing interest, as some colleagues know, in age-related issues, dating back to the 1970s, when I was director of Age Concern Scotland. I should also declare an interest, not because I have manifestly got more of a vested interest in age-related issues, but because I am the current chair of Age Scotland, an office of which I am particularly proud.

The scourge of loneliness throughout society is widespread and until relatively recently was not often talked about. There is now an increasing awareness, however, illustrated by the fact that next week marks the third annual Loneliness Awareness Week. Older people

are especially vulnerable to loneliness and social isolation. People can become socially isolated for a variety of reasons, such as decreased social mobility, families moving on, leaving the security of the workplace, the deaths of spouses and friends, or simply through disability or illness. Whatever the cause, feeling alone and vulnerable can lead to other, more serious issues, such as depression and a serious decline in physical as well as mental health and well-being.

According to research carried out by the Office for National Statistics, more than half of all 75 year-olds live alone and 10% of 65 year-olds say that they are always or often lonely. That equates to more than a million people saying that they are always or often lonely. The research also found that older people are far less likely to let it be known that they suffer from loneliness. A particular urgency and immediacy have been given to this debate by the frankly appalling news that the universal right of over-75s to a free television licence is to be ended. This has been greeted with widespread dismay. Indeed, the Age UK petition calling on the Government to reverse this decision was sitting at 433,000 this afternoon, after just a few days. If this policy is carried through, it will add substantially to the problem we are discussing today, that of loneliness among elderly people.

Since 2000, anyone aged 75 and over has been entitled to a concessionary TV licence. This was a progressive Labour policy, introduced by then Chancellor, Gordon Brown, which has increasingly become a vital benefit for older people, particularly poorer older people. However, in 2015 this Government, opposed by Labour, decided to transfer the costs of the concessionary licence to the BBC as part of a wider agreement regarding the licence fee. On Monday, following what it says was its largest ever consultation, the BBC decided to end this benefit unless the person was receiving pension credit. I doubt that any of those directly affected supported this outcome. Indeed, 48% of those consulted supported the status quo—nearly half did not want any change at all and the rest put forward various forms of change.

For those living alone, the TV is often their main companion—their window to the outside world. Research by Age UK sadly found that over a million people say that the TV is their main source of company. One in four over-75s views the TV as their main source of companionship.

The Conservative Party agreed and pledged to protect free TV licences for over-75s in its 2017 election manifesto—on page 66 to be precise, if the Minister wants to double-check that. The corporation has estimated that over 3 million people will lose the free TV licence under these proposals. Those who receive pension credit equate to only a little more than 800,000, or 15% of those currently eligible. The people who will be hardest hit are those who just fall short of qualifying for pension credit, but who can by no stretch of the imagination be described as wealthy. Indeed, by being over that limit, they are already no longer entitled to help with spectacles, teeth and extra heating, so they will be quadrupally disadvantaged by this proposal. The £154.50 which to noble Lords in this place may not seem a lot is absolutely crucial to the survival of

[LORD FOULKES OF CUMNOCK]

these pensioners. It is the difference, in some cases, between heating and eating. They are counting every penny, and now have this additional blow.

Let us be clear—and I am glad that my noble friend Lord Bragg is speaking in this debate—that the Government cannot blame the betrayal of that commitment on the BBC. It was not the BBC that published the manifesto; it was the Conservative Party. It now has an absolute moral obligation to ensure that the promise is fulfilled. On Tuesday I asked the Minister who is replying to the debate today, since the legislation transferring responsibility to the BBC was passed before the 2017 election, how the Conservatives, when they decided to include in their manifesto that they would maintain free TV licences for those aged 75 and over, expected to be able to implement that promise. I look forward to hearing that in the reply; I will jump up if I do not get it. He was not able to give a satisfactory answer on Tuesday, so I look forward to it this evening.

No. 10 issued an astonishing, hypocritical statement, saying that it, the head of the Government, expected the BBC to continue the concession and pointed towards the large salaries of senior BBC staff. These are two separate issues. Whatever one thinks about BBC salaries, they are a drop in the ocean compared to the £745 million—a fifth of the BBC's budget—that this would cost. This is a social welfare issue. The BBC is not the Department for Work and Pensions, and the Government must answer the straightforward question of why they are breaking their manifesto commitment to more than 3 million older people.

I will return to the general theme of this debate. The work carried out by many charities to mitigate government policies is absolutely crucial. A key part of the strategy of charities has been to focus on loneliness—we have had that in Age Scotland and Age UK in the past year. A number of essential services have been set up: friendship groups which bring people together, allowing them to socialise; and women have been getting together more, but now through Men's Sheds men are getting together to use their skills to help society as a whole. There are also helplines that provide free and confidential help, as well as benefit and other advice, specifically for the elderly. One helpline, getting around 10,500 calls every week from lonely and isolated older people, says that 53% of the callers say they have no one else to speak to. That is why they are phoning. It should also be said that the handling of these calls is often carried out by great volunteers, some of whom I have seen at Age Scotland.

While every such initiative is crucial and should be encouraged, they do not address the scale of the issue. The Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness, set up following the death of the wonderful former MP who campaigned tirelessly on this issue, found that while government cannot solve loneliness alone—of course it cannot—it could bring together the key actors and develop a clear strategy. That led to £20 million in extra funding to address the issue—which, frankly, is a drop in the ocean—as well as widening the role of a DCMS Minister to include this area and lead cross-government strategy. But it was not the creation of a Minister for Loneliness, as some in government and the media have claimed.

These are all welcome steps, but they take place before the backdrop of massive government cuts in social care for older people. The LGA has estimated that there will be a £1.5 billion funding gap by 2019-20 for local authorities, rising to £3.5 billion by 2024-25. How can we expect there to be any chance of those concerned with the welfare of older people overcoming all these challenges?

This brings me to free and concessionary bus passes, which are also of great importance. They allow for accessible travel and interaction with other people, making loneliness less likely. I have been really keen on this, as I know the noble Baroness, Lady Greengross, was when she worked with Age Concern England. They get all the people out and about, to mix, keep active and become less reliant on health and social services, and save money as a result. In rural areas especially, they are also crucial for getting older people to medical appointments, banks and post offices. In 2017-18, there were 8.5 million passes in England for older people. It is estimated that 71% of eligible women and 67% of eligible men have a pass.

But the LGA estimates that there is a £652 million funding gap, with local authorities having to fund the costs out of their hard-pressed resources. The SNP cutbacks are affecting local government in Scotland as well. There have been suggestions, including, regrettably, by some Peers, of means testing for free bus passes. However, research by Age UK has pointed to the dangers of this. Better-off people are far less likely to obtain and use a bus pass, so the savings through means testing would be modest and the administration costs great. Take-up is higher among those from lower-income groups, and it is they who will be deterred from applying if means testing is introduced. However, the free and concessionary travel on buses for older people also helps keep these vital bus services viable to be used by the rest of the population. They would not exist if they did not have older people using their passes on them.

This brings me to the recent report by the Select Committee on Intergenerational Fairness and Provision. It has made some positive recommendations on intergenerational provision, which are welcome, but I disagree with its specific recommendations 33, 34, 35 and 36. These relate to age-related benefits, removing the triple lock on the state pension, phasing out free TV licences and raising the age that you start receiving certain benefits. It made these recommendations on the basis that younger households are sadly now relatively poorer than older households. However, that is not an argument for reducing the hard-earned entitlements of older people. Nor does it represent a general truth. There are millions of older people struggling to make ends meet and suffering from loneliness at the same time.

What is important is the inequality between the richest and the poorest in society, as we heard in my noble friend Lord Dubs's debate earlier today. Surely that is the division in society we should seek to address, rather than playing off poorer younger households against poorer older households. Some 21% of wealth in the UK is held by 1% of the population. Over 40% is held by 5% of the population. It is they who should help the poor of every generation.

The first aim of this debate is to emphasise the sheer scale of the problem we are dealing with. Loneliness may be out of sight and out of mind, almost by definition, but it is the daily experience of millions and poor reward for the contributions they have made to society through their active lifetimes. Those noble Lords who watched, as I did, the D-day celebrations will have seen those veterans. Were they not fantastic? Were their statements not great? When you think of the contributions that they have made, why should they and others of their generation suffer?

We need to support and encourage the many admirable initiatives which exist. However, the role of government cannot be overstated. Even if a particular measure does not include the word “loneliness”, it may well have a huge negative impact on those who are already enduring that condition and seeing their few lifelines of human contact under threat.

Free travel and free TV licences are two particularly powerful examples of how we can help—there are many others. An awareness of this issue and the unhappiness it creates must run through government as a whole to influence policies to ensure no further damage, but instead an enhancement of essential services and the quality of life that they underpin.

Sadly, the threat to TV licences shows how quickly progress can be reversed and the promises from Ministers rendered meaningless. An immediate reversal of this disgraceful decision would be the best illustration that the Government understand the problem and are listening.

3.40 pm

Lord Haselhurst (Con): My Lords, my age and appearance compel me to declare an interest in the subject matter of this debate.

For most of my political life, it has been a given that we should provide ever-increasing support for the elderly, but it is interesting that we have now, seemingly, reached the point at which serious debate arises about the balance of support between the young and the elderly. Why else did your Lordships’ House set up the Intergenerational Fairness and Provision Committee, to which the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes, has just referred?

Today’s Motion relates only to the elderly, specifying loneliness and isolation. It is further narrowed by reference to the twin issues of free public transport and TV licences. As we are not making any final executive decision today, I wonder whether those methods are the only or the best means to tackle loneliness, isolation and the general welfare of elderly people. After all, the NHS and social services are for ever needing more resources, so anything in that direction tends disproportionately—rightly—to help the elderly. One goal that the Government set themselves in their cross-departmental strategy to tackle loneliness was a commitment to improve the evidence base. I certainly support that, because it seems to me that there may be many more ways in which loneliness could be approached than simply the two suggestions in the Motion before the House today.

I certainly recognise, as the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes, said, that TV is a main companion for many people, but with only four minutes at my disposal I do not want to go into the argument about funding. I just

want to make two points. First, looking ahead, surely broadband is more important to be in every home—particularly in rural areas, but also everywhere—because it is a means which allows local and family connectivity. The fact is that a growing proportion of the elderly community will be computer-savvy. Secondly, are we absolutely sure that broadcasting in the way that we have known it will continue indefinitely, or will other means bring news and entertainment into people’s homes?

I have had the honour to represent two constituencies in the House of Commons, and in both of them I have been a witness to how the intergenerational family structure has been weakened, inevitably leaving more for the state to do. In the constituency of Middleton and Prestwich, overspill housing attached to Middleton as part of the solution to Manchester’s slum clearance programme meant that the young people growing up could not live on the same estate as their parents, because Manchester had 95% of the re-lets. They had to live in another part of town and, in those early days, 40 or 50 years ago, public transport was still a problem for them.

In the much more rural constituency of Saffron Walden, there was hostility building up to new homes, with people seemingly not caring that young people growing up would be forced to move away because they could not afford to live in the area of their birth. I am not saying that mobility can or should be arrested, but virtually forcing families to move apart seems to me distinctly unhelpful.

A growing proportion of the elderly cohort will also be car drivers and, having worked longer, may have more disposable income to support independent living. Through my knowledge of council for voluntary services work, I became aware of many great local initiatives to enrich the lives of elderly people. This sector deserves more support for what it can do. Instead of running half-empty buses in rural areas, I should like more development of schemes of community transport—even the formation of a rural Uber and, ultimately, driverless pods. Some people in old age prefer to be on their own; most of us probably prefer company.

My conclusion is that we need a wider, ongoing debate about how we satisfy a variety of needs. It needs fresh thinking combined with compassion, convenience and a great dose of ingenuity.

3.45 pm

Lord Addington (LD): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes, for raising this subject. For once, I remember that, in your Lordships’ House, I am still quite young—but only in your Lordships’ House. There were two things that he raised to illustrate loneliness and the problems of isolation and, only one speech down, the point has already been made that they are not the only considerations. Free travel for people when they get older will stop them being isolated. As the noble Lord, Lord, Lord Haselhurst, pointed out, how it is delivered in future may well change, but it will be beneficial to groups. As he also pointed out, car ownership may well have its limitations. People’s reflexes and eyesight go as they get older, so that may well not be the answer. We have to look at that in certain ways in the future.

[LORD ADDINGTON]

However, I intend to address most of my remarks to TV licensing. The noble Lord, Lord Haselhurst, beat me to the punch because, as I did when we discussed this issue on Tuesday, he made the obvious point that the BBC is not a benefits agency. It is designed to deliver programmes online, on terrestrial TV and on radio that are supposed to be accessible to all of us and of a high standard. The BBC is part of Britain's soft power; it extends our reach. We may well need it in future.

When the over-75s policy was brought in two decades ago, it was designed for the elderly. Stepping into that gap is, shall we say, an example of sleight of hand, or double dipping. You name it—it is about pulling a fast one. This time, it has been spotted. The BBC may have given way in the past, but we have to stand up on this. We should not expect something designed to do something different to take on the job of the Department for Work and Pensions and the activities of the Treasury. That should not happen; in no way should we consider that, or even tolerate it. We cannot go down that route. Just think of where else it goes. Which other agencies that get government money should be expected to subsidise somewhere else? What will we not take our hands off? We must make sure that we respect people for doing the jobs they are told to do, and make sure that people with other responsibilities are taking them on. We cannot allow this in perpetuity. If we do, will we grant these people powers to tax and to elect people to their council? That is the other route we can go down, but I do not think that anybody is in a busting hurry for that sort of solution.

If we accept that the BBC is a general good—and one that must be paid for—and want to help a certain group, we must look at the overall structure. If we are to give away free licences for the hardest up—that is probably a good thing; remember, they support online benefits—higher earners might have to pay for licences when others do not. Of course, there is an assessment cost there, but let us at least open up that possibility. We cannot just allow this double counting. If we do, we open Pandora's box just a little wider—indeed, we probably pull open the fire escapes as well. We cannot allow this to happen. We must defend the BBC's right to do what it is supposed to, and that is produce programme content.

3.49 pm

Baroness Ramsay of Cartvale (Lab): My Lords, I am grateful to my noble friend Lord Foulkes for giving us the opportunity to discuss this important issue, which, thanks to the BBC, has become very topical in the past few days.

If it is true that a society's degree of civilisation can be measured in how it treats its most helpless—the youngest and oldest citizens—I am afraid that the UK does not score enough to be at the top of any league table. All of us could enumerate the shortcomings in how we provide for our youngest citizens but, in this debate, we turn to the other end of the life cycle: our oldest citizens. Where better to do that than in this House, where nearly all of us have some experience of the main issues?

For our oldest citizens, our performance is lamentable. Masses of statistics, too numerous to mention in the short time we have, have been provided by many respected organisations from across the UK, including Age UK, Age Scotland and many more. They demonstrate what we have all seen with our own eyes and what we all know from personal experience: social care for our elderly and needy is dismal. Social care provisions are, at best, perfunctory and, at worst, non-existent or unacceptable. The blight of loneliness is increasing and deadly, making long life a misery instead of a blessing.

The latest blow is the BBC announcement that free TV licences for over-75s will be linked to pension credit—that is, means tested. Research from the House of Commons Library finds that 3,037,950 households will lose the free TV licence if that happens. I do not blame the BBC for this; noble Lords may agree with me. In a proper, decent society, the Government take responsibility for social welfare; it is monstrous for a Government to ditch their responsibilities like this and put them on a broadcasting service, private or public. Given that our old age pensions are among the lowest in Europe, using any measure, how can means testing TV licences or any such benefit for our elderly be justified?

I leave noble Lords with two questions that arose in the discussions on the Urgent Question asked on Tuesday in another place by the shadow Culture Secretary, the right honourable Tom Watson. First, how can you means test loneliness? Secondly, how can you means test social isolation? The answer to both is that you cannot—indeed, you ought not even try to do so.

3.53 pm

Baroness Greengross (CB): My Lords, I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes, for giving us the opportunity to debate such an important issue. I have enjoyed working and sharing interests with him over many years. I declare my interests as set out in the register, including at the ILCUK. In my remarks, I will refer to the wide-ranging recommendations of the Select Committee on Intergenerational Fairness and Provision, of which I was a member. Although the media reporting focused on the recommendations on age-related tax and benefits, I remind the House that the committee also made recommendations on housing, training, employment and local communities to promote intergenerational fairness. This is important because there are beginning to be rumblings from younger people who feel that their generation is not being treated fairly compared with their parents' generation. We must avoid intergenerational conflict or even resentment. Today's older generations want to make sure that their children and grandchildren have better opportunities in life than they had, but sadly this is not the case.

Loneliness, as Age UK has pointed out, is a long-standing problem. It should be of great concern to us all that the number of lonely older people may rise from 1.4 million to 2 million very soon. Next week, the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Dementia, which I co-chair, will publish a report on disability and dementia. Its central theme is that dementia is a disability recognised in both UK law and international conventions. The report

makes a number of recommendations, including on transport, where it points out that any changes to bus and community transport services should be reviewed in the context of the public sector equality duty, which I strongly support. We need to think about how that might be expanded somewhat. Access to public transport is a lifeline for many older and disabled people—to visit friends and family, and to get to GP and hospital appointments. That is why I support free local travel for pensioners.

I am also proud to be an ambassador for the Silver Line charity, which does so much to try to reverse the trend towards increased loneliness and isolation. Last year, the ILC with the Just Group awarded an innovation prize to the Chatty Cafe scheme. It encourages cafes to have a “chatter and natter” table so that customers who want to engage with other people can do so. We need to get people to talk to each other because it is very important.

The Government’s loneliness strategy, published in October 2018, is therefore a welcome policy response to a very big problem. Among its specific recommendations was a greater focus on the role and importance of social prescribing. Only last month I spoke at an Arts 4 Dementia conference about social prescribing and last year the ILCUK, with the support of the Utley Foundation, produced a report on the importance of music to guard against isolation. I therefore hope that the Government strategy will successfully embed tackling loneliness and isolation across government departments and that the evidence base on how we do so is improved by all stakeholders.

I turn now to age-related benefits. I have long believed that we need to redefine old age. It was why, when I set up the ILCUK, a think tank looking at the implications of an ageing society throughout the life course, we understood that age is no longer a good proxy for policy-making. People differ enormously in their capacity to work, to volunteer and to be more or less active throughout their older lives, which can now span 30 or 40 years, making generalisations meaningless. It would be like making policy for everyone aged from birth to 40 as though they were one homogenous group. That really would be a bit silly. We now have comprehensive age discrimination legislation, which covers not only work but the provision of goods and services. This ought to protect older people. Many are very experienced and senior workers, which is why I believe people should be defined by their circumstances, not by their age. If an older person is working, they should be seen not as a pensioner but as a worker, and an experienced worker at that.

The intergenerational fairness Select Committee made some sensible and pragmatic recommendations, seeking to strike a balance between the generations while at the same time taking account of rising longevity and the increasing number of older people. On the TV licence, we recommended that free licences based on age alone should be phased out. Rather than passing the decision to the BBC, it should be for the Government to decide. I regret that the BBC has been put in this invidious position. We also suggested that free bus passes and the winter fuel payment should be available only five years after state pension age from 2048.

We need to do things differently. Tomorrow’s older people will be older in a very different society from that of today or the recent past. We also need to keep in mind that isolation and loneliness are not age-related per se, and it is our fault as a society if people remain a huge problem because they are old. We must tackle it—it is a responsibility we all share.

3.59 pm

Lord Browne of Ladyton (Lab): My Lords, I congratulate my noble friend Lord Foulkes on his introduction of the debate. I thank him for his remarks and for his consistent advocacy for the interests of older people, as I consider that I am one.

He has left us with very little to add; I am persuaded by his arguments. The Minister is in a relatively easy position because he has been a Minister since 2014 in his department and he must have dealt with at least some of the debate on the television licence since 2015. I am sure he will be able to answer in some detail.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State, Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (Lord Ashton of Hyde) (Con): It was 2016, I am afraid.

Lord Browne of Ladyton: I apologise to the Minister. I will tell my officials that his CV is incorrect. However, in any event, I am sure he is ready to answer the best question of the day posed by my noble friend Lord Foulkes: how did the Government, post 2015, go into the 2017 election with a manifesto pledge on not only TV licences but free travel without working out how they were going to deliver it? It is the Government’s responsibility to deliver that manifesto commitment and to look after the needs of old and vulnerable people. Jointly, I am sure they have figured out in the past 24 hours how they will solve this problem. I have seldom seen a Secretary of State more discomfited at the Dispatch Box in the other place than the Minister’s was when he was questioned by one of his predecessors two days ago.

I am glad to follow the noble Baroness, Lady Greengross. She told us that she was a member of the Select Committee that tackled intergenerational fairness. Of all its members who recommended that free TV licences be phased out, she is the only one who has come here to own that recommendation and she deserves credit for that. I share her disappointment that none of the other interesting discussions and recommendations in the report have attracted any attention, other than the age-related benefits.

However, what did the committee expect? The nature of those recommendations was such that it was unlikely that anyone would go beyond them and look at anything else. The presentation of the report by its chairman, the noble Lord, Lord True—I am disappointed he is not in his place to answer some of my questions—led to a great deal of publicity, given that it contains sentences such as, “The Government needs to get a grip of these particular benefits”. The argument he put forward—that this type of benefit will lead to conflict between generations in the long term—is nowhere in the report. I do not believe that. I do not think that anyone of the younger generation resents the few things in these benefits that some older people are given to make their lives better, particularly those who are lonely or vulnerable.

[LORD BROWNE OF LADYTON]

If the Minister thinks that in the report of the Select Committee he will find arguments to deploy here that will protect the decisions that the Government have made, or allow them to revise their view of their manifesto commitment, he will be disappointed. He will see that the argumentation of this is one-sided. It concentrates on witnesses who gave evidence to the committee who were utterly predictable in what they said about these benefits.

4.03 pm

Lord Howarth of Newport (Lab): My Lords, we live in a fractured society. Our twin cults of individualism and the market have tended to diminish our sensitivity to each other's needs, untie our social bonds and induce extensive anomie and depression. In our wealthy and crowded country, social isolation and loneliness are endemic, particularly among people on low incomes. Age UK reports that 1.2 million people are chronically lonely, and loneliness impairs their mental and physical health. Figures from the NHS yesterday told us that there are 454,000 people diagnosed with dementia and perhaps another 220,000 living with undiagnosed dementia. We should try to imagine the loneliness of those people and of far too many of their carers.

The Marmot review argued that social participation leads to a healthier life expectancy. We are told that perhaps one-quarter of GP appointments are sought by people who do not have a diagnosable clinical condition but who are living in isolation. I very much admire the response to this challenge by the present Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, Matt Hancock. His speech to the King's Fund in November and his long-term plan for the NHS place prevention at the centre of healthcare strategy, social prescribing at the centre of prevention, and the arts and culture at the centre of social prescribing. He has also endorsed the three key messages of *Creative Health*, the report of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Arts, Health and Wellbeing, which I co-chair with Ed Vaizey. These messages are that the arts and culture can help keep us well, aid our recovery and support us to enjoy longer lives better lived; help the NHS and social care meet major challenges such as ageing, long-term conditions, loneliness and mental health; and help save money for health and social care.

There is much evidence that engagement with the arts, whether through choirs, painting clubs, dancing, drama or reading groups, improves social connectedness and the ability to make relationships and confers benefits for health. There are a number of case studies in *Creative Health* which illuminate that. A randomised control trial assessing the benefits of Sing For Your Life, a project running singing groups for old people in Kent, found measurable improvements in their quality of life. The Staying Well project in Calderdale, which enables older people to have opportunities to paint, draw or sing, showed demonstrable reductions in loneliness and improvements in health. That project has been extended three times. The Campaign to End Loneliness, developed by Age UK Oxfordshire, Independent Age, Sense, Manchester City Council and the WRVS and funded by the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation, is using arts strategies to improve social connectedness, including intergenerational connectedness, and to empower older people.

Age UK's 2018 document *Creative and Cultural Activities and Wellbeing in Later Life* points to problems with access to transport as a significant barrier to cultural participation. In Northern Ireland, the *Arts and Older People Strategy* has identified isolation and loneliness as the first of six key themes. The Arts Council of Northern Ireland, the Baring Foundation and the Public Health Agency are using the arts to improve social inclusion, and they too point to the significance of barriers to transport. Similarly, the strategy for older people in Wales acknowledges a disparity of opportunity between younger and older people in regard to public transport and access to cultural or recreational facilities. The cultural strategy for Scotland, which is out for consultation, sees an important role for culture in reducing social isolation and loneliness.

In England, we should learn not only from the other nations of the United Kingdom but from New Zealand, where the recent budget of Jacinda Ardern's Government has reframed progress in that country in terms of well-being, not GDP. In England, however, the Government have no strategy for ageing. The Local Government Association recognises the role of the arts in connecting isolated and lonely older people with the wider community, including different generations, and I pay tribute to Councillor Izzi Seccombe for her role as chair of the Community Wellbeing Board of the LGA. But what is the strategy in Whitehall? The DCMS leads on the Government's loneliness strategy. That is very good, but it does not go far enough. In England, we need not just piecemeal initiatives but a coherent strategy to support an ageing population. I thank my noble friend from Scotland for putting us in England on the spot in that regard.

4.09 pm

Baroness Redfern (Con): My Lords, I too welcome this most timely debate on an important issue and thank the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes, for tabling the Motion.

Taking part in this debate enables me to speak on behalf of those thousands of over-75s who will not now be entitled to a free TV licence from next year; this action cannot be justified and is simply unfair. It follows a consultation that shows just how much older people value their TV, with one in four of those aged over 65 saying that it is their main form of companionship. Under the new plans, 3.7 million pensioners will now have to pay and 1.5 million households will be ineligible for a free licence; some will struggle to apply and lots more will feel embarrassed about needing help.

Another issue I wish to raise is that many older people have struggled throughout their working lives to save a little extra for their retirement, but that small pot of savings for a rainy day means that they will not qualify for means-tested benefits. We know that half of all those aged over 75 are living with high levels of ill health, including heart disease, stroke, mental illness and other disabilities. These people are likely to have lower disposable incomes after meeting essential disability-related costs, including paying for care and support, so they rely much more on their TV for companionship, entertainment and keeping up to date with news. More generally, we underestimate how many elderly people living on their own rely on their

TV to keep them company; as they age, they find human company harder to come by and many do not have access to the internet.

You simply cannot means test for, or quantify, social isolation. Loneliness intensifies as the years go by and can affect anyone anywhere; it would be unfair for those with incomes just above the threshold to be penalised. Loneliness as we grow older has been acknowledged as one of the greatest public health challenges; three-quarters of GPs surveyed said that they see between one and five people per day suffering with loneliness. Doctors of course encourage patients and refer them to art groups, cookery classes and so on, as we heard earlier, which is very much valued. Older people in rural areas who can use local transport, do so to keep in touch with friends, as well as to keep medical appointments or go to the bank or post office. They find local transport invaluable.

While in the past loneliness was sometimes viewed as a trivial matter, it is increasingly understood to be a serious condition which can affect people's mental and physical health and well-being, and for local authorities it is now a major public policy issue. Engaging in various activities is all well and good, but during those long, dark winter months, when the evenings draw in, going out is not an option; that is when the television comes into play, making people feel connected and lifting their mood. The corporation's response to 80 and 90 year-olds dependent on their cherished TVs is that it has made a difficult decision. I would go further and say that it has made a fatal mistake, which will not only damage its reputation but undermine its long standing as a public service broadcaster.

I do not know how it can be said that the over-75s should pay to plug this deficit, but it is refreshing to hear the general public say that they would be willing to step up to the plate and give a little more to help salvage and keep that much-prized, universal benefit for older people. Free public transport and television licences are the creative means to alleviate loneliness and isolation, stimulate well-being and keep older people connected to the world.

4.13 pm

Baroness Pitkeathley (Lab): My Lords, I too congratulate my noble friend, including on his timing, and acknowledge his long commitment to the cause of support for older people.

I could not agree more with his calls for free TV licences, transport and so on, and I agree that the problem of loneliness in older people is acute. Nowhere is this seen more starkly than among carers who are themselves often elderly while caring for older people. The Carers UK survey published this week for Carers Week told us that carers—especially if they receive no practical support—are eight times more likely to report that they are lonely than the general population. So any practical or psychological support is welcome for the growing number of carers.

I endorse all that has been said about the need for well-funded services. I have to say, with the greatest respect, that without these well-funded services, including those provided by the voluntary sector, any discussion about social care is simply moving deckchairs on

the “Titanic”. We have to tackle the wider issue of how to provide social care for an ageing population—how it will be funded and how it will be organised.

I have been in your Lordships' House for 22 years and I have lost track of the number of times I have led or participated in debates on social care. Of course, when we do this our speeches are assiduously collected by the doorkeepers and returned to us—and some of us are sad enough to keep the hard copies as well as the electronic ones. I looked through the large pile of mine and I can tell noble Lords that they make pretty depressing reading—as do the *Hansard* records.

This is certainly not to criticise the quality of your Lordships' speeches in those debates, which were fine, perceptive and innovative. What is depressing is that we have kept making the same arguments over and over again: in fact, I could have stood here and made the same speech for the past 10 years. We all know that social care is underfunded; that it is as important as healthcare but has never been accorded the same status; that people do not understand the system and do not realise that social care is means tested; and that no one plans ahead for their care.

The arguments are familiar, as are all the attempts to deal with the issue: the royal commission, the Wanless review, the Barker review and the Dilnot commission. Occasionally we have a ray of light. One party commits to a policy and it is labelled a “death tax”—that was my party. The party retreats in confusion. Another party—the party opposite—commits to something that is labelled a “dementia tax”. More retreat in confusion. We did get as far as passing legislation on the Dilnot report, but it was never enacted.

In the last Queen's Speech—can anyone remember that far back?—we were told that there would be a consultation on social care. Even the promise of a Green Paper got us excited. But where is it? Is anything happening? How important do the candidates in the Tory leadership race think this pressing problem is? I do not have much hope that they will take my advice, but I will give it anyway.

I have just two pieces of advice. First, be honest. No Government of whatever colour or combination have ever made it crystal clear to the public that responsibility for paying for care and for arranging it rests with individuals and their families, and that public funding is available only for those with the least money and the very highest needs. As a consequence, no one prepares or plans for care. We must rethink this and be honest. In addition, we have grown up with the idea that savings and the considerable assets now contained in property can be passed on to one's family without being touched. We must rethink that.

My second piece of advice is: be bold. Every independent review of the past 20 years has recommended that the future funding of social care as well as healthcare should come from public, not private finance. The needs of individuals cannot be divided neatly into either health or social care needs—as those of us who have tried to fathom the difference between a “health bath” and a “social care bath” have long acknowledged. We must embark on a frank and open debate on how to fund health and social care on a sustainable basis

[BARONESS PITKEATHLEY]

into the future, and remind everyone that such a debate will not be settled in a single Parliament—so we need to secure cross-party support.

The Government's usual response is to say that no more money is available. However, as Andrew Dilnot often says, it is a case not of "can't afford" but of "won't afford". Our GDP shows that we are five times better off than we were in 1948, and time and again we find that social care, properly delivered and of good quality, with an emphasis on prevention, is a better way of caring for frail, elderly or disabled people than healthcare, especially in expensive hospitals. If we pool the risk—after all, only one in five of us will ever need the more expensive types of care—and prioritise this, we can afford it. It is a matter of priorities. Surely it is not asking too much to call for some commitment and vision on this most pressing problem for our society.

4.18 pm

Lord Kirkwood of Kirkhope (LD): My Lords, it is a pleasure to contribute to this debate. I am grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes, whose timing is always politically immaculate and who makes this subject more apposite today than it was last week.

It is an important subject. Both of these concessions form an important part of the network of social protection that the country has embedded in its social security set-up. I have a question which may sound technical—but that does not mean that I do not concur with all the powerful and emotional speeches that have been made.

My noble friend Lord Addington made a point about the BBC not being the DWP. This is passporting that it is getting involved in, with pension credit guarantee; it is passporting undertaken by a non-government department. Passporting cannot be done all that efficiently by government departments; they are struggling to make passporting work with universal credit and still trying to find solutions to some of those problems. It may be premature to ask some of these questions, but can I have an absolute assurance that, if this unfortunate plan proceeds, the Government will cross-examine the BBC on how they are going to do it?

Means-tested benefits always involve cliff edges; they involve disincentives to saving in this case, and they are difficult to administer. We already know that pension credit take-up for 2016-17 was only 60%. If we are looking for extra money and there is a shortfall in take-up of pension credit of that dimension, surely the answer is to get more people to claim what they are entitled to. Then we will all have more money and do not have to start doing the strange, untoward things being contemplated now.

There are 1.2 million entitled non-recipients of pension credit. A question that might occur to people is: what is happening to them? There is an unclaimed amount of £3 billion for 2016-17, and that has been on the books for some time. What is the administrative framework for how this works? The whole question of enforcement comes to mind. Working with households of 75 year-olds often means dealing with advisers and family members, so implicit consent will be necessary

to make this work. There will be appeal and verification processes. What happens when one reaches the "can't pay, won't pay" brigade? Are we seriously saying that the BBC will take some of these people to court to get the money back? It is deeply concerning that it is assumed that the pension credit link will solve the problem. It will be very difficult. I wish the BBC well, but I do not think it will work as easily as it thinks.

My next point will not please the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes, but sometimes I do not. Sir David Clementi, the BBC chairman, has said:

"The Government could of course choose to step in and close the gap from their own resources".

My personal view—it is not a party view—is that if the upcoming spending review is looking at the triple lock, which is guaranteed only until 2020 anyway, restricting the triple lock to a link with earnings for valorising pensions in future would produce a significant sum of money, which could certainly pay for all this and probably more. It is time to start looking at such things. If my preferred method of raising money, which is increasing the uptake of pension credit, does not work, it is worth looking at the triple lock to find some extra resources to help Sir David out of his difficulty.

The final thing to say, as everybody before me has, is that this is the Government's responsibility. It lies squarely at the Government's door. If the Minister thinks that he will get away with shuffling off the blame politically to the BBC in the elections and doorstep discussions that we will all have in the future, he is wrong. This will stick. It has happened on his watch, and his Government will have to answer for it in the fullness of time.

4.24 pm

Lord Bragg (Lab): My Lords, I, too, thank the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes, for his stirring and comprehensive opening and for this debate. I declare a couple of interests: I work for BBC Radio and for Sky Arts.

This debate has covered a wide and impressive canvas, but I am going to stick to the BBC licence fee, an issue which is current and of great importance in my world and many of our worlds, including those of many of the elderly in this country.

The BBC's decision to limit free licence fees to those over 75 who receive pension credit and to take the £0.25 billion-a-year hit from its own funds—i.e. from us, the licence fee payers—seems to me to be a difficult solution, arrived at with a great deal of pain, to a problem not of its own making. A lifeline has been thrown to the poorest in our society, which shows how the BBC, out of our funds, is taking on a government job.

When several years ago the Government steamrolled the BBC into accepting responsibility for giving the licence fee free to all pensioners, it was seen as something that just happened under the yoke of government austerity at that time. Like many others, I thought it was a bad idea. The BBC licence fee is there to support BBC programmes; it is the responsibility of the state to support pensioners. This has been said again and again, from the beginning of this debate and throughout.

This move by the Government crossed a boundary. It was a mean snatch-and-grab raid which the BBC board at the time could summon up neither the wit nor the nerve to resist, which it was its duty to do.

The BBC's independence from government is an essential pillar of its constitution, still admired throughout the world—unlike, sadly, our own current constitutional antics. Yet the BBC, with its 347 million viewers around the world each week, along with the 91% of the adult population of this country who use it every day, is still the gold standard in broadcasting globally, domestically and locally. My own view remains the same: the BBC should not have to shoulder the Government's social policy. It is already shouldering four times more television channels, twice as many national radio stations and new web services for 24% less in real terms than 20 years ago because of the clamping down on the licence fee. Had the BBC continued to accept the diktat and given everyone over 75 a free licence, when it is widely proved that many pensioners are very willing and able—more able, often, than the younger population—to pay that £3 a week fee, that tax would soon soar to £1 billion a year, resulting in the loss of channels and numerous programmes that are vital to the lives of many, especially those who live on their own and find in television and radio programmes entertainment, solace, companionship and conversation.

The BBC has woven together a tapestry, a niche in minority programmes, unlike anything else in the world. The armada coming over from America will do nothing about that; nothing to help that; nothing to replace that. It is unique in this country and unique to this country. We need all the evidence that we can muster to show that we in this country are still capable of making things that are universally valuable, widely available and richly rewarding. That is what the BBC does. It can continue to do that if the Government stop penalising it, begin to cherish it and see it for what it is: something great that we have. It does not need the Government to undermine it.

4.27 pm

Lord Glasman (Lab): My Lords, I also thank my noble friend Lord Foulkes not just for initiating this debate but for his lifetime commitment to this issue. I honour and respect it. Looking at the programming, it is not really a surprise to see—if I may dissent—that the BBC is now part of the Department for Work and Pensions. There is a decline in autonomous civic institutions that run independently of government. It is sad to see how few Conservatives are here, but this used to be a pillar of conservatism—there was a body politic with autonomous institutions that made their own decisions. This is therefore part of the general problem with our politics.

I really appreciated the speech by my noble friend Lord Howarth. There is a general malaise in a society based on individualism and an economy in which, if you really want to get on in life, you have to come to London. I cannot count the number of people I have spoken to who are distressed to be separated from their elderly parents and cannot care for them. We have to look at that issue in the context of regional policy and the economy. These are really huge issues.

Obviously, I agree with my noble friend Lord Foulkes and others who have spoken. The noble Baroness, Lady Redfern, spoke extremely eloquently, saying that television and radio are a crucial part of people's lives. As I say to my children all the time, "The friends you've got on Facebook aren't your friends". Nothing can beat relationships and real contact.

We sometimes ignore the beauty of this House. What amazed me in the first year I was here was that it is an institution where older people have power and responsibility, and they do work. If you go anywhere else in our kingdom, it is so rare to see vital, alive and engaged older people. To rephrase a somewhat tarnished ex-Prime Minister, I believe that we are at our best when we are at our oldest.

I will put forward three things we can think about, because I hope the Chamber takes responsibility for the debate and thinks about the role of older people in a sustained way. First, it is very typical that there is an initiative called Teach First. I do not know whether noble Lords have heard of it. Young, bright people go into schools—as if they know anything. What about "teach last"? What about getting older people into schools? What about getting them in front of classrooms? What about genuinely showing honour and respect, and giving some power to older people?

I am Baron Glasman of Stoke Newington and Glasman Stamford Hill. In the Orthodox community in Stamford Hill, at Yesodey Hatorah School, every single student is paired with an older person who has been widowed or widowered. They visit them every day. They are a part of their lives. When I took that to Hackney Council it said, "Can't do it—health and safety", and so on. We have to think of relational ways to integrate older people into the joys of life, such as birthdays. That is what they are excluded from. They are not part of that.

Thirdly, it is now clear that we have to rethink vocational training and skills. How about getting retired workers in as teachers in vocational colleges? There are so many ways in which we can honour older people. I do not think that we should be greedy and keep the privilege of participating in public life strictly for the House of Lords. We should make the argument for it and extend it, because the key aspects of health and life are loving, stable relationships, a sense of dignity, empowerment and participation. That is the key to our treatment of older people.

Viscount Younger of Leckie (Con): My Lords, I am afraid timings have become very tight for this debate. When the Clock reaches four minutes, speakers are advised to conclude their remarks, otherwise we cut further into the Minister's time.

4.31 pm

Baroness Masham of Ilton (CB): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes of Cumnock, for giving your Lordships the chance to discuss some of the ways to alleviate loneliness. I shall use my few minutes to concentrate on elderly people with disabilities. What concerns me is that it seems to be the most vulnerable in our society who are selected to have their facilities cut or reduced, causing extra hardship and anxiety on top of challenging situations.

[BARONESS MASHAM OF ILTON]

Several years ago my late husband was watching cricket on television when he had a stroke, and he developed diabetes and Parkinson's. One of his enjoyments continued to be watching cricket on television. Without that, he would have been deprived of his passion.

There are many disabled people living over the age of 75 who have several complex disabilities, many of whom are living alone, having lost a partner or having always been single. Loneliness is a danger.

Disability is expensive. Because of social care being in crisis, many people have to buy in much-needed vital services. One case I know of was a young woman with a child who was stabbed in the neck, rendering her tetraplegic, paralysed from the neck. Now she is older her hands have got contracted. She desperately needs physiotherapy and occupational therapy to stop her hands stiffening completely. Her elderly mother has to pay for this privately as the hospital can no longer supply it.

I agree that for millions of people aged over 75, the TV is their window on the world and their main form of company. Television plays a central role in their lives. If the right to a free TV licence is taken away, the most vulnerable people in our society will suffer. These are the elderly, lonely people with disabilities and long-term conditions such as dementia. I believe many people, hearing about the removal of this benefit of free TV licences for the over-75s, are disgusted. I am pleased that there is such strong support for the elderly people in this country. I hope the Government and the BBC will think again.

4.35 pm

Lord Maxton (Lab): My Lords, I thank my noble friend Lord Foulkes, who has been my good friend and colleague for over 40 years now, for obtaining this debate and introducing it so ably. I should perhaps say at the outset that I am elderly—I could have claimed the free TV licence for the last eight years, but I have not done so—and I am not lonely. I have probably saved the Government about £1,000.

Much of what I want to say has already been said, particularly the points about the transfer of the free TV licence from the Government to the BBC, which I think is wrong. Will the Minister publish in full all the discussions that took place between the BBC and the Government on this issue? That is very important. If he believes that the TV licence will be abolished somehow or other, was that part of the discussion? Did he tell the BBC to take it or leave it—that it was either this or the Government would abolish the TV licence now? I am sorry; the Minister is indicating that he was not part of that discussion. Does he expect the licence to still be in existence 10 years from now? If not, what will replace it for the elderly people who watch TV and to whom it is their one connection?

If the licence does survive, is it not time that we had different rates of payment for that licence? I probably have at least 10 devices in the house, plus two in the car, so it is unfair that I pay exactly the same sum of money for one TV licence as an old age pensioner living on her own with one television in her house. That cannot be right or fair. This tax was introduced

right at the beginning of broadcasting by the Government of the time, in 1926 I think, when having just one radio in the house was enough, and was all people had. Now people have a variety of different devices, so should we not have different TV licences based on the number of pieces of equipment people have? I do not know how that would be paid for, but we could have that system, rather than having one TV licence for all, and that being the norm which is expected from everybody. I can afford to pay more, so surely I should pay more, while those who cannot afford the licence should pay considerably less, or it should be free for them. I ask the Government to take that into account when looking at this.

4.38 pm

Lord O'Neill of Clackmannan (Lab): My Lords, in the last 12 months, I have spent rather more time watching television than has been my usual habit. I very quickly began to lose the will to live with the extensive coverage of Brexit, so I took refuge in some of the Freeview channels. They will not necessarily win a Palme d'Or for their westerns or adventure films, which relive the days of my youth in the 1950s. The fact is that throughout all these programmes of the non-BBC kind on Freeview there were interminable adverts for funeral plans, so these stations are obviously watched by the elderly. To take up the point that my noble friend Lord Maxton was developing, perhaps we ought to look at whether it could be arranged so that some of the Freeview channels make their contribution to the funding of the licence.

Looking at the intergenerational fairness report, there is an assumption that if the benefits given to the elderly are preserved and the benefits to the young are undermined by austerity-driven meanness, then the answer is to extend that meanness to the elderly. This is a fundamental flaw in the argument advanced by a group of people who I would not normally have credited with this degree of stupidity.

I want to finish on this point, as I know that we do not have a lot of time. Several benefits such as the winter fuel payment, the free bus pass and the television licence are seen as benefits which the elderly get at the expense of the rest of us. I was an MP from 1979, throughout the Thatcher years. One thing which struck me at that time was the concept of genteel poverty, when there were people who were frightened to claim the benefits. Nowadays there are people who take advantage of the bus pass and winter fuel allowance, as it helps to pay for the Christmas presents for their family. These people do not always have the money to subsidise their heating costs but this gives them that bit of independence and enhances their integrity. Very often, it compensates for their loneliness.

This is a mean-minded, dispiriting measure for which the Government, either by design or intent, have correctly ended up getting the blame. They have within their capability the means of finding solutions. The solutions should come early because, if they do not come soon, the general election which will follow will see them being punished. If there is one thing that the elderly will not do, it is to forget who is responsible for their increasing misery.

4.42 pm

Lord Suri (Con): My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes, for securing the time for this debate, which raises a tricky question: how far should we go to help the elderly at the expense of others? We should discuss the key recent development, namely the decision of the BBC to withdraw free TV licences.

I was not in this place in 2001 when free licences were brought in, but the rationale was clearer then. Pensioner poverty was a very real and substantial evil, and this was one reasonable measure to tame it. The BBC was a hegemonic force, with few private sector competitors; much has changed since then. The BBC has to compete with a multiplicity of online competitors, some of which produce exceptional content at far lower rates, and whose subscriptions are not coerced by criminal enforcement. The BBC's viewership has dropped every year, while the average age of a BBC viewer is now 62—some 20 years above the national average.

Can it be fair for younger viewers to subsidise wholly every elderly person? It would not seem an equitable state of affairs. Many in this place, including myself, could pay for the licence fee, and it seems unjustifiable that we should get it for free. The eventual compromise which keeps licences free for some is a reasonable one that reflects the increasing burden of the measure, and deflects it from being a liability on the young.

Non-payment should be decriminalised to reflect the potential for hardship, and as it is plainly better suited to being a civil offence. I hope this measure sparks some debate and discussion about the scope for pensioner benefits in this economy. A number of benefits were brought in during the last Labour Administration which may need to be stripped of their universality. Put bluntly, they have worked and served their useful purpose. Pensioner poverty has halved in the years since 1997 and continues to stay low. This is primarily because the rocketing cost of housing is less of a problem for pensioners, more of whom own their homes.

It is a major regret of the 2017 campaign that a serious discussion about intergenerational fairness was halted by a poorly communicated social care policy. It was not a well thought-out move and was unlikely to work in practice, but it was an important step in addressing how, nowadays, the old tend to be richer than the young but cost the state far more in triple-locked pensions, the winter fuel allowance and free transport.

The cost of social care and healthcare for the elderly is another rocketing cost to the public purse and, at some point, a serious discussion will need to be had about how we can recover some of the cost from the estates of those who can afford to pay more. I should be clear that I do not wish to see the vulnerable suffer; pensioner poverty still exists, and is a scourge on a decent society, but these benefits should not be universal. Means testing, as the BBC has in effect chosen to do, offers a sensible compromise. It will enable us to target our support to the people who need it. The continuing rollout of universal credit allows us to start thinking seriously about what can realistically be justified at this time to keep harmony between the generations.

4.47 pm

Lord Hussain (LD): My Lords, I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in the gap. I will make only a couple of points.

The provision of free public transport and television licences for the elderly are important issues. I would like the Government to issue centralised passes for all elderly people across the country, rather than leaving it to local authorities. We have experienced how, when certain provisions are on the other side of a local authority, and there are administrative problems from time to time, elderly people will suffer from a delay in passes being issued. Hospitals, dentists and doctors may be on the other side of the local geographical boundary, or perhaps a sports club they are a member of or want to spend their time in; bus passes for the elderly should be a centralised issue.

Off-peak provision also has to be looked at. What about appointments that elderly people have early in the morning at hospitals, dentists and other places? They have to attend them, so we should look at taking away only the off-peak provision and give them passes across the day.

Means testing is another point. Organisations such as Age UK have told us that administrative costs would be higher with means-testing, so we should take it out and offer these services to all elderly people, as well as free television licences. The point was made very well in this Chamber earlier that many elderly people suffer from loneliness, and it would help for television provision to be given to them free of charge.

4.49 pm

Baroness Janke (LD): My Lords, the BBC's announcement that it will stop free licences for all but the most needy over-75s was greeted with shock, disbelief and outrage by pensioners, politicians and public alike, not just those affected. It seems a petty and miserable renegeing on a principle and, given that these are the oldest pensioners, another assault on the people least able to fight back. It makes these pensioners pawns in a stately dance of death between the BBC and the Government, who are trying to shrug off their responsibilities. I support the speakers today who have said that this should be the responsibility of the Government, not the BBC. The information I have been given tells me that the BBC has a total of £5 billion, including £1 billion from overseas sales. Sky has £7 billion to spend on programming. Netflix will have \$13 billion to spend on programmes. The current provision for pensioners will eventually cost £1 billion. As all noble Lords have said today, we value our national broadcasting company, the BBC, and all that it stands for. How can it possibly cope with this level of responsibility for pensioners' concessions?

The noble Lord, Lord Foulkes, spoke eloquently and made the case for keeping licences and bus passes. He talked about the "scourge of loneliness". There are so many vulnerable pensioners. Many of the oldest are in social isolation and have depression and mental health issues. More than half of over-75s live alone. This is an absolutely awful renegeing on a commitment that the Government gave to these pensioners. I agree with the noble Lord, Lord O'Neill, and the noble

[BARONESS JANKE]

Baroness, Lady Greengross, about the rather disturbing narrative that pensioners are all well off and do not need benefits. This may be true of some pensioners but it falls short of reality for many, particularly the most elderly, and is very divisive. As the noble Baroness, Lady Greengross, said, there need to be good relationships between the young and the old and, by and large, there are.

Experience in my city showed me that many pensioners are living on shrinking resources but not qualifying for benefits. They are unable to afford entertainment so rely on their televisions to provide them with entertainment, news, stimulation and a sense of being part of a bigger world. Many pensioners in rented accommodation, particularly in urban settings, live in communities where there is no support network. They are in flats in places where other people do little more than sleep. Bus services, and a bus pass, and community transport are essential for them. Many noble Lords have spoken about the nature of prevention and how we need to keep people active. The noble Lord, Lord Howarth, spoke eloquently about areas of good cultural practice and gave many examples. We need to build on local experience and enable those. When I was leader of a city council, I tried to get budgets to combine. Budgets are compartmentalised, both in central government and across the NHS. We need to work much harder in that area. There is a lot of social prescribing now, but it tends to be about solving problems of illness rather than trying to prevent it.

Many in this Chamber support these benefits and believe they are essential. However, not all pensioners require them. The report of the Select Committee on intergenerational fairness raised a number of issues about them. I am sure we all know people who say that, though they are retired and are pensioners, they do not really need the winter fuel allowance. Most enjoy the bus pass, but perhaps sometimes feel that the money could be put to better use. If we want to keep these universal benefits, we have to consider exactly how we will pay for them. There are other ways of providing them.

The noble Lord, Lord Haselhurst, spoke about broadband, but unfortunately broadband is not available over wide stretches of the country. I know that in my city there are Wii sports competitions between pensioners in retirement homes and this is a really important feature. Certainly, the internet can provide lots of facilities for people. In some homes I know of, the internet has replaced the television in the room and the pensioners have a much more social experience. They watch television together rather than independently. So there are more ways of making pensioners' lives happier and healthier, and of fighting social isolation.

The noble Baroness, Lady Greengross, addressed the issue of the very different capacities of different groups of elderly people, and we need to recognise that. Good practice in many cities has pensioners delivering services to other pensioners and building on the strength of volunteering. Despite the need, in my view, to keep these universal benefits, we can build on good practice. We can look at cities and rural areas and see how good practice can be financed. People often have really good ideas and can do excellent

things but just cannot raise the money to do them. Cuts to local councils have made services even rarer. I support keeping the universality of these benefits; on the other hand, a number of ways of financing them have been raised in the Chamber today.

My noble friend Lord Kirkwood spoke in a personal capacity about such things as the triple lock. The report mentions means testing, which I do not favour because of the cliff edge and the people who fall just short. However, there is an idea that the people in tax could be taxed on the value of some of these benefits; that is an area we could look at.

I am extremely grateful to the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes, for bringing this debate to the House and I very much hope that it will not be something that, as the noble Baroness, Lady Pitkeathley, said, we do again and again. I certainly support her call for a proper strategy on social care. I hope that some of these ideas might be taken up by the Government and that we might make progress by taking the report of the Select Committee on intergenerational fairness into account in doing so.

4.58 pm

Lord Stevenson of Balmacara (Lab): My Lords, we owe a great debt of thanks to my noble friend Lord Foulkes for his perspicacity in spotting this issue and timing the debate in the way he has, but also for how he framed his Motion, allowing him to focus on two political nuggets of some depth that are quite hard to deal with in the context of a much wider debate on the question of loneliness. We have done a very good job today in covering the full range of issues that have come up. I think it is fair to say that this is one of the wicked issues—it is very hard for the Government to deal with such a broad range of things covering so many departments. Within our very wide-ranging discussion, the boundaries of the debate came from four or five main contributions; that is not in any sense to devalue others, but these are the ones that set us in the right place.

The noble Baroness, Lady Masham, made sure that in addition to discussing poverty, we did not lose the specificity of those who have a disability in the issues we are talking about. The noble Baroness, Lady Ramsay, had a concern, which she expressed very well, that we are in danger of making long life a misery, not a blessing. The noble Baroness, Lady Greengross, made the interesting suggestion that we are getting hung up on age, which is probably a very bad basis for making policy; it is a point we need to think about. My noble friend Lord Howarth reminded us of the evidence on how effective creative work and creative partnerships are in combating loneliness. My noble friend Lord Bragg and others stressed that we should not risk the magnificent job that the BBC does for us day in, day out and year in, year out by asking it to do jobs that it is not properly constituted to do. My noble friend Lady Pitkeathley made a plea for sanity regarding our failure still to resolve the question of social policy: a policy merry-go-round has prevented us making progress in the way we should for far too long. That needs to be addressed and sorted. All speakers have been stressing how crucial a holistic approach must be to this whole question. Loneliness is the end product in a lot of a different areas.

Having said that, we should pay tribute to the Government for having grasped the nettle, as it were, of the policy on loneliness that needs to be addressed here. They are following up on the report by the Jo Cox Commission on Loneliness and coming forward with a strategy which, although it may need a lot more work now and in the future, certainly sets out the ambition, which is a good thing. Good specific proposals have been announced, such as expanding social prescribing, adding loneliness to ministerial portfolios and incorporating loneliness into ongoing policy decisions. These are important issues; the criticisms we have heard today should not be used to dismantle what the Government have done here, and we should listen to the Minister when he comes to respond on that. There is also a cross-departmental ministerial committee; that should be doing some work as well.

However, we need a bit more from the Government on the evidence regarding the impact of different initiatives. We do not really know what works here. Some research has been published but I think the Government are doing more; perhaps the Minister could update us on that. We need appropriate indicators of loneliness across all ages so that the Office for National Statistics can measure it properly. It is all very well talking about happiness and well-being in relation to GDP; we measure GDP and estimate the rest. Unless we have some hard figures, we will never be able to get to the bottom of this important issue. At the end of the day we also need reports, and I am sure that we are due one shortly. Can the Minister remind us when that is likely to happen?

Several noble Lords have pointed out that we make a mistake if we try to narrow this down to particular issues—strategies, tactics and who is responsible for what. The austerity agenda has been the context here, and the cuts to local government have not been discussed enough today: the closure of 428 day centres, 1,000 children's centres, 600 youth centres and 478 public libraries; and cuts in funding for countless lunch clubs, befriending services, local voluntary groups and community centres. This all has a cost regarding what our society can do as a whole for those who suffer, and the capacity of organisations up and down the country to provide something of value.

That leads neatly into the question of bus services and public transport more generally. The bus figures are absolutely astonishing. The elderly have been particularly impacted by the cuts to bus services. Statistics reveal that since 2010, fares have risen faster than wages and passenger numbers have plummeted, and new research shows that average fares are likely to be 53% higher in 2022 than they were in 2010. This is not the way to make sure that people travel and meet people, and to go forward.

The biggest policy issue we have been discussing off and on throughout this whole debate is the BBC licence fee. This is both a direct attack on those who benefit from the services—in a way that has been described so well by noble Lords—and an example of the impact that austerity measures dressed up as public policy can have on our society. We now know that the BBC will charge all those not on pension credit the full licence fee, which raises the spectre of criminal penalties for those who are unable or unwilling to pay.

I have some questions about this, some of which were touched on by the noble Lord, Lord Kirkwood. First, does the Minister agree that pensioner poverty, which halved between 1997 and 2010, is now on the rise again, from 1.6 million three years ago to 1.9 million now? It is forecast to pass 2 million by 2022. Does he accept also the figures quoted earlier in the debate that over-75s are almost 50% more likely to be in poverty than the 65 to 75 age group? What does that mean for public policy?

Secondly, have the Government considered how they will authorise the BBC to means test pensioners for their eligibility for the free licences? Does the legal power exist for the DWP to open up its records and allow BBC officials to access private information on the finances of the over-75s? If so, where is that power enacted, and can he give us the reference? If not, what legislative vehicle will be considered for this, as I presume under the GDPR it will require primary legislation? Who is paying the £72 million that it is estimated it will cost simply to administer this system?

Thirdly, what are the constitutional implications? Does it mean that the BBC, a private company established by royal charter, has become a taxing authority, with all that that implies? Can he confirm that the licence fee will still be decided by the Government and agreed by statutory instrument under the affirmative procedure, and therefore subject to a vote in Parliament? Does he agree with his right honourable friend Mr Damian Green, who pointed out in the other place that roughly one-third of pensioners eligible for pension credit do not claim it, which saves the Government about £3 billion a year? If even half of those eligible for pension credit now start claiming it to retain the free BBC licence, it seems that the Government will have shot themselves in the foot, because the net outcome will be a lot more expensive than maintaining the existing free provision.

Why are they continuing with this ridiculous policy? Is it, as my noble friend Lord Bragg said, just another attack by the hard right on the BBC under the guise of austerity? In the other place, the Secretary of State acknowledged that retaining the free licence fee concession would require primary legislation and implied that it would be hard to find parliamentary time for it. Given that we have virtually no legislation at the moment and are unlikely to have any for the rest of the Session, that is a pretty weak excuse.

As others have said, for the party opposite, nothing, least of all promises made in manifestoes, seems sacrosanct at the moment. Making a commitment about a major policy issue cannot be written off as a mistake. When it was discovered, trying to persuade the BBC to bail them out is a disgraceful way to behave.

This issue is a test of honour, integrity and truthfulness. Decisions such as this will sully the reputation of the party opposite for years to come. The Government should sort it out with a simple amendment to the Digital Economy Act—in a three-line Bill, if that is what it takes. The Minister would have the support of these Benches if he chose to do that.

5.06 pm

Lord Ashton of Hyde: My Lords, I start, with slightly less time than I should have, by thanking the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes, for calling this debate and

[LORD ASHTON OF HYDE]

all the contributions. I cannot say that it has been an altogether comfortable way to spend the past two hours.

The Government are committed to ensuring economic security for people at every stage of their life, including when they reach retirement, so I am pleased to say that relative poverty rates have halved since 1990. I am glad that incomes for over-75 households have increased much faster than average. The average income for all households between 1999-2000 and 2016-17 improved by 71%, but for households containing someone 75 or over, average weekly incomes more than doubled. The noble Lord, Lord Stevenson, mentioned some other statistics which I do not have in front of me, but I will get back to him on that and his other 15 questions later, and copy the answer to all noble Lords.

We want to maintain the achievement of raising average income for the elderly. We forecast to spend more than £120 billion on benefits for pensioners in 2019-20 and are committed to the triple lock for the duration of this Parliament, guaranteeing that both the basic and the new state pension, excluding protected payments, will rise by the highest of average earnings growth, price inflation or 2.5%.

The Government recognise loneliness as one of our biggest public health challenges. It is estimated that between 5% and 18% of all UK adults are always or often lonely. Frequently, feeling lonely is linked to early death. It is associated with an increased risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, depression and Alzheimer's. We know that loneliness can affect people of all ages. As Jo Cox said, young or old, loneliness does not discriminate. We are working to help people of all ages to have meaningful social relationships and to avoid loneliness. We are the first Government in the world to appoint a Minister to lead work on tackling loneliness; I appreciate the comments of several noble Lords who acknowledged that.

Last year, we published the world's first government strategy on loneliness, as well as securing £20 million of new grant funding for projects run by charities and community groups to bring people together. As the Motion suggests, the causes of loneliness and its solutions are many and varied. I much appreciated the ideas of the noble Lord, Lord Glasman, on that with respect to the elderly. I agree with him and other noble Lords that a debate on the wider aspects of this problem would be useful.

The loneliness strategy contains more than 60 policy commitments covering many aspects of people's lives, from transport and health to education. For example, the Government are improving and expanding social prescribing across England. That will change the way in which patients experiencing loneliness are treated, connecting them to community groups and services through the support of link workers; 1,000 new, trained social prescribing link workers will be in place by 2020 and 900,000 will be referred to social prescribing by 2023-24. The strategy also announced the creation of a network of employers to take action on loneliness. More than 30 leading organisations, including Sainsbury's, the Co-op, Transport for London and the British Red Cross, have signed up to this network, pledging to

support their employees to avoid loneliness. We are also embedding loneliness into relationship education classes so that children can learn about it and the value of social relationships.

We agree that transport is vital to building and maintaining people's social connections; it is therefore integral to the Government's loneliness strategy. We have invested significantly in transport infrastructure, providing more than £61 billion in the five years up to 2020. That underpins much of what the Government can do to help people remain connected. We are also providing support to local bus services, community transport and community rail services.

For some people, a free local bus service can be a lifeline, providing access to healthcare and other essential services as well as allowing them to visit family and friends. To support this lifeline, the Government support council spending of around £1 billion a year so that older and disabled people can travel on buses for free. The Government remain committed to preserving the current statutory entitlement to concessionary bus fares. Therefore, last April, we announced a change in legislation to protect the concessionary travel scheme in its current form. However, we must recognise that providing free transport alone will not solve the problem of loneliness. Inclusive transport is key to our approach to the current transport network.

Lord O'Neill of Clackmannan: Can the Minister tell us why we should believe what he says about buses when the Government betrayed the trust they sought from the British electorate at the last election? They clearly broke their manifesto pledge there, so why should this promise be worth any more than the previous one?

Lord Ashton of Hyde: If the noble Lord is referring to TV licences, I will come on to them later. I hope that I will answer his question then. Of course, the fundamental difference there is that the power to do that was with the Government, not another organisation.

As I said, inclusive transport is part of our inclusive transport strategy, which was published last July, and our future of urban mobility strategy, which was published in March.

Turning to TV licences, I acknowledge and recognise the important role of the BBC in our national conversation and as a constant companion for everyone across the country, especially older people. From impartial news and current affairs coverage to its wide-ranging radio content, it provides something for everyone every day. We know the importance of providing such services, which is why we guaranteed the over-75 licence fee concession until June 2020. We know that television, radio and online services are powerful tools in combating loneliness and isolation.

The noble Lord, Lord Maxton, asked whether the scheme will continue in its present form. In the consultation, the public said that they want that; however, I accept that many changes in the competition and the provision of these services are coming. At the moment, the current charter arrangements say that the current licence will continue in its present form for the 11-year period. I do not know what exactly was said five or six Secretaries of State ago when this was agreed, but I know what was agreed and I will come on to that.

I stress to the noble Lord, Lord Addington, that when we agreed the five-year licence fee funded settlement with the BBC in 2015, the corporation was well funded to provide vital public services. We phased in the cost by providing £468 million in 2018-19 and £247 million in 2019-20, as agreed with the BBC. That is why, as I have said before in the House, the director-general said that the overall deal provided “financial stability”, in his words, and that the Government’s decision to put the cost of the over-75s on to the BBC had been more than matched by the deal coming back for the BBC. It was an agreement.

The licence fee income underpins the BBC’s important role in making sure that everyone can access the content that educates, informs and entertains. I noted earlier this week in the House that the Government did commit to maintaining the current licence fee—I mentioned that to the noble Lord, Lord Maxton. As part of that deal we unfroze the licence fee for the first time since 2010 by guaranteeing that it will rise each year in line with inflation. The BBC received over £3.8 billion in licence fee income, more than ever before. In return, we agreed that responsibility for the over-75 licence fee concession would transfer to the BBC in June 2020. Parliament consented to that and delivered it as part of the Digital Economy Act 2017. That is why we are disappointed that the BBC will not protect free television licences for all viewers aged 75 and over. Of the number of proposals on the table, the BBC has taken the most narrowly defined reform option.

Let me address directly the question put by the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes: why did we promise free licences for the duration of this Parliament when we cannot guarantee that the BBC will keep them free from 2020? That is because, as I have said, we agreed with the BBC at the 2015 funding settlement that responsibility for the concession will transfer to the BBC in 2020. That future concession was therefore a decision for the BBC. That was agreed by Parliament in the Digital Economy Act. The Secretary of State has said repeatedly that he expected the BBC to honour that agreement, and that is why we are disappointed. The BBC has acknowledged that the most vulnerable—the poorest pensioners who receive pension credit—will get the over-75 concession. Of course, as many noble Lords have said, there is a possibility that with the help of the BBC in making this available, an extra 600,000 people could receive pension credit because although they are eligible for it, they do not claim it. That would be a good thing and that is what the Government would like to see happen.

Lord Browne of Ladyton: Before the Minister moves on from this issue, is the agreement with the BBC enforceable? If so, do the Government intend to enforce it so that they can keep their word to the nation?

Lord Ashton of Hyde: The agreement with the BBC, which is in the Digital Economy Act, is what has happened. The BBC has the power and the responsibility to make a decision. It has made a decision and it is not a question of enforcing it. That is what is in the Digital Economy Act and that is what the BBC has done. It is its decision to do that because it is what Parliament gave it.

Lord Browne of Ladyton: I am sorry to take the Minister’s time, but what right does anyone have to be disappointed if there was no expectation? It is either an agreement or it is not an agreement. If it is a legal agreement that is enforceable, surely the Government have a responsibility for the third parties who are being affected by this to enforce the agreement.

Lord Ashton of Hyde: The agreement put into law in the Digital Economy Act was the power for the BBC to make the decision, so the BBC has done what it is entitled to do and what we gave it responsibility for. What I said was that the Secretary of State expected that because this was part of the agreement reached in 2015, the BBC would do what it said it would do. Oh, I am sorry, that is not true. It said it would do that part of the deal when it was made with the Secretary of State in 2015. The BBC made its decision, which it was entitled to do, and that is the situation.

I do not have much time because I want to allow a little for the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes.

On public services generally, to support care for the elderly the Government have given councils access to around £10 billion of additional dedicated funding for social care over the spending review period, including a £240 million adult social care winter fund for 2018 and 2019 to alleviate pressures on the NHS. This is the biggest injection of funding for winter programmes that councils have ever received. The investment in social care services allowed 65% of local authorities to increase home care provision in 2017 as a direct result of the £2 billion funding boost announced in 2017.

In the medium term, social care funding will be settled in the spending review, when the overall approach to funding local government will be considered in the round. The noble Baroness, Lady Pitkeathley—who has not given up after 22 years, I am glad to say—mentioned that we will bring forward at the earliest opportunity a Green Paper that will set out our plans to deliver a more sustainable social care system. She asked about the various candidates for leadership. The present Secretary of State, who I used to work with, takes this seriously and is keen to produce it as soon as he can. It will cover care and support for adults of all ages and will bring forward ideas for including an element of risk pooling into the system, which will help to protect people from the highest costs.

I agree with the noble Lord, Lord Foulkes, that the Government have an important role in working with charities, businesses, councils and other organisations which are already doing great work in bringing people together. We also have to create an economy which allows the ever-increasing expenditure that the noble Lord desires, otherwise we will simply transfer the problems to our children and grandchildren, which is not what we want.

We expect to publish the first annual report on loneliness later this year.

There are a number of questions that noble Lords have asked but, in the interests of time, I hope they will allow me to write to them and copy other noble Lords in on the answers.

5.22 pm

Lord Foulkes of Cumnock: My Lords, I am grateful to the Minister for giving me a couple of minutes. It has been an exceptional debate. My only regret is that it has not been at prime time, when more Members would have been here to hear the wonderful eloquence of the noble Baroness, Lady Redfern; the plea for art and culture from my noble friend Lord Howarth; the speech of my noble friend Lord Howarth; the speech of my noble friend Lord O'Neill, who I welcome back from his hospital bed; and the contributions of all those noble Lords I have not mentioned. It has been a tremendous debate.

The Minister answered many questions on loneliness—he was helpful on that and other matters—but he has not answered the crucial question even though my noble friend Lord Browne put him under tremendous

pressure. There were questions about the practicability of the BBC running this scheme—it will be impractical—and, on enforceability, whether the Government have the ability to make the BBC do what it apparently promised. I can assure the Minister that, as far as the TV licence issue is concerned, we will return to it again and again until we get a proper answer and action.

These older people, who have given so much to society, depend on TV for contact, news, entertainment and information. They deserve more from us and more from the Government, and we will return to this issue again and again until we get proper answers from the Government.

Motion agreed.

House adjourned at 5.24 pm.

Volume 798
No. 313

Thursday
13 June 2019

CONTENTS

Thursday 13 June 2019
