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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

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House of Commons

Thursday 18 June 2009

The House met at half-past Ten o'clock

PRAYERS

The Clerk at the Table having informed the House of the unavoidable absence of the Speaker from this day's sitting, the Chairman of Ways and Means took the Chair as Deputy Speaker (Standing Order No. 3).

Oral Answers to Questions

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for South-West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Electoral Systems

1. **John Robertson** (Glasgow, North-West) (Lab): What recent assessment the Electoral Commission has made of the potential effects on levels of voting of the use of different electoral systems; and if he will make a statement. [280570]

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): The Electoral Commission informs me that, although it collects turnout figures after each election, it has not undertaken research on the impact on turnout of different electoral systems. However, the commission does provide information to electors, through its public awareness campaigns, on the way in which different electoral systems work, and on how they may cast their vote.

John Robertson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his answer. I have always felt that the Electoral Commission should look in more detail at the different electoral systems, particularly as we have so many in the United Kingdom as a whole. What was the turnout when electronic voting was used, and with postal voting?

Mr. Streeter: The Electoral Commission is certainly prepared to carry out the research that the hon. Gentleman has in mind if the Government ask it to do so. I am afraid that I do not have figures on turnout using electronic voting and postal voting, but the number of people who vote by post has increased significantly since 2000, and now roughly 15 per cent. of those who exercise their vote do so by postal means.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): Is it not a fact that we have elected two Jew-hating racists to represent us in the European Parliament—we have done so in the form of British National party electors—even though in Yorkshire the BNP got fewer votes in 2004? What is the reason? In the 2004 European Parliament elections, there was an all-postal ballot and almost twice as many people voted. I understand that there are

some fiddles in postal voting, but we must look much more seriously at encouraging all-postal ballots, because that is the best way to prevent the fascists from being elected to represent our nation.

Mr. Streeter: The Electoral Commission certainly supports a thorough modernisation of electoral processes in this country and has made recommendations to the Government, but the electoral systems that we employ in this country are very much a matter for this House, not the Electoral Commission.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): Is it not a fact that people vote in large numbers when these two circumstances apply: first, they think that the body that is being elected matters to them; and, secondly, they think that their vote will actually make a difference—that their vote counts? Are not those the issues that we, not the Electoral Commission, ought to consider so that we make our electoral system fit for purpose?

Mr. Streeter: There are, of course, a number of issues that affect voter turnout at all elections. It might interest the House to know that the probable figure for turnout at the European elections this year was 34 per cent., which was down on the figure of 38.5 per cent. five years previously. However, a number of issues affect voter turnout, and the hon. Gentleman is quite right that, although some are for the Electoral Commission to consider, many are for this House and the political parties in it.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell) (Con): May I suggest to my hon. Friend that it would be useful for the Electoral Commission to carry out a full investigation into, and produce a report on, the recent European elections? Most of us believe that the prospect of voting for a list puts people off voting, but that people do like to vote for an individual elected representative. As the right hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) just said, a system that allows an extremist party to be elected with a small number of votes is not a system that we should encourage.

Mr. Streeter: The Electoral Commission is carrying out a survey of the effectiveness of the recent elections to the European Parliament, and I entirely agree with the right hon. Gentleman that a number of factors have to be taken into account. However, the electoral system that we put in place for future European Parliaments, or for any election that takes place in the United Kingdom, is a matter for this House, not for the Electoral Commission.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Surface Water Drainage Charges

2. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York) (Con): What assessment he has made of the effect on the Church's finances of the new system of charging for surface water run-off on church property. [280571]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Sir Stuart Bell): I estimate that surface water charges by area will cost the Church of England at least £5 million and a further £10 million for highways drainage contributions. The effect of these cost increases on individual parish churches and cathedrals will vary, but I assure the hon. Lady that every church will face an increase.

Miss McIntosh: I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that answer. Does he agree that there should be a moratorium on the imposition of those charges until a complete impact assessment has taken place? Will he support the early-day motion to that effect which stands in my name and those of my right hon. and hon. Friends? Will he also look at the formula that Yorkshire Water, which serves my constituency, has come up with? It causes the least damage where the introduction of those charges applies.

Sir Stuart Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. We will certainly look at any proposal or scheme seeking to ensure that the least possible damage is done to churches as a result of water charges. We have heard some encouraging noises from Ofwat and the Government, but we hope for something more tangible and, from the Church's point of view, for a broad, permanent exemption. That is what we are seeking to achieve with Ofwat.

David Taylor (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): The Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, of which I am a member, is undertaking a review of Ofwat's charging policies, and we had the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmere (Huw Irranca-Davies), before us yesterday. He made it quite clear that Ofwat has not only a brief but a duty to ensure that charging systems are fair and avoid creating hardship. Can I suggest to the Second Church Estates Commissioner, my hon. Friend the Member for Middlesbrough, that the Church Commissioners make strong representations to ensure that Ofwat delivers on what he described as encouraging noises?

Sir Stuart Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who will know that we have had discussions with Government and Ofwat representatives. Those discussions are continuing. Our difficulty appears to be that water companies, with the possible exception of the Yorkshire water authority, are charging churches and other voluntary bodies as if they were big businesses. We are seeking to argue that that cannot be morally or ethically right and that it is not a balanced approach. The Government respond, but whether they do so sufficiently and significantly is another matter.

Miss Julie Kirkbride (Bromsgrove) (Con): May I, too, urge the hon. Gentleman to make strenuous representations on this matter with both Ofwat and Ministers? As he has just said, the issue involves not only the churches but other voluntary bodies such as scouting organisations. Such bodies are very important to our national life, are not big businesses and cannot afford the charges. If the charges go ahead and they are not able to operate, that will diminish our national life.

Sir Stuart Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Lady. She will be happy to know that at yesterday's annual general meeting of the Church Commissioners, I raised that

specific point. I said that it was encouraging that the Church, through the Synod and the Archbishops Council, was working with scouting and other organisations. The Archbishops Council has led the way in this matter on behalf of the Church, along with the Church Commissioners, but the House has to give, as I think it has done, a strong message to Ofwat in addition to all the other representations that have been made.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): I thank the hon. Gentleman for what he has said, but urge him to redouble his efforts. As he may be aware, I have seen and corresponded with the chief executive of Ofwat. Although charming and courteous, he has not delivered as he should have. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is extraordinary that the body set up to protect the public is creating this appalling problem? Will he once again approach the chief executive and the appropriate Ministers?

Sir Stuart Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. Among other things, Ofwat is misdirecting itself on these issues. It seems to be suggesting that the new charging regime is an ecologically sound policy. Let me say that the Church takes environmental issues seriously, and that we do not necessarily accept that argument. I refer the hon. Gentleman to my statement in *Hansard* on 5 February at column 972, in which I asked the Government to intervene robustly on behalf of the churches and other organisations. I will be happy to repeat that request to the Government.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

Early Voting

3. **Mrs. Linda Riordan (Halifax) (Lab/Co-op):** What recent discussions the Electoral Commission has had with the Ministry of Justice on proposals for the introduction of early voting in elections. [280572]

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): The Electoral Commission informs me that it believes that giving people the option of voting in person in advance of polling day would improve access to the electoral process. In May 2009, the chair of the Electoral Commission wrote to the Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, the right hon. Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills), reiterating the commission's view on early voting in the context of a wider strategy for the future of elections. It also responded to the Government's 2008 consultation on weekend voting.

Mrs. Riordan: Two weeks ago, voter apathy and electoral disengagement hit an all-time low; turnout plummeted to 16 per cent. in my region of Yorkshire. I recently met the Minister of State, Ministry of Justice, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills), to discuss my plans to introduce early voting in the UK. There was early voting in the recent American election, in which voters flocked to the polls

over a two-week period. Clearly, one day's access to the polls is not enough in today's society. Will the Electoral Commission therefore discuss plans to introduce early voting?

Mr. Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that it is not opposed in principle to moving polling day to the weekend. However, it does not support such a change at present because there is a lack of compelling evidence to show that such an arrangement would be more convenient or accessible for electors, and increase turnout. As has been said, there are a number of reasons why voters do not turn up to vote at elections. Many relate to the political parties and our conduct in the House. All of us—not only the Electoral Commission—should consider how to increase voter turnout in this country.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Bats

4. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby) (Con): What assessment the Church Commissioners have made of the cost to parishes of dealing with bat populations in churches in the last five years. [280573]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Sir Stuart Bell): We do not collect the figures, but I know that a significant number of churches—mainly rural ones—are coping successfully with bats, as they have done for centuries. Cleaning and protecting contents costs volunteers time and money; in some cases even that is not enough, and the bats cause damage and create hygiene problems.

Mr. Robathan: Before I get swamped with letters about this, let me make it clear to all those outside the House that I like bats, I love seeing bats flying and I want bat populations to flourish. However, there is a serious issue about the damage that is being done by bats, particularly to historic and beautiful old churches and other buildings. Could the Church Commissioners get together with the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, English Nature, Natural England and English Heritage to come up with a holistic approach? Bats do not have to live in belfries; they can go and live elsewhere. They are natural animals; they do not need us to produce churches for them. This needs sorting out, because it is costing parishes a great deal of money and damaging our historic structures.

Sir Stuart Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question. He is a great authority on bats. I can share with the House the fact that he is also a great authority on newts—but the Church Commissioners are not responsible for newts, although they may be responsible for bats in the belfry. He mentioned DEFRA, English Heritage and Natural England, but he omitted to mention the Bat Conservation Trust. We are working with all those organisations to strike a sensible balance. I will be pleased to feed in the points that he makes, which are very pertinent to these discussions. In the

past, we have had a good deal of success in accommodating bats, but the fact that we continue to raise the issue in this House reflects the fact that it is a problem in churches up and down the land.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

The Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission was asked—

Contingencies (Underspend)

5. **Mr. Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): What the Public Accounts Commission's most recent assessment is of the likelihood of an underspend on contingencies in the National Audit Office estimate for 2009-10, as referred to in HM Treasury's note to the commission of 10 March 2009. [280574]

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): When the commission took evidence on the National Audit Office resource estimate on 17 March 2009, the NAO told us that it hoped to be able to surrender some of the contingency included in the revised budget for the repair and refurbishment of its headquarters, and it has confirmed that that remains the position.

Mr. Hollobone: I thank my hon. Friend for his helpful answer. The NAO estimate for 2009-10 is 3 per cent. above that of the previous year at a time of negative inflation. Clearly, it aspires to achieve cost reductions across its range of activities. When will it be made clear to this House that those cost savings might begin to be reflected in the total support that the NAO seeks from Parliament?

Mr. Leigh: For every £1 of taxpayers' money that the NAO spends, it saves £9 for the taxpayer. Considerable extra work has been given to the NAO by the Public Accounts Commission. My hon. Friend is asking about the contingency fund and expenditure on the NAO's new headquarters. It tells me that it is seeking to achieve a £1 million underspend against a revised project budget, and the project will be delivered on time in November. It is a success story that we should be proud of.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

The hon. Member for Middlesbrough, representing the Church Commissioners, was asked—

Economic Downturn (Assistance)

6. **Ben Chapman** (Wirral, South) (Lab): What steps the Church Commissioners are taking to assist the Church during the economic downturn. [280576]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Sir Stuart Bell): Despite the economic downturn, the commissioners plan to maintain the level of their distributions in cash terms this year and into next year.

Ben Chapman: Can my hon. Friend assure me that when the commissioners look at expenditure in cash terms there will be a keen prioritisation and selection of expenditure categories, because that is going to be vital? Can he also tell me that the selection of those priorities will reflect the needs of the 21st century Church?

Sir Stuart Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend. Supporting the Church's ministry, particularly in areas of need and opportunity, is the priority that the Church sets itself. We want to spend our sums wisely. This summer we are holding a series of conferences with our beneficiaries, and that detailed engagement will help us to assess the priorities to which he refers; we then seek to help the growth of the Church.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

The hon. Member for South-West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, was asked—

European Parliamentary Elections

7. **Simon Hughes** (North Southwark and Bermondsey) (LD): What plans the Electoral Commission has to make an assessment of the effectiveness of the arrangements made in the UK for the June 2009 elections to the European Parliament. [280577]

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): The Electoral Commission informs me that it plans to publish its statutory report on the administration of 2009 European parliamentary elections in October this year.

Simon Hughes: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. I welcome him to his new responsibilities, as does my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), who spoke earlier.

Will the hon. Gentleman pass on to the commission a specific request that two matters be looked at? First, did the facility work for people who are European Union citizens and are allowed to vote here but have to fill in a form to make it clear that they are going to use their vote only in this country rather than in their country of origin, and how many people used it and so on? The second matter is how accessible the venues for voting are generally. I still take the view that they are often in hidden-away places that long-standing locals might know, not places where most of the public go in the course of their daily business.

Mr. Streeter: The Electoral Commission is extremely keen to increase voter turnout at all elections, and the hon. Gentleman's point will certainly be taken into account. The commission would like me to inform hon. Members that it is keen to hear from many sources about the conduct of the elections that have just taken place, including Members of Parliament. If anyone has particular representations to make, they will be warmly received by the Electoral Commission, and I will certainly ensure that his comments are passed on to it.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

The Solicitor-General was asked—

Theft (Shops)

9. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York) (Con): How many prosecutions have been brought by the Crown Prosecution Service for offences of theft from shops in each of the last five years; and if she will make a statement. [280579]

The Solicitor-General (Vera Baird): The Crown Prosecution Service records count defendants proceeded against for offences of theft and handling, but they do not separately identify the premises where the offence takes place, so we cannot tell the hon. Lady about theft from shops, which I believe she is interested in. I can, however, tell her the overall number of people prosecuted for theft, which is reasonably constant at around 140,000 to 150,000 a year, but the conviction rate has risen considerably over the period in which she has an interest.

Miss McIntosh: I am most grateful to the hon. and learned Lady for that full answer. Will she support my private Member's Bill, which will be considered tomorrow, in which I call for more cases to appear before the courts when there are persistent offenders or when the goods taken from a shop are of high value? The impact of the credit crunch has been a higher incidence of shoplifting and shop theft, and I know that the Government are concerned about that. If a first-time offender is involved or goods of only a small value are stolen, I can understand the value of a fixed penalty notice, but the thrust of my Bill is to allow the cases that would best benefit from coming before a court to do so. That would allow for restorative justice, and for the offender to get some treatment if it is—

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. We must not have the Second Reading debate now.

The Solicitor-General: I have a sense that the hon. Lady and I are growing old with her asking me questions about shoplifting and me trying to answer them even though we do not have the figures that she perpetually seeks. She knows that whether penalty notices are being used totally appropriately is a constant concern within Government, and we keep it under review. She makes a powerful point about the impact of the credit crunch, which has to come into all our considerations. She knows that the decision whether to prosecute has a public interest component, and I am reasonably satisfied that all those factors are kept under review and applied consistently and conscientiously.

On the specific question whether I will support the hon. Lady's Bill tomorrow, I am afraid that I will be in Redcar.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): Has not the hon. Member for Vale of York (Miss McIntosh) got an important point? The problem with fixed penalty notices, particularly for shoplifting, is that the person involved does not have contact with the prosecution authorities or the courts. The underlying reasons for the offending behaviour are never recognised, so they are

not dealt with. It seems to me, and I think to a lot of people, that if we are stop those who shoplift because they have a drugs habit or extreme social difficulties, it is better that they are placed before a court, which can take appropriate action. Fixed penalty notices get in the way of doing that.

The Solicitor-General: It does depend on what kind of offender is before the authorities. Where there is a clear need that has a criminogenic component—drugs, drink or whatever it is—I agree with the hon. Gentleman that it is appropriate that that be tackled. Otherwise, there is no getting to the root of the problem. It is really intended that penalty notices should be used when those factors are not present.

There is a scale as to when diversionary penalties of one kind or another are intended to be used—knowing the hon. Gentleman's responsibilities, I am sure that he has seen it—with a penalty notice for disorder right at the bottom. Where particular causes become obvious, there are such things as conditional cautions right at the top of the scale, which then leads quickly into court. I agree in principle that the hon. Gentleman is right, but we need to ensure that PNDs are used against the right people. They are a useful tool for the police, as they can deal on the spot with a minor offence that does not show any signs of the causes that he mentions, and as such they have considerable use, but in principle he is quite right.

Rape

10. **Fiona Mactaggart** (Slough) (Lab): What recent progress has been made in monitoring the Crown Prosecution Service's performance in relation to prosecutions for rape. [280581]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service has recently started a series of visits to police force and CPS areas. The visits are being undertaken by a joint team with the police to assist the implementation of recent guidance, assess current performance area by area and provide guidance on improving performance and sharing good practice.

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank the Solicitor-General for that reply. In February, I received a reply from a Justice Minister claiming that 59 per cent. of cases prosecuted as rape result in a conviction for rape or another offence. However, my hon. and learned Friend knows that that hides massive differences between police areas. In Dorset, fewer than one in 60 women secured a conviction for an attack when they reported rape, but in Cleveland, the area that my hon. and learned Friend represents, almost one in every five rapes reported to the police results in a conviction. Why does that difference exist and what can we do to ensure that every area of the country meets and exceeds the standards that Cleveland has achieved, so that women who are raped can get justice?

The Solicitor-General: I should like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend's diligent work on rape, about which she shares a powerful interest with me. There are two sorts of figures. One is the figure that she cited of around 59 per cent., which relates to those going from charge to conviction, once there has been a charge. The much lower figures, especially those that the Fawcett Society

puts forward, are from complaint to charge; there is a much higher drop-out rate before cases get to court. There are disparities between Cleveland and other areas. I am proud of Cleveland, though even Sean Price, the chief constable—pleased though he is to top the poll, as it were, for conviction rates for rape—feels that he has further to go before he is performing adequately. None the less, he is to be complimented.

My hon. Friend is right that the figures suggest that less attention is paid to that highly important offence in some areas. Of course, the figures have flaws because complaints and outcomes are likely to be separated by years, so they will not cover the same cases. However, one cannot disguise the fact that the figures are inevitably indicative of a difference in prioritising. The rape support group—the Home Office component of the partnership team, which also comprises the CPS—will talk to police forces specifically about that. To put it bluntly and crudely, the idea is to find out what is working well in one police area, take it to another where they are not doing so well and persuade them that they must implement it to attain much better results. However, having said that—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That is a very long answer. I hope that the Solicitor-General will bear it in mind that several other hon. Members wish to question her.

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon) (Con): May I support the campaign of the hon. Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) on this serious offence? In addition to disparities in various police regions in the United Kingdom, is not it the case that conviction rates in the UK are significantly lower than those of many of our European counterparts? Does the Solicitor-General know the reason for that? Has any thorough research been conducted to ascertain what lessons we can learn from Europe to try to improve conviction rates in this country?

The Solicitor-General: I am thankful for the hon. Gentleman's support and I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) will be, too. It is important to do the work that he mentions. The differences that exist are evidence that there is nothing magic about getting a better conviction rate for rape. If one police force can do it and another cannot, the way forward is accessible. There are huge definitional differences between us and some European countries. The numbers of people who are prosecuted vary, too. I will not get this precisely right, but I point out that in Italy, essentially only stranger rape is prosecuted. It is relatively straightforward to get a conviction for that, whereas the difficulty here is rape that happens within a relationship, in which consent is the issue. That is much more difficult.

Mr. Mark Todd (South Derbyshire) (Lab): I share the concern of my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) on this subject. I welcome the planned visits and very much hope that an early visit will be made to the CPS in Derbyshire, where one of my constituents suffered the appalling fate of having a case that had got to court dropped, apparently because of failures by the local CPS to communicate effectively with social services about key papers, with the entire

range of cases against her assailant subsequently dismissed. Will my hon. and learned Friend ensure that that visit is given particular attention?

The Solicitor-General: I am thankful for my hon. Friend's concern and support on this topic. I do not know about that case in Derbyshire, which sounds as if it may be a cause for concern. If he would be interested in telling me about it, I will look into it and draw it to the attention of the CPS, so that it can investigate further and, if there is a need, accelerate the time of its visit.

Fraud (Small Businesses)

11. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield) (Con): When officers of the Serious Fraud Office next expect to meet representatives of small business organisations to discuss measures to combat serious fraud schemes aimed at small and medium-sized enterprises. [280582]

The Solicitor-General: Reducing the harm caused by fraud to individuals and businesses is a key priority for the Serious Fraud Office, although it investigates serious and complex fraud whomever it is aimed at. Last month Richard Alderman, the director of the SFO, met representatives of Transparency International and the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, as it is now called, to discuss the ways in which the SFO could help small and medium-sized enterprises in that respect.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: I am obviously grateful to the Solicitor-General for that reply, but is she aware that a Federation of Small Businesses survey showed that online crime and fraud costs small businesses £800 a year on average and that more than half of smaller businesses report that they have been victims of crime in the past 12 months? That is a serious cost to smaller businesses, which are very important to the economy of our country. What additional measures does she believe can be implemented to reduce the current level of crime, which is so bedevilling small business, and electronic crime in particular?

The Solicitor-General: I do know about the FSB survey to which the hon. Gentleman refers—it is from February 2009, so it is quite up to date—which indicates exactly what he said. The FSB is working with the National Fraud Authority, and there are a number of agencies involved in the issue of fraud. Indeed, the National Fraud Authority, which used to be called the National Fraud Strategic Authority, is intended to have exactly that overview. [*Interruption.*] I am assured that NFA does not mean “No further action”; it means “National Fraud Authority”, and I am cheered by that reassurance. The FSB is on its programme board and stakeholder group, as is the British Retail Consortium and the British Chambers of Commerce. I can therefore give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that the interests of small and medium-sized enterprises are directly acknowledged by the relevant authority and taken on board day to day.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): Given that the SFO case load has increased by a third in the past 12 months and that it now faces budget cuts, could the Solicitor-General please identify the financial extent of those cuts and say whether they are likely to hinder the SFO's ability to protect SMEs from fraud?

The Solicitor-General: I will write to the hon. Gentleman with the specific details of the budget cuts, if that is what he would like. The SFO is going from strength to strength under the new direction of Richard Alderman. It is indeed contending with a rising case load, but it is coping with it well. The SFO has introduced a number of efficiencies and ways of distinguishing cases that can realistically go the whole distance from those that can be cut off short, so that a solution other than a conviction can be sought, such as a civil outcome. The SFO is genuinely trying to crisp up its act, and I am confident that progress is being made.

Fraud

12. **Rosie Cooper** (West Lancashire) (Lab): What steps the Serious Fraud Office is taking to increase its effectiveness in prosecuting fraudsters. [280583]

The Solicitor-General: Since Mr. Alderman became the director of the SFO, he has overseen a comprehensive transformation of that body. It has a new structure, a new focus, a new approach to work and improved processes, which have already produced a number of improvements in prosecutions. We are confident that there will be more to follow as the changes bed in.

Rosie Cooper: I thank the Solicitor-General for that answer. Could she tell us a little more about what the Serious Fraud Office is doing for the victims of fraud and about how those people are receiving justice? Following on from the previous question, can she also say briefly whether she believes it has enough resources?

The Solicitor-General: The SFO has a high regard for the importance of looking after witnesses in fraud cases. Indeed, I have taken a personal interest in this. The Crown Prosecution Service does a good deal in this regard now, and its performance rate on the dropping of cases at the door of the court because of the non-appearance of witnesses, and so on, has got much better because of the attention that it pays to victims and witnesses. The SFO deals with a completely different kind of case, of course, but it none the less well understands the need to ensure that witnesses and victims are supported. I have met two small business men who were the victims of fraud and who felt that, when their cases came to court two years ago, they were not treated as well as they could have been. We have learned lessons from that, as well. I do not think that the resources question that my hon. Friend has raised will take away from the effort that is now going to be put more fully into protecting victims and witnesses.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): There seems to be an increasing tendency for fraudsters to pick on vulnerable people. Will my hon. and learned Friend tell us what measures she has in hand to ensure that sentences take into account the fact that a vulnerable person has been picked on, in addition to consideration of the crime itself?

The Solicitor-General: The personal damage that fraud can cause, particularly to vulnerable people is recognised. Historically, it has perhaps been seen as a crime that attacks victims slightly less than other crime, but being defrauded is very undermining and can sometimes tip

people into as poor a state as they would find themselves in if they had been seriously assaulted. We are pursuing the protection of vulnerable victims, and when such vulnerability exists, the Crown will draw it to the attention of the judge. Guidelines on sentencing usually allow for aggravation to follow from the fact that a victim is particularly vulnerable, and that can increase the sentence.

Bribery

13. **Richard Ottaway** (Croydon, South) (Con): What steps she is taking to review the operation of laws on bribery. [280584]

The Solicitor-General: The Government introduced a draft Bribery Bill on 25 March this year, which built on a report published by the Law Commission last November. The Bill is currently being considered by a Joint Committee, which will report next month. My noble and learned Friend the Attorney-General will appear before the Committee on 25 June.

Richard Ottaway: Does the Solicitor-General share my concern that the Bill makes negligently failing to prevent bribery an offence? As I understand it, that means that, for the first time, an omission can be prosecuted. Does she not agree that that will have a profound impact on English law?

The Solicitor-General: I do not think that it is an entirely new principle. This is not about omission; it is about negligently failing to take steps to prevent bribery. There are businesses that are in pole position to see when bribery is going on, and if they choose to turn away, or if they do not have sufficient procedures in place to prevent it, it is probably a poor situation to say that they have a valid defence. Of course they should be under an obligation to prevent bribery from damaging themselves and others, and they should be punished if they do not do so.

Crown Prosecution Service

14. **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): What estimate she has made of the likely effect of the merger of the Revenue and Customs Prosecution Office with the Crown Prosecution Service on the number of jobs in the CPS. [280585]

The Solicitor-General: The merger of the RCPO and the CPS will generate efficiency savings as we combine the strengths of the two organisations, with the aim of delivering an enhanced prosecution service. We anticipate making savings through a range of means, including some headcount reduction over time. At present, however, the management is assuring staff that their employment is secure and that any future reductions will be achieved through natural wastage, as it is called, and as part of ongoing efficiency planning.

David Taylor: The trade unions, the Public and Commercial Services Union and the FDA, might well have been reassured by the CPS that they will be fully consulted about the implementation of the merger, but what reassurance can my hon. and learned Friend give to the skilled, dedicated staff in the RCPO and the CPS

that they will not ultimately become casualties of the Treasury's remorseless fixation with driving down headcount?

The Solicitor-General: Actually, we had this merger in mind at some stage, irrespective of the remorselessness of the Treasury, because we thought it would enhance the prosecution service we give to the public. The history of the RCPO's roots demonstrates why that element of prosecution was not included in the remit of the CPS, but that is now indeed history, and it will be optimally beneficial for the public for the two agencies to work together. I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making it clear that this is a merger and not a takeover by the larger organisation, the CPS, of the smaller one. Management have assured staff that they will all have a job on transfer, which applies to both components, and have stressed the large amount of work that the RCPO will bring into the CPS in any event. All the RCPO contracts will be transferred to the CPS and the existing terms and conditions will be kept at the point of transfer. As I said in my original answer, any further reductions are currently—optimistically, but, I think, rightly—likely to be achieved through what is called “natural wastage”, which is not a very nice term, but means retirement.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

The Leader of the House was asked—

Parliamentary Standards Bodies

17. **Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory** (Wells) (Con): What discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Justice on the respective roles of the Committee on Standards and Privileges and the proposed Parliamentary Standards Authority; and if she will make a statement. [280588]

The Leader of the House of Commons (Ms Harriet Harman): The Justice Secretary and I have had significant discussions about a Bill to create the Parliamentary Standards Authority. As well as having discussions within Government, we are consulting all parties represented in the House, and the Chair of the Committee on Standards and Privileges has attended those meetings.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Last week, the Prime Minister announced that the Government's democratic council—whatever that is—wanted the immediate creation of the Parliamentary Standards Authority, which would have wide-ranging powers over the House, including those of disciplining and fining Members of Parliament. Since that task has been very well discharged by the Committee on Standards and Privileges for some years, why do the Government want to transfer it to an external, unelected, unaccountable quango, which would in itself turn the clock back several hundred years as regards the powers of this House—a move that would be heartily welcomed by King Charles I?

Ms Harman: It was not just the Prime Minister, but all the party leaders who agreed to my right hon. Friend's proposal to put the setting and administration of our allowances on an independent footing. We should

all recognise that a public perception has emerged that we arrange the allowances in our own interests rather than in the interest of us doing our job, that we then administer these allowances within the House of Commons and lean on officials to exercise their judgment in our interests. We need to address that perception so that people can have confidence in the high standards of the House of Commons. The proposal to overcome that perception, which has been subject to wide-ranging discussions and on which we will have further such discussions, is to create an independent Parliamentary Standards Authority so that we can no longer vote on our own allowances, which will be set independently; the functions of the Fees Office will be transferred to that authority. That is the remit of the Parliamentary Standards Authority; rather than questions of conduct in this House, it is all about putting our allowances on a proper transparent footing with fair and firm rules that will allow us to get on with our job and give the public confidence that the allowance system is being run independently.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): The Leader of the House, and, indeed, the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Alan Duncan) have had the pleasure of giving extensive evidence before Sir Christopher Kelly's Committee over the last couple of days. Given that Committee's interest in this matter, would it not be sensible if the draft legislation for the Parliamentary Standards Authority were sent as soon as ready to it for its early consideration so that it can give advice to the House before we set in statute something with which it might profoundly disagree?

Ms Harman: The Justice Secretary will meet Sir Christopher Kelly this afternoon, but it might be helpful for Members to see the Parliamentary Standards Authority as the hardware and the inquiry into allowances conducted by the Committee on Standards in Public Life and its recommendations for a new allowance system as the software. If, as I hope, we can legislate for and set up the new independent authority before the House rises for the summer, if Sir Christopher Kelly is able to report in, say, October—obviously when he reports is a matter for him, because he is independent and arranges his timetable and inquiries according to his wishes and those of his committee—and if the Parliamentary Standards Authority can begin work in November, it will then be able to deal with Sir Christopher's proposals on allowances.

We need to make absolutely sure that we get the system right. I hope that no one will think that we can simply carry on as we were after this crisis. There has been a profound undermining of public confidence, and the best way in which we can handle that is to say "We are not doing this ourselves any more. The allowances are being set independently. What we are doing is getting on with our job of representing our constituents and holding the Executive to account."

Mr. Richard Bacon (South Norfolk) (Con): Will the Leader of the House explain what role, if any, the commission headed by the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright) will have in relation to the Parliamentary Standards Authority—and, by the way, when will that commission report?

Ms Harman: The Prime Minister has said that he thinks it would be helpful if a parliamentary Committee chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase could address a number of issues relating to the way in which the House operates. We must address the knock that confidence in our Parliament has taken by dealing with the allowance system, but that will also give us an opportunity to look more widely at a number of issues that have been on the agenda and should now be dealt with. We intend to table a motion shortly to establish a Committee which will be able to consider direct representations from the public through e-petitioning—the Procedure Committee has already done a good deal of work on that—as well as how the House itself could decide what constitutes non-Government business, and time-limited Select Committees.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I plead with the Leader of the House for shorter answers? We have only four questions to get through, but we are going to struggle at this rate.

Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): Does the Leader of the House recognise the important principle that except when a serious criminal offence has been committed, the ultimate court of appeal to decide whether a Member is allowed to continue to sit in the House must be the voters? There have historically been a number of occasions on which a Member of Parliament whom the authorities do not like—a rebellious Member—has been returned at the insistence of the voters.

Ms Harman: The right hon. Gentleman has just enunciated a fundamental constitutional principle. We are accountable, because we are accountable to the electors at every general election. If the electors do not want to send a Member back to the House, they do not have to do so. In addition, we are accountable individually to the collective of the House. The House has wide-ranging powers to chuck out any Member at its discretion, and that will cause a by-election. We need to consider whether or not we have used those powers in the way in which the public expect us to.

I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I have been producing rather long answers. I shall try to shorten them, but I thought that we were not going to use up the time. I shall try to get into less expansive mode.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I am trying to be the best judge of that.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. May I ask the Leader of the House briefly and unequivocally to confirm that, while the Parliamentary Standards Authority will deal with the financial matters about which she talked—we all accept that—it will not become an appointed quango with jurisdiction over Members of Parliament? That would be intolerable and unacceptable to any right-thinking Member of Parliament.

Ms Harman: I think the answer to that is yes. The jurisdiction will be in respect of considering and paying Members' allowances. Once we have a Parliamentary Standards Authority, if there is a general consensus that we want it to do more we can discuss that, and if there is a consensus we can ensure that it happens. However, that is not a matter for the initial Parliamentary Standards Authority Bill.

Procedure Committee/Modernisation Committee

18. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield) (Con): If she will establish a cross-party committee to review the functions, objectives and roles of the Procedure Committee and the Modernisation Committee; and if she will make a statement. [280590]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Barbara Keeley): I am sure that the whole House agrees that the starting point for the further modernisation of the House should be the reforms to deal with the loss of confidence caused by the expenses scandal. We will shortly put proposals to the House to establish the new Parliamentary Reform Committee that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced last week and to which the Leader of the House has just referred.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: The Modernisation Committee has not met for many, many, many months. The Procedure Committee is doing good work and could easily take over the role, functions and responsibilities of the Modernisation Committee. It is chaired by a Back-Bench Member of the House, as are all other Select Committees. Does the deputy Leader of the House accept that the Committee announced by the Prime Minister should consist of those who have experience of the Modernisation Committee? I have been on the Modernisation Committee since it was formed, chaired the Procedure Committee for two Parliaments and have been in this place for some time. It would be helpful if the Leader of the House or her deputy indicated who is to be appointed to this Committee. Why has the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright) been selected? He is a member of the governing party. Would not it be better for an Opposition Member to lead the Committee?

Barbara Keeley: The Modernisation Committee has not met because five of its members, from all parties represented on the Committee, have indicated their desire to leave it. It is up to the parties, through the usual channels, to re-nominate members so that the Modernisation Committee can continue. On chairing the Committee, the Modernisation Committee was aimed at taking forward the Government's modernisation agenda, so it made sense for the Leader of the House to chair it. Notwithstanding those points, there are many Members, of whom the hon. Gentleman is one, with great experience in these matters. I am sure that they would be welcome members of the new Parliamentary Reform Committee. It is of course up to the parties to decide on nominations.

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend on her appointment. My understanding is that the Modernisation Committee was established to drive forward modernisation at a time when there did not seem to be a broad consensus in the House on that objective. Now that there does appear to be a consensus on modernisation and on strengthening the role of the Commons, may I suggest that my hon. Friend looks at ways of simplifying the various Committees that have been set up? There is a danger that many Committees will have difficulties getting members to sit on them to drive forward the agenda. Would not it be better if the agenda were driven by one Committee rather than a plethora of Committees that might not meet very often in some cases?

Barbara Keeley: I thank my hon. Friend for his comments on my appointment. The Modernisation and Procedure Committees have secured some considerable achievements, but my hon. Friend is right, which is probably why the Prime Minister has accepted that the new Parliamentary Reform Committee should run for a defined period. It can take forward some of the excellent work done by the other two Committees. The Modernisation Committee has a piece of work to finish and will do so shortly. Following the interest shown in this topic, I hope that hon. Members will carry forward the excellent work of the two Committees and will volunteer to sit on the new Parliamentary Reform Committee. Clearly we can look at simplification later in the year.

Mr. Shailesh Vara (North-West Cambridgeshire) (Con): I congratulate the deputy Leader of the House on her appointment and look forward to working with her as closely as I did with her predecessor on the best practice and business of the House.

On Committees, will the hon. Lady inform us whether the Government have any intention of establishing a Select Committee on science. There is a huge amount of pressure to set up such a Committee, not least from the Minister for Science, the noble Lord Drayson. What is the Government's position on setting up a Select Committee to consider science policy?

Barbara Keeley: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his kind words. Next Thursday we will be considering House business and our aim is to bring forward proposals for the Committee structure he has talked about. We are mindful of the fact that the previous Select Committee on Science and Technology was very popular, and I am sure it would be very welcome in all parts of the House if we were to table a motion to re-establish it.

Sir Peter Soulsby (Leicester, South) (Lab): May I join other Members in welcoming my hon. Friend to her new post? Speaking as a member of both the Modernisation Committee and the Procedure Committee, I urge on her the need for us to be prepared to take forward the work that will be done by the Parliamentary Reform Committee, which, as she said, will meet only for a defined period. I urge her to recognise that the work of the Modernisation Committee and the Procedure Committee significantly overlap and could easily be merged into the Procedure Committee, so ensuring that co-ordinated progress is made.

Barbara Keeley: I thank my hon. Friend for his kind words. This was a question that my predecessor, my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), found himself answering on many occasions at the Dispatch Box, so we really must consider the question put today, and make progress.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire) (Con): I welcome the fact that the energy of the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright) will be applied to parliamentary reform, but could we not have achieved the same objective by his taking over the chairmanship of the Modernisation Committee?

Barbara Keeley: That is a difficult one for me to answer. The Modernisation Committee, which I have been reading a lot about in the past few days, has

registered some great achievements, as has the Procedure Committee; we are very much looking forward to the Procedure Committee's report on written questions. This is a new initiative, however, and it is very welcome; I do not want anybody to think that we do not very much welcome the new Parliamentary Reform Committee. It is an idea for its time, and the time is now.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

The hon. Member for North Devon, representing the House of Commons Commission, was asked—

Demonstrations (Parliament Square)

19. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby) (Con): What recent representations the House of Commons Commission has received from hon. Members on the continuing demonstrations in Parliament square. [280591]

Nick Harvey (North Devon): There have been three recent questions to the House of Commons Commission relating to the demonstrations in Parliament square, and 13 hon. Members have made representations in writing.

Mr. Robathan: Parliament square is a world heritage site, but it currently looks a bit like a rather dated set for an episode of "Step toe and Son". Will the House of Commons Commission, together with the Leader of the House and the Home Office—and whomever—sort out this situation? I yield to nobody in my defence of people's right to demonstrate outside Parliament, and in fact I deprecate the Criminal Justice Act that brought in some sort of strange exclusion zone to limit demonstrations outside Parliament. However, those demonstrations cannot go on for ever, and we should be able to strike a balance so that people may demonstrate and the world heritage site looks as it is meant to look.

Nick Harvey: The Serjeant at Arms has made representations to the Metropolitan police to the effect that access to this House is essential for the working of the House. Beyond that, the policing of Parliament square is a matter for the Metropolitan police, and by extension the Mayor of London and the Home Office. I hear what the hon. Gentleman says, but he would do better to raise these matters in Home Office questions, as they are not a matter for the House of Commons Commission.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman join me in congratulating the Tamil community on the dignified way in which it conducted its protest, and on the fact that it vacated Parliament square yesterday? Although there are long-term issues to consider, as the hon. Member for Blaby (Mr. Robathan) has said, the fact that that demonstration is no longer there shows that by working with the police, organisations can get the right to protest and show that they are able to conduct themselves with dignity.

Nick Harvey: I am grateful that this gives me the opportunity to confirm that the Tamil demonstration is now over. I believe that there is to be a further large-scale

demonstration in central London, but the protest in Parliament square is over, and the authorisation for it was, I understand, due to expire in a few days' time in any case.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

The Leader of the House was asked—

Whips Offices

20. **David Taylor** (North-West Leicestershire) (Lab/Co-op): If she will bring forward proposals for reform of the role of the Whips Offices as part of the Government's proposals for constitutional reform; and if she will make a statement. [280592]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Barbara Keeley): As I mentioned in an earlier reply, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister has announced the creation of a new Committee to be set up for a defined short period to look at issues of reform, such as making Select Committee processes more democratic, scheduling for more and better time for non-Government business, and engaging the public in topics for debate such as petitions.

David Taylor: The political process may need Whips to give shape and direction to efficient policy implementation, but the parliamentary system allows the Executive to take liberties with democracy, generating an atavistic herd instinct which strangles independent thought and objectivity. Does my hon. Friend agree that an ordered party is best obtained by persuasion rather than patronage, and by consent rather than compulsion? If we are serious about reform, we must abandon the coercion and inducements available to Whips, starting with having more powerful Select Committees chosen by this House.

Barbara Keeley: I will try not to take that too personally; until very recently I was my hon. Friend's Whip. I very much hope that he believes that the relationship I had with him when I was a Whip allowed him to be independent-minded and to decide for himself. Compulsion and the other things he mentioned are not facets of the Whips Office; Labour Members are independent-minded and the Whips Office just works to try to get the Government business through.

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute) (LD): At the moment, programming seems to be decided by what are euphemistically called "the usual channels": the Government and Opposition Whips getting together. Will the Government adopt the practice, used in the Scottish Parliament, of conducting a business committee on which all parties are represented? That would mean that decisions on programming could be taken much more transparently.

Barbara Keeley: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that question. When the new Parliamentary Reform Committee comes together shortly—we expect to table a motion on that next week—it will be able to examine the exact issue of programming non-Government time.

Business of the House

11.31 am

Alan Duncan (Rutland and Melton) (Con): May I invite the Leader of the House to give us the forthcoming parliamentary business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Ms Harriet Harman): Before I inform the House of the business for next week, may I add my personal tribute, as Leader of the House, to Speaker Martin? Yesterday, nearly all the tributes to him mentioned his kindness, and it is very important to recognise that he kept order in the House not by pushing people down, but by supporting and encouraging people. Kindness is very much underrated in modern politics, but it is highly rated by Members of this House. A nudge of encouragement can be of great importance, particularly to a new Member. Members never had to fear the Chair when Speaker Martin was in it; they needed only to look to the Chair for advice and support. I hope that whoever succeeds him tries to match that.

The business for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 22 JUNE—The House will meet to elect a Speaker.

TUESDAY 23 JUNE—Second Reading of the Marine and Coastal Access Bill [*Lords*].

WEDNESDAY 24 JUNE—Opposition day [14th allotted day]. There will be a full day's debate entitled "Iraq Inquiry" on an Opposition motion.

THURSDAY 25 JUNE—The House will be asked to approve various motions, including the establishment of a London Regional Committee and Regional Grand Committees; a motion relating to Members' pensions; and motions relating to Select Committees.

FRIDAY 26 JUNE—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 29 June will include:

MONDAY 29 JUNE—Second Reading of the Child Poverty Bill.

TUESDAY 30 JUNE—Opposition day [15th allotted day]. There will be a debate on an Opposition motion, subject to be announced.

WEDNESDAY 1 JULY—Consideration of Lords amendments to the Political Parties and Elections Bill, followed by motion to approve the draft Terrorism Act 2006 (Disapplication of Section 25) Order 2009, followed by consideration of Lords amendments to the Saving Gateway Accounts Bill.

THURSDAY 2 JULY—Estimates [3rd allotted day], subject to be confirmed by the Liaison Committee.

At 6 pm the House will be asked to agree all outstanding estimates.

FRIDAY 3 JULY—Private Members' Bills.

Alan Duncan: I thank the Leader of the House for giving us the forthcoming business, and may I echo what she said about Mr. Speaker. As a recent addition to the House of Commons Commission, I must say that I found the way in which he chaired and administered it to be far better than the public reputation he was afforded by the press.

Further to the answer given just a moment ago by the deputy Leader of the House, I think everyone would welcome some urgent clarification from the Leader of the House on the business of the House motions that she announced for next Thursday. On 10 June, the Prime Minister said in his statement on constitutional reform that "a special parliamentary commission" will be established, comprising Members from both sides of the House, to advise on necessary reforms of the procedures of the Commons. He seems to want to set up a new committee very much on a whim when there are already structures in the House for considering these issues. It is pretty disgraceful that the Prime Minister should choose to interfere to gain a headline when no consultation whatever has taken place.

Will the right hon. and learned Lady therefore take this opportunity to confirm whether it is now her intention to abolish the Modernisation Committee? Will this new commission or committee replace it? If so, what is the difference between this new commission or committee and the Procedure Committee, which also deals with the "necessary reforms" of the procedures of this House? Will she confirm that the real difference is not in the functions of the two committees, but in the simple fact that the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright) would chair the new one, and not my right hon. Friend the Member for East Yorkshire (Mr. Knight)?

We were taken by surprise yesterday when Mr. Speaker reported that a new cross-party committee would now be inquiring into the circumstances surrounding the arrest of my hon. Friend the Member for Ashford (Damian Green), and even more surprised that that announcement was said to follow from a discussion with only the Government Chief Whip. We were pleased that the Government appear to have backtracked on their attempt to maintain a majority hold over that committee, but given that I have had nothing more than an unacceptable holding response from the right hon. and learned Lady to my letter of 27 April on this matter, will she now tell the House who will be on this committee, when it is likely to report and what is its exact remit? Will it look, for example, at the issue of privilege that we on the Opposition Benches think should be examined in detail and in parallel by the Committee on Standards and Privileges? In a previous answer to one of my questions, the right hon. and learned Lady said that she could not see any objection to that happening.

Will the right hon. and learned Lady take this opportunity to inform the House when the Government will move the writ for the by-election in Norwich, North? I remind her that the previous Member for that constituency was appointed to the Chiltern Hundreds some days ago and that the writ for the by-election in Crewe and Nantwich was moved much faster.

The House will note that we have chosen to have our Opposition day debate on Iraq and the inquiry, and I hope that the Leader of the House appreciates how strongly we—and many Labour Members—feel that the Iraq inquiry should be much more public and far broader in composition.

May we also have a debate on the way that some parking enforcement companies are extorting money on utterly vicious grounds from members of the public? Several cases have come to my attention in which, because of unclear signs in the car park, people have

[Alan Duncan]

been unwittingly entrapped and their cars clamped. I have to report that the Co-op appears to be one of the most unjust practitioners—

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Absolute balderdash!

Alan Duncan: Will the House have the chance to call them to account and seek a broader change in the law?

May we have a debate on levels of numeracy in Government? This subject may be closer to the heart of the hon. Member for Huddersfield (Mr. Sheerman), who is barracking from his seat. Yesterday, we had the unedifying sight of a Prime Minister denying the truth about his own cuts in public spending that are in the Chancellor's most recent Budget. Last week, the Leader of the House was—it is fair to say—ticked off by the UK Statistics Authority for using figures on the gender pay gap that it said would be “misleading” and would “undermine public confidence in official statistics”.

This is not the first time that the Government have been criticised for manipulating figures, but judging by the confusion of Ministers over spending, perhaps it is not so much a case of intentional distortion and more an indication of their deficiencies in basic maths.

Finally, may we agree across the floor of the House that, when it comes to electing a Speaker on Monday, each Member should do so from the best possible principles for Parliament, and their choice should be on that basis and not for any narrow or party reasons?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman raises the question of the special parliamentary committee. It is important to take the opportunity of the need to rebuild confidence in Parliament, not just to sort out the question of our allowances but to see whether we can make further progress in improving our procedures. We can take the opportunity to allow the public direct access by putting issues on the parliamentary agenda through e-petitions; to strengthen the work of Select Committees; and to allow a wider say in decisions on non-Government business.

The important thing to focus on is the job that needs to be done and on establishing a committee of short-term duration simply to get on with that job. We can either focus on process or on outcome. If we can reach an agreement, we can move forward. Many hon. Members on both sides of the House have done a lot of work on these matters over the years and they have not found the opportunity to move forward. I think that this is that opportunity, so, instead of complaining about the process, let us all work together to ensure that we achieve some outcome.

The hon. Gentleman asked why the matter should not be dealt with by the Procedure Committee. The Procedure Committee does very important work and I refer to what my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House said about its important forthcoming report on the answering of written questions. The new committee will have a wider remit than the Procedure Committee, but I am sure that it will draw on the expertise and work of the Committee and of some of its members, including, possibly, its leading member, the Chair.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the Speaker's Committee on the arrest of the hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green) and the search of parliamentary premises. In a resolution of the House some months ago, the House decided that there needed to be a Speaker's Committee to consider that matter, but that it would not start its work until after any investigation by the criminal justice system had been completed. Now that that investigation has been completed, the Committee needs to get on with its work. The announcement of who will be on the Committee will be a matter for the new Speaker. I hope that the Committee will be able to get on with its work. Once it is established, the terms of reference of the House resolution said that it could consider a number of basic issues and those relating to them.

In relation to the Iraq debate, the Prime Minister—

Alan Duncan: And privilege?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman should refer to the resolution of the House that established the Speaker's Committee. It will work within that remit and deal with related issues.

The Iraq inquiry was the subject of the Prime Minister's statement to the House on Monday and there will be a debate on the subject next week, which will no doubt focus on the issues that the Prime Minister dealt with and was questioned on, which concerned the composition of the committee and its way of working.

We might well need to have a topical debate on the subject of parking enforcement. It may seem a minor issue, but quite a lot of money changes hands. If someone comes out of a shop with a couple of kids and a buggy and finds their car immobilised, leaving them stranded, it can be very difficult indeed. Perhaps we ought to consider that. The subject involves a number of different Departments, and the fact that responsibility has fallen between the Department for Transport and the Department for Communities and Local Government has been a problem. Perhaps we might consider that.

In a rather patronising and condescending way, I am sorry to say, the hon. Gentleman cast aspersions on my numeracy. I shall address his point about the UK Statistics Authority. He is referring to the gender pay gap. Previously, the gender pay gap has been reported as two figures. The first is the average gap between the pay of full-time men and full-time women at work. The second is the gap between part-time employees and full-time male employees. One thing that I have said to the Office for National Statistics is that part-time women employees are not a separate breed of second-class citizens. If they are lowly paid, they ought to be considered in the context of the statistics as a whole. We should compare the average pay per hour of men with the average pay per hour of women. I reject any suggestion that it is a question of trying to manipulate the figures. It is about the figures properly representing the valuable contribution that women make to the work force and about stopping pay discrimination, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman regrets asking that question.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): The right hon. and learned Lady referred to the tributes paid to the Speaker yesterday. I think that all the tributes remarked on his generosity of spirit in personal

terms, and I can only go along with that; that generosity of spirit was obvious to everyone who knew him. I welcomed Mr. Speaker pointing out in his statement yesterday the lack of leadership and wrong-headed thinking that led to the House rejecting the sensible proposals for reform of our expenses system last year. It was important that he made that point.

The hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Alan Duncan) mentioned the Committee, proposed by Mr. Speaker, which is to look at the issue of the police search of Members' offices. I have to say that the right hon. and learned Lady has got herself into a bit of a mess on that. If she remembers, we on the Opposition Benches proposed that there should be no Government majority on that Committee, and that it should be chaired by an Opposition Member. That was rejected by her and her party, and in a whipped vote the Labour party pushed through a motion on 8 December that precluded that option. If the Government have backtracked on that, which is extremely helpful, she needs to put a new motion before the House, because she is bound by a resolution of 8 December that does not allow the Committee to have the composition that it is apparently now to have. Will she put such a motion on the Order Paper next week, so that we can vote on it?

In another place last week, during proceedings on the Political Parties and Elections Bill, there was an extremely important vote on an amendment in the name of Lord Campbell-Savours. That amendment will be strongly supported in this House by Liberal Democrat Members—and a great number of Labour Members, too, as was indicated by the fact that the Government could not manage to get a Labour majority in the House of Lords on the matter. May we have confirmation that there will be ample time to debate that amendment in this House, and that there will be no attempt by the Government to reverse the decision made in another place on non-domiciled tax exiles providing funding for political parties?

The Prime Minister yesterday appeared to have a problem understanding how limited his reforms of the banking sector have been, but he was put right in no uncertain terms by the Governor of the Bank of England last night. Given that the Prime Minister does not appear to know what he is doing on banking reform, and that the Chancellor of the Exchequer does not seem to know either, while the Governor of the Bank of England clearly does know, may we have a debate on the issue so that we Members of the House can put forward our ideas on how the banking sector should be regulated in future?

Lastly, when the Lord High Everything took control of the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills, and it was then abolished, one part of the collateral damage was the presumed demise of the Select Committee on Innovation, Universities, Science and Skills. Before it had that title, the Committee did a superb job in this House as the Select Committee on Science and Technology. In fact, it did a particularly superb job when I was a member of it. There are many people, both in the House and outside, who feel that having a Committee that is committed to the interests of science and technology is no bad thing, including the learned societies led by the Royal Society of Chemistry. When the right hon. and learned Lady brings forward her proposals on Select Committees next Thursday, will she ensure that we re-establish a properly constituted Select Committee

on Science and Technology, with a cross-cutting brief, to ensure that those interests are properly represented in this House?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman mentioned the work on expenses. It would perhaps be helpful if I reminded the House that today there has been progress on transparency, with all expenses claims having gone on the House of Commons website. Shortly, we will bring a Bill before Parliament to create an independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. There is also a reassessment under way of all the past four years' claims, which is being carried out by Sir Thomas Legg and independent accountants. Every single claim will be looked at, and any money that was paid out with the rules will have to be paid back. We will be able to strengthen parliamentary processes as a result of the work of the Committee that is to be chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright). We will get the results of the independent Kelly committee on our allowances, and then the Parliamentary Standards Authority will start work. We have had a major problem, but all the work to solve it is under way.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the Committee examining matters in relation to search and seizure and the arrest of the hon. Member for Ashford (Damian Green). There will be no need for a further resolution of the House, because the resolution of 8 December said:

“That the committee consist of seven members appointed by the Speaker reflecting the composition of the House.”

Mr. Heath: And now the Government are not doing that.

Ms Harman: Actually, having read that again, I see what the hon. Gentleman means. If we need to do anything, we can do that next Thursday, but that is not a commitment; it is just a maybe.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned cleaning up donations. Important work has been done over the years to ensure that donations to political parties are clean and transparent. We do not want anyone to have influence over politics in this country that is gained from money coming from abroad. We will, of course, review the Lords amendments.

The hon. Gentleman talked about banking regulation, which can be addressed during today's topical debate on the economy. It is important that we work internationally so that we have the highest standards of regulation for our financial services industry, which is international. We need international guidelines so that we can reach international high standards, and Europe plays an important role in that. Obviously, the structure will have to be operationalised at a national level with each nation ensuring that its national machinery works to high international standards. The Chancellor has made it clear that regulation will be toughened. We want to ensure that the Financial Services Authority and the Bank of England have clear responsibilities, and there will be further work to get this right.

Ms Sally Keeble (Northampton, North) (Lab): Will my right hon. and learned Friend join me in congratulating the staff and community who have been responsible for the opening of a spectacular new children's centre in Blackthorn in my constituency? When the Child Poverty

[Ms Sally Keeble]

Bill is considered in Committee—I hope that she will upgrade its Second Reading date of Monday 29 June from provisional to absolutely fixed—will she ensure that there is an evidence session so that the Government's measures on combating child poverty and the work of children's centres, which the Opposition criticise, can be clearly set out and may feed into the construction of the Bill?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend makes an important point. There will be evidence sessions. Tackling child poverty is about not only income levels—from work and benefits—but, importantly, the support services that enable children to get on better in their lives. Children's centres have made a major contribution to equality in this country. There are now more than 3,000 centres, but we want to ensure that there is one in every single neighbourhood. Important discussion about that will take place alongside consideration of the new Child Poverty Bill.

Mr. Patrick McLoughlin (West Derbyshire) (Con): Will the Leader of the House arrange for the Foreign Secretary to make a statement next week on British prisoners kept abroad without trial? Failing that, will she ensure that I get a reply to my letter of 21 May to the Foreign Secretary concerning Mr. William Keating, who has been kept in prison without any trial in the Central African Republic since early February? His family are incredibly concerned about what is happening to him.

Ms Harman: I will ensure that the right hon. Gentleman gets the reply to his letter to which he is entitled. Foreign Office questions take place next Tuesday, but I hope that he will receive a reply before then.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Will my right hon. and learned Friend look into the way in which disabled facilities grants are operated by local authorities? There is an ultimatum that occupational therapists must visit and carry out an evaluation within six months and that the work be done within a year, but it is being stretched by local authorities. There is an additional worry that ring-fenced money is being used for other purposes. Will she mount an investigation into the situation and consider holding a debate?

Ms Harman: That can be considered during debates on the Equality Bill, which puts a duty on public authorities to consider and meet the needs of disabled people.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): If the Leader of the House listened to the "Today" programme this morning, she would have heard the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs giving an interview about climate change projections, on which he is to make a statement after business questions. Although that was deplorable—it is doubly deplorable in the Secretary of State's case, because he is usually meticulous in upholding the traditions of the House, rather than breaching them in such a way—what really worries me is that it was clear that the BBC had accessed the document, or received briefing on its substance, yet hon. Members will have to face it blind when we hear the statement.

Can we establish a system whereby when Ministers insult the House by giving interviews outside, they release the documents to which they have referred so that all of us may see them in advance of a statement? Alternatively, although perhaps this is a lesser thing, should not all hon. Members, in much the same way as Front Benchers, have access an hour beforehand to documents on which statements are made, as long as we do so in the privacy of the Library? The calibre of debate would be improved if more people could read the relevant documents prior to statements, and that would genuinely improve the scrutiny of documents and legislation in the House.

Ms Harman: I am not sure whether that suggestion has been made before, but it is a good one. It is not just Front Benchers who need a moment to marshal their thoughts so that they can question Ministers properly; Back Benchers on both sides of the House need that too. The right hon. Gentleman suggests that the content of the statement was put out on the "Today" programme before the matter came before the House. It is an important principle that the first people who get a chance to question a Minister about a substantive policy statement should be Members of the House, not journalists, so I will get a transcript of the interview on the "Today" programme and look at the content of the statement.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East) (Lab): I have a registered interest in this question. Has my right hon. and learned Friend had time to read a letter dated 12 June that she received from the executive secretary of the Royal Society, and the chief executives of the Royal Academy of Engineering, the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Institute of Physics and the Institute of Biology, calling for the reformation of a science and technology Select Committee? Will she give the contents of the letter great consideration, given that this is now a cross-party request?

Ms Harman: I will consider that point very seriously. I pay tribute to the work of my hon. Friend and other members of the Science and Technology Committee.

John Bercow (Buckingham) (Con): May we please have a debate next week in Government time on the continuing crisis in Burma? Given that the brutal military dictatorship in that country practises egregious human rights abuses, including extra-judicial killings, rape as a weapon of war, compulsory relocation, forced labour, and the use of child soldiers on a scale proportionately greater than in any other country of the world, would it not be good to have a debate in which the Government could explain what action they will take multilaterally to try to bring that regime to book and to give the people of Burma the freedom and justice that we have so long enjoyed and they have so long been denied?

Ms Harman: I will consider that as a suggestion for a topical debate.

Mr. Chris Mullin (Sunderland, South) (Lab): Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that the Bill to set up the parliamentary standards committee will be published in draft and subject to full pre-legislative scrutiny? I am sure that she agrees that it is better that we do not legislate in haste and repent at leisure.

Ms Harman: There is not an intention to publish the Bill in draft and subject it to full pre-legislative scrutiny. It is important that we have a narrow Bill on which there can be complete consensus. If we then want to expand on the Bill's provisions, we can do so following consideration of draft clauses and further discussion. The narrow point is that just as we are no longer going to set and vote on our own pay—we have agreed a system so that we do not have to do that—we should not in future set our allowances or administer the system that pays those allowances. To be honest, if we subject a draft Bill to pre-legislative scrutiny, the public will feel that we have not got the point and we have put the matter into the long grass. I know that it is usually good to spend an awfully long time thinking about things, but if there is a straightforward, narrow and practical proposition, we should just get on with it.

Mr. Phil Willis (Harrogate and Knaresborough) (LD): First, I thank the Leader of the House for considering carefully the issues that my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) and the hon. Member for Bolton, South-East (Dr. Iddon) raised about the resurrection of the Science and Technology Committee. When the machinery of Government changes took place in 2007, perhaps she was unaware of the strength of feeling not only inside the House but outside it about the need to scrutinise science, engineering and technology effectively. Despite the valiant efforts over the past two years of my Committee's members, to whom I pay tribute, in reality, if a very large Committee—and the Select Committee covering the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills will be even larger—is not able to get to grips with science and technology not only in government but throughout all the Departments, it will be a huge mistake. I hope that on Thursday, when she brings forward her recommendations, she will bear that in mind and recognise that organisations such as the Royal Society of Chemistry, the Royal Society, the Royal Academy of Engineering et al are incredibly interested in supporting the Government in their drive to put science at the heart of Government policy.

Ms Harman: There is a lot of force in the hon. Gentleman's points, and I thank him for placing them on the record.

Barry Gardiner (Brent, North) (Lab): I know that my right hon. and learned Friend will join me in congratulating the Metropolitan police on its recent successes in reducing violent crime. Could she find time in the next week or so for a debate to discuss the ways in which those successes have been achieved and how to promulgate them more widely?

Ms Harman: I shall look for an opportunity for a further debate about something that is always high on the Government's and the public's agenda—further reductions in violent crime.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) (PC): The Leader of the House knows that there are urgent ongoing discussions about the imposition on Members of a statutory code of conduct. In the light of recent breaches of the ministerial code, is it not right that we should discuss a similar approach to the ministerial code?

Ms Harman: Members of this House are already covered by a code of conduct, and the question is whether we should consider at some future date putting it on a statutory footing.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): May I congratulate my right hon. and learned Friend and the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Rutland and Melton (Alan Duncan), on the tributes that they paid to the Speaker? Some of us could not make a tribute to him, but we loved him dearly, and will miss him as Speaker. I still feel very strongly about the campaign that was waged against him by Quentin Letts and other people in the press.

May I ask my right hon. and learned Friend not to leave out universities from the debate about how we scrutinise science and technology? Under the present arrangements, it looks as if it will be very difficult to give that important sector, in terms of both our communities and our economy, the proper attention that it deserves.

Ms Harman: It is very important not only that the work of my hon. Friend's Select Committee on Children, Schools and Families, which he chairs so ably, is carried through into further and higher education, but that we have a proper Select Committee with responsibility for science and innovation which relates to the business Department and trade and industry. I take his points on board, and will consider them before we come back to the House.

Mr. Greg Knight (East Yorkshire) (Con): Will the Leader of the House think again about the business for next Thursday? On reflection, would not it be better to abandon plans for a parliamentary reform Committee and, instead, abolish the Modernisation Committee and refer all issues of outstanding concern to the Procedure Committee? That would then give us time on Thursday to debate the Procedure Committee's excellent report on e-petitions, which, if implemented, really would reconnect the public with Parliament.

Ms Harman: I pay tribute to the work that the right hon. Gentleman and his Committee have done on e-petitions, and hope that it will be taken forward. However, his Committee's terms of reference do not allow it to address the question of how non-Government business is allocated—at least, I do not think that it does. It is important for us not to make an argument about process, when we are trying to deliver on what is probably a consensus on improving how the House conducts its business. We should move on to the many demands for the Government to cede some of their control and their right to dictate Government and non-Government business. Many Members have argued for that. Should we not all work together to bring that into practice, rather than argue about which Committee does so?

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) (Lab): As someone who does not in any way renounce the 2003 vote on the Iraq war or blame the former Prime Minister, but justifies the vote, in all the circumstances at the time, may I ask my right hon. and learned Friend, regarding Wednesday's debate, whether the Government will reflect further on the committee of inquiry on the Iraq war? I, for one, do not believe that its proceedings should be totally in private. There is undoubtedly an argument

[Mr. David Winnick]

that some of the evidence should be taken in private, but not the entirety. The inquiry's credibility is very much at stake, so I do hope that Ministers at the most senior level will have given further consideration to the matter by Wednesday's debate.

Ms Harman: I thank my hon. Friend for making those points, and will draw them to the attention of those who are responsible for arranging the Government's response.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire) (Con): Further to the question from the hon. Member for Sunderland, South (Mr. Mullin) about the imminent Bill to set up a Parliamentary Standards Authority, I must note there will be disappointment at the Bill not being published in draft. If the Government proceed with a Bill, will the Leader of the House at least give an undertaking that any controversial aspects will not be subject to a guillotine, and may even be taken on the Floor of the House?

Ms Harman: I think that it would be good idea if all the Bill's stages were taken on the Floor of the House—and although there has been no formal publication of the draft Bill, a Bill in draft is being developed. If any Members would like to have a look at what might be in it, they should just come to my room and I shall show it to them. I do not want to go through the palaver of the publication of a draft Bill, but it is no secret that a Bill is being drafted, it has some clauses in it, and the more people who feed their contribution in before it is brought to the House on Second Reading, the better.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East) (Lab): Can we have a debate or a statement on the position of British citizens who are the victims of crime abroad and wish to claim compensation? My constituent Luke Laurent was subjected to a vicious stabbing and attack in Cyprus, and has been trying for the past year to claim compensation. After the Tampere discussions and Hague 2, it should be much easier for British citizens to claim compensation in EU countries. Will my right hon. and learned Friend look at the matter to see whether we can have a debate or statement on this important issue?

Ms Harman: Perhaps my right hon. Friend could raise the matter at Foreign and Commonwealth Office questions, which is not next week, as I said earlier, but the week after next.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): All of us have constituents who have studied hard for years only to leave education this summer with very uncertain job prospects. Graduate unemployment is projected to double, and some estimates are that the number of jobless under-25-year-olds could rise to more than 1 million, so can we have a debate on youth unemployment and what the Government are doing to tackle the problem?

Ms Harman: Members could raise the issue later this afternoon in the debate about the economy. It is absolutely at the centre of the Government's concerns that we should protect people from unemployment and from being thrown out of work, which is a tragedy for every individual. It is even worse when that individual is a young person who left full-time education full of hope,

only to feel that they have been thrown on the scrap heap before they have even begun. To avoid that, we have injected billions of pounds of extra funds into jobcentres and are providing apprenticeships, training guarantees and internships. We are definitely working to address those issues, and there will, no doubt, be more discussion this afternoon in the debate about the economy.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): I am not sure whether the Leader of the House is aware of this, but the courageous Prime Minister of Zimbabwe, Morgan Tsvangirai, will shortly visit the United Kingdom—and, in fact, the House of Commons—next Tuesday. Would it not be possible—and I ask her please not to tell me to put a question next Tuesday to the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs—for a Foreign Office Minister to make a statement, indicating the contact that the Government have with South Africa, the African Union and Zimbabwe's other neighbouring states to monitor the progress towards better forms of democracy in that country, so that we might help the people with meaningful aid, as we are currently unable to? Would she ask for a statement to be made on the Floor of the House?

Ms Harman: I shall ask the Foreign Secretary to consider whether, on the occasion of Morgan Tsvangirai's visit, there could be a written ministerial statement setting out the Government's extensive international and bilateral contact in support of the Zimbabwean people, and the extensive aid development programme going into that country.

Mr. Mark Lancaster (North-East Milton Keynes) (Con): May we have a debate on the proposed changes to how furnished lettings are treated for tax purposes? Many of my constituents rent out property, and for tax purposes they are considered to be trading. The proposed changes will alter that, at enormous cost to some people, especially farmers. As the recession continues to bite, is it right that the changes are being brought in now?

Ms Harman: If the hon. Gentleman is concerned about farmers—

Mr. Lancaster: Farmers are an example.

Ms Harman: If the point was about farmers, the hon. Gentleman could raise it in this afternoon's general debate on farming. Otherwise, I shall bring his points to the attention of Treasury Ministers and work out the most appropriate way of dealing with the concerns that he has raised.

Greg Mulholland (Leeds, North-West) (LD): May we have a debate about the treatment of prisoners on remand—who, of course, have not been found guilty of any offence? I should like to raise the case of my constituent Mr. Mohammed Mudhir, who was subject to extraordinarily inhumane treatment in Armley jail. A few weeks ago, the inquest jury talked of systematic failures, a culture of complacency and a lack of training. Mr. Mudhir's family have been wronged; he committed suicide as a result of the incredible catalogue of failures that he suffered in custody. Will the right hon. and learned Lady allow a debate in the House about this important matter?

Ms Harman: I shall bring the hon. Gentleman's points to the attention of my colleagues at the Ministry of Justice.

Mr. Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): Some corporate groups force solvent companies into liquidation because of their pension liabilities, and then repurchase the assets for pennies in the pound. Business men enriched by such shameful behaviour then use their wealth to cosy up to those in power. May we please have a debate on the implementation of the Pensions Act 2004, so that we can ensure that pensioners are not ruined by the behaviour of companies such as the Caparo group, which is owned by the Prime Minister's close confidant Lord Paul of Marylebone?

Ms Harman: It is for the Chair rather than me as Leader of the House to say so, but I really think that it is too easy to use business questions to take a pot shot at, and make allegations about, people who are unable to respond. If the hon. Gentleman had given me notice I might have been able to give a substantive response. He has not, so I cannot challenge what he has said. Will he please, however, regard it as challenged, even though I do not know what he is talking about? I shall raise with the Treasury the point about solvent companies being pushed into liquidation.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. It so happens that I did know what the hon. Gentleman was talking about. There was a debate, and during it I made a ruling about the use of the name of a Member of the other place; I hoped that the matter might have rested at that.

Dr. Julian Lewis (New Forest, East) (Con): Following the brilliant speech in the other place by Lord Campbell-Savours last night, the measures taken by this House to protect the security of MPs' and election candidates' home addresses were finally endorsed and passed the last hurdle. There will be no more questions on that subject from me. May I instead ask for a debate in Government time on the unpredictability of future conflicts? That would enable the Government and the Opposition to say why it is important to keep a strategic nuclear deterrent between 2025 and 2055—unlike the Liberal Democrats, who seem to think that because we are fighting counter-insurgencies now, there could be no nuclear threat to this country half a century into the future.

Ms Harman: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will find an opportunity to make those points to Defence Ministers at the next Defence questions.

Mr. Paul Burstow (Sutton and Cheam) (LD): I draw the right hon. and learned Lady's attention to early-day motion 640.

[That this House notes with concern the findings of a University College London study into the prevalence of abuse by family carers of people with dementia that as many as half of carers reporting some abusive behaviour; further notes the finding of the UK Study of Abuse and Neglect of Older People 2007 that as many as 342,000 people aged over 66 years are victims of abuse in the community, often committed by family members; welcomes the Government's review of its current safeguarding vulnerable people guidance, No Secrets; is concerned that the review

concentrates on abuse by paid carers; believes that guidance issued under section 7 of the Local Authority Social Services Act 1970 does not carry the same status as legislation; calls on the Government to introduce legislation that provides a statutory basis for the construction and work of adult protection committees (APCs); and imposes a duty on agencies to collaborate, share information, actively participate at a senior level in APCs and work together to establish a right to access the adult at risk without hindrance or coercion and provide powers to protect the welfare of a person found to be the victim of abuse.]

It states the case for placing on a statutory basis issues of elder abuse and the protection of vulnerable adults.

Furthermore, I should like to mention early-day motion 1296, which deals with the case of Margaret Haywood, who—scandalously—was struck off by the Nursing and Midwifery Council for blowing the whistle on the poor treatment and neglect of older people in another institution. May we have a debate on those two issues? The House has legislated to protect children and punish those who commit domestic violence. Is it not time to make sure that these other vulnerable people in our society get the same sort of protection?

Ms Harman: Obviously, we need tough enforceable measures in criminal law and a proper regulatory framework to protect those in residential care. The number of people over 85 is set to double in the next two decades, so the issue is of growing importance. Last week we had a debate on carers, and Health questions will be taken next week. A number of hon. Members have raised the point; it was raised at Prime Minister's questions yesterday. We will look further for an opportunity to take the issue forward.

Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): May we have a debate on the procedure used for early-day motions? There are now 1,700 of them on the Order Paper, and there is no evidence that they are ever read by Ministers or officials. Unlike what happens with petitions, there is never a ministerial response to them unless they are specifically raised in business questions. Outside groups, however, set great store by them.

Could we not have a system whereby an early-day motion that attracted sufficient signatures got at least a ministerial response? If an early-day motion attracted a large number of signatures, there could be the possibility of a debate on it. I do not think that there is a recorded instance of any of those 1,700 early-day motions ever getting debated, unless one happens to be adopted by the Opposition as a basis for a debate in Opposition time.

Ms Harman: The setting up of a business Committee is to be considered by the Committee that we hope to establish, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright). If the House is minded to move control of non-Government business from the Leader of the House to such a Committee, the question of enabling early-day motions with a certain number of signatures to be debated on the Floor of the House on a substantive motion will be very much a possibility. The Committee to be chaired by my hon. Friend could look into the idea and come up with proposals promptly.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon) (LD): I hope that the Leader of the House accepts that scrutiny of legislation on Report is House business, not Government business. Obviously, I welcome the establishment of the Committee to be chaired by the hon. Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright). Within its remit should be the issue of how we as a House handle the scrutiny of legislation on Report. It would be ridiculous to set up that Committee and have an election for the speakership that involved consideration of reforms to scrutiny on Report, while Bills such as the Health Bill—and the right hon. and learned Lady's own Equality Bill—come back during that time and yet again receive what is felt, regardless of what the Government think, to be inadequate scrutiny by the House. Will she clearly specify how she proposes to do things differently in respect of the Equality Bill this time, as an example of how we want the scrutiny of all legislation on Report to be?

Ms Harman: Timetabling on Report is an attempt to make sure that all aspects of the Bill receive scrutiny, and that the House does not spend so much time on a couple of clauses that some are not scrutinised. However, I readily acknowledge that that has not always been the result. We want to be flexible so that if issues arise in Committee and Government amendments can be brought forward, that should be done. However, we should not find ourselves in a situation where those amendments are not properly scrutinised. There is a lot of justification for the points raised by the hon. Gentleman, and they can be within the remit of the Committee that I hope will be established, chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase. However, I would say that the Report stage of a Government Bill is Government business, however we look at it.

Mr. David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Tomorrow the House will further consider the commendable provisions in the Autism Bill, which deserve full support. However, can we have a debate about autism in the context of the criminal justice system? My constituent Gary McKinnon, the computer hacker, has been diagnosed with Asperger's syndrome, yet the Home Secretary—or at least the previous Home Secretary—chose to disregard the impact of his condition and approved his extradition to the United States.

Ms Harman: I am sure that all aspects in relation to that individual would have been taken into account when considering an extradition process. As for the work on autism, the Government believe that the strategy across the Department for Children, Schools and Families and the Department of Health goes even further than the points raised in the Autism Bill, although that Bill offers a welcome opportunity for further discussion.

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute) (LD): The “Digital Britain” report caused great concern in the highlands in relation to radio, because it proposes that all national broadcast radio stations should move from analogue to DAB by 2015 and that all car radios are to be converted. However, the presence of DAB in the highlands and islands is almost non-existent. I hope that if the Government are switching from analogue to DAB they will ensure that everywhere in the country that can currently get the analogue radio signal will get DAB. Can we have an urgent debate so that those issues can be raised?

Ms Harman: Earlier this week we had a statement in the House, and precisely those issues were raised. The whole approach of the Government is that just as it is expected that everywhere in the UK where people live there should be a supply of water and electricity, there should also be broadband working to a high degree, and digital inclusion. I am therefore sure that the hon. Gentleman's points have already been taken on board.

Mr. Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Given that topical debates are meant to be topical, and given the strategic importance of the tumultuous and dramatic events in Iran, could we have a topical debate on that country next Thursday?

Ms Harman: While the Foreign Secretary is, as he has made clear, working very closely with other countries to ensure that the will of the Iranian people is recognised, it is important to say that this is a matter for the Iranian people and the Iranian electoral authorities. Obviously, however, we want to be absolutely sure that everyone has the right to demonstrate and no one suffers as a result of the demonstrations.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): Following the revelation in today's *Guardian* that Tony Blair approved policy guidance to British intelligence officers on interviewing detainees overseas that probably led to Britain being in breach of our international obligations under the UN convention against torture, can we have a debate on how this House scrutinises such policy guidance? Could the Leader of the House ensure that such a debate is led by the Secretary of State for Justice—not least because he was Foreign Secretary at the time when that guidance was approved and, along with the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett), must surely also have been responsible for approving such policy guidance for our intelligence services?

Ms Harman: I am confident that we would not have broken any international obligations prohibiting torture, not just because we have entered into international obligations but because we abhor torture and would never have anything to do with it.

UK Climate Projections

12.24 pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Hilary Benn): With permission, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to make a statement on the publication of new projections for the UK's future climate. A summary will be placed in the Vote Office and full details can be found on the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs website.

The House knows that climate change is one of the greatest challenges we face. The world's climate is already changing: the 10 hottest years on record have occurred since 1990, including every year between 2001 and 2006. In the UK the 2003 heat wave led to over 2,000 excess deaths, and yet average temperatures that year were just 2° higher than normal. In 2006 the south-east experienced a severe drought. Eight million people in the region are dependent on rivers for their water supply. In 2007 we saw widespread flooding across the country, and a storm surge came within 10 cm of overtopping the defences at Great Yarmouth.

The projections we are publishing today—more than 4,000 maps on the website—give us a clear sense of what we might be able to expect over the next 100 years. They represent the best science we have on how our climate is likely to change; and they are a call to action. I want to thank the scientists at the Met Office Hadley Centre and many others for bringing home to us how these changes in our climate—with a greater likelihood of heat waves, flooding, drought, and coastal erosion—will affect our society, and how important it is that we reach a deal at the UN climate change conference in Copenhagen this December. We are, of course, already taking significant steps to cut our emissions. With the Climate Change Act 2008, we became the first country in the world to set legally binding carbon budgets.

Across the UK, the projections show a range of climate changes up until the end of the century based on three possible greenhouse gas emissions pathways: high, medium and low. Broadly speaking, the world's emissions are currently closest to the medium pathway, although there is still a risk that we could be heading for the high one. While we cannot be absolutely sure what will happen in future, and there are uncertainties—these projections are not a long-range weather forecast—they do show the probabilities of potential changes for the UK, and that is a future that we must avoid.

The projections based on the medium emissions scenario show that by the 2080s—within the lifetimes of our children and grandchildren—we could face an increase in average summer temperatures of between 2° and 6° C in the south-east, with a central estimate of 4°. They show a decrease in average summer rainfall of 22 per cent. in Yorkshire and Humber and in the south-east, which is already short of water, and an increase of 16 per cent. in average winter rainfall in the north-west, with increases in the amount of rain on the wettest days leading to a higher risk of flooding. They also show a rise in the sea level for London of 36 cm. Temperatures would rise even more under the high emissions pathway, which could mean peak summer temperatures in London regularly reaching over 40°.

Those results are sobering, and we know that those changes will affect every aspect of our daily lives. The first clear message is that only by cutting emissions

through a global deal in Copenhagen can we avoid some of the extreme changes that the projections describe. Moreover, even if we achieve our international target to limit global temperature rise to 2°, we will still have to live with some level of change. That is because it will take 30 years for past emissions to work through the system, so the next three decades of climate change are already set. By 2040, what was exceptional in the summer of 2003 will have become normal.

The second message of these projections is therefore that we must plan to adapt to changes that are now unavoidable—and this is a job for all of us. That is why we have more than doubled spending on flood and coastal protection since 1997, and we are on course to provide better protection for about 160,000 more homes across England. We are taking action to tackle water scarcity and improve water efficiency. For the first time, all Government Departments are producing their own adaptation plans, which they will publish by next spring.

The NHS now has a heat wave plan to protect vulnerable people from hot weather. The Department for Transport has reviewed its design guidance for roads, looking at drainage capacity and new road surfaces. With the Department for Communities and Local Government, we are already working with more than 50 local authorities that have made adapting to climate change a priority in their local area agreements.

All local authorities will in future have to consider adaptation when taking planning decisions, and from today all major Government investment will have to take into account risks from climate change.

In the Climate Change Act 2008, we took the power to require public bodies to adapt and to report on the steps they are taking. Today I am launching a consultation paper proposing the first 100 organisations, including Network Rail, the National Grid, Ofwat and the Environment Agency, that will be required to tell us what they are doing. I am placing copies of that consultation paper in the Library of the House.

The economic case for acting now is very strong, as the Stern review made clear. By investing in flood defence, for example, we estimate that we can reduce the annual cost of flooding by 80 to 90 per cent. in the years to come. There may also be some economic opportunities, for tourism and agriculture, for businesses developing adaptation technologies and for jobs in new infrastructure projects.

Climate change is going to transform the way we live. These projections show us both the future we need to avoid and the future we need to plan for. As well as cutting emissions, we have to start making changes today. I commend this statement to the House.

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): I thank the Secretary of State for early sight of his statement and for his courtesy in briefing me this morning.

This week, a report on global climate change impacts in the United States showed that climate change is already affecting water, energy, transport, agriculture, ecosystems and health. Those impacts are occurring now and are expected to increase. These new Met Office projections reinforce the US report and make the scale of the challenges facing our own country startlingly clear.

[Nick Herbert]

Does the Environment Secretary agree that these data again tell us that it would be a serious mistake to suggest that climate change will have only benign impacts in the UK, or that we will somehow be insulated from the worst effects? Some people claim that even if global temperatures are rising, it is a cyclical event. Is that not a dangerously flawed and even complacent view? Will he confirm that the temperature of the planet is already at its highest, and that the rate of change is accelerating?

Given the gravity of these assessments, we agree with the Environment Secretary about the importance of the forthcoming Copenhagen summit. There clearly needs to be co-operation on climate change mitigation and adaptation measures at international level, but is it not essential that for Britain to be seen as a world leader, we cannot just go to Copenhagen and ask other countries to sign up to an agreement without being seen to be delivering at home? Over the past decade, the UK's carbon emissions have flatlined, and he himself has admitted that the Government will not meet their 2010 reductions target.

The Secretary of State says that the Government are taking significant steps to cut emissions, but effective measures require more than setting targets. Practical steps to decarbonise the UK's economy are now essential. Will the Government adopt the Conservative party's low-carbon economy proposals, including an immediate upgrade in the energy efficiency of homes and a smart electricity grid so that we can consume energy more intelligently?

We need to adapt in this country for temperature changes that we will not be able to avoid. Is it not the case that that aspect of the climate change agenda has been too much overlooked, despite the significant known risks of increased flooding and coastal erosion, the implications for our road and rail network and critical infrastructure, the loss of wildlife habitat and the impact on health? Can the Environment Secretary confirm that the cross-Government programme to assess the costs and savings involved in adaptation will not even begin to be developed until 2011? When will the climate change adaptation sub-committee meet?

The greatest climate change risk facing the UK is flooding. The floods of two years ago were a reminder that what we are talking about today can have a devastating impact on people's lives. Can the Government explain why one in four major flood defence projects have been delayed since then, and why the majority of the recommendations of the Pitt report on the 2007 floods have not yet been implemented?

The impact of rising temperatures on our natural environment, agriculture and water resources will be significant, and it could be severe. We are already facing biodiversity loss and water shortages in many areas. Is it not time to consider a radical new approach to ensure the sustainable management of natural resources? Do we not need a regulatory framework that incentivises the conservation of water? To help wildlife adapt and find new habitats, do we not need to think beyond traditional protected areas and start to create new green spaces?

The new plans are a welcome update to the last climate change scenarios, which were produced in 2002, but have these projections not been delayed on several

occasions? The national flood risk assessment, which has been informed by the data, has also been delayed by several months. Does the Environment Secretary recognise the need to balance the regular provision of information, to keep people updated with the latest projections, with the need to provide a degree of certainty for those making long-term plans and investment decisions, at least to the greatest extent possible?

One of the authors of the US report said this week:

"The most important thing...is that the impacts of climate change are not something your children might theoretically see 50 years from now."

Is not the message of the Met Office's projections not only that action to reduce carbon emissions is essential to avoid very serious climate change events in future, but that we need to begin preparing now for significant changes in the environment that we can no longer avoid?

Hilary Benn: I agree wholeheartedly with what the hon. Gentleman said about the message that the projections give us. If there are those in society who somehow think that climate change is not happening and we do not need to worry, and that we can pull up the bed covers and hope it will all go away, they are profoundly mistaken. That is why I believe the publication of the projections today will have an impact, and a lot of people will have cause to think about what the future may hold if we do not change it.

With respect, it is not true to say that the UK is not delivering on its own commitments. As the hon. Gentleman will know, we are one of the few countries that will not just meet its Kyoto commitments but do more than that. Frankly, when one looks around the world, one finds a lot of countries for which that is not the case.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned smart meters, and there is a plan to roll them out over 10 years. As he knows, we as a nation are investing a significant amount in renewable energy, and we are producing more electricity from offshore wind than any other country on the planet. The consultation on coal, for which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change was responsible, set out proposals that will give us the toughest regime for any future coal-fired electricity generation of any country in the world.

On the adaptation sub-committee, the hon. Gentleman will be aware that Sir John Krebs has been appointed to chair it, and I hope to make an announcement very soon about the other members. It is not the case that the programme is not going to start until 2011. A cross-Government programme is already under way, but the national risk assessment must be pulled together by that date.

With respect, I disagree with the hon. Gentleman's assessment of the progress that we have made in implementing the recommendations in Sir Michael Pitt's report. What he said is not Sir Michael's view, and he is in a better position to make judgments than either the hon. Gentleman or I. We have made a lot of progress, and I shall shortly report to the House with a further update on what has happened since I last reported in December.

The hon. Gentleman made an important point about new green spaces. He drew attention to the sites of special scientific interest that we currently have. They

reflect what is special now, but a changing climate may alter that. One thing that will have to adapt over time is the system we have in place to safeguard what is special. We must recognise that climate change will have an impact on that.

On the hon. Gentleman's final point, I want to be straight with the House and say that there is a balance to be struck. As he will know, this is cutting-edge science and an enormous amount of work has gone into producing the projections. Those involved should not apologise for one second for taking the time required to get them right. However, he is correct to say it is important that we get the information out. The 2002 projections were for then, and the new ones give us a much better assessment of the probability of the change. He knows, as does the whole House, that there is no absolute certainty, but I think we have struck the right balance. It will be for everyone who sees the projections to make their own judgment about the message that they send us, which is pretty clear, and the action that we need to take to adapt.

Dr. Kim Howells (Pontypridd) (Lab): I congratulate my right hon. Friend on an impressive, timely and comprehensive statement. May I urge him and my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change to resist the temptation to cover the superb wild uplands of Wales and other beautiful parts of this country with thousands of wind generators, not one of which would be built without a direct or indirect subsidy from the British taxpayer? Will he get on with the much more sensible and much cleaner way of generating energy—a new nuclear power station programme?

Hilary Benn: There are places in the country where it would not be appropriate to put wind turbines, including some of our most beautiful landscapes. However, the biggest obstacle to more onshore generation of electricity from wind power is planning permission, followed by issues to do with the grid connection. It has therefore been easier to get agreement offshore. In the end, we cannot pick and choose because we will need all such means of generating energy. The Government, with some foresight, said a little while ago that nuclear needed to be part of the mix, as well as cleaner coal, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change announced recently, and renewables. We must also not forget that we can do much to reduce our consumption of energy. That is why the home insulation programme, on which we are leading, is an important contribution to the progress that we all support.

Simon Hughes (North Southwark and Bermondsey) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and for today's early briefing, and I welcome the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change back to the House after his paternity leave and send him best wishes for his new responsibilities.

We are grateful to the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, and ask him to pass on our thanks to the Met Office scientists, who have done a fantastic amount of work. They have produced what is probably one of the most significant pieces of scientific work to influence the debate for decades. We owe them great respect—they are hugely well regarded.

We are also grateful to the Government for being honest about the conclusion, which the science backs, that we will experience a 2° rise in temperature. According to assessments by the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, that might mean that between two and three species are at further risk of extinction. We must face up to the biodiversity implications.

Does the Secretary of State accept that the statement predicts the fastest and most dramatic change in our environment that has ever been witnessed in such a short time? Today's projections probably mark a watershed in how we consider the future. We now have the evidence at home as well as abroad to show that we must change the way we do things in this country and plan our future differently.

I have some questions about the specifics. Does he accept that we must rethink food production in this country so that we are more self-sufficient in different parts of the country, avoiding the areas that have been most at risk from flooding and might be at more risk in future? Will we not have to rethink how we ensure access to clean water at all times, when more storms and unexpected global events are likely, with the consequent risk to the water supply? Will we not need to think carefully about our housing and planning? We will have more people to accommodate and many more houses to build, but we need to be much more careful about where we build them, given what we know about the risks in Gloucestershire, parts of Yorkshire, places on the east coast and, indeed, along the Thames estuary.

I have a different view about energy policy from that of the right hon. Member for Pontypridd (Dr. Howells). Does the Secretary of State accept that we need to boost, not reduce, the opportunity for renewables as a result of the report because climate change means that we need to reduce emissions and move to other more dependable supplies? In London and the south-east, does the report imply that the Thames barrier may not be enough and that we need to start planning much earlier for further protection?

Does the Secretary of State accept that we need the same accuracy of prediction continentally and globally as we now have nationally and that we should work at Copenhagen and elsewhere on that basis?

Does the right hon. Gentleman accept that what he has told us today, based on the science, means that the Government may have to rethink some of their policies for the best of reasons—for example, the third runway at Heathrow, the plan for coal-fired power stations and the general balance of the energy mix? None of us can afford to avoid the implications of today's announcement, and we must all realise that Britain and the world need to act pretty quickly or we will risk not only future generations but this generation's ability to maintain a planet on which we can continue the sort of life that not only we but people abroad need and expect.

Hilary Benn: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his kind words about the Met Office scientists, who have worked so hard to give us the benefit of the projections. He is right to talk about the fundamental changes that we could face. We cannot absolutely predict the future, but we can try to plan for it. That is the message that we must take from the report.

[Hilary Benn]

The changes outlined in the report will unquestionably affect the way we produce our food. I spoke earlier about trying to garner the water that we have got. Bluetongue is a disease that travelled up Africa, swept through Europe and arrived in the UK. That is an example of a change in climate affecting our farming industry. We found a way of dealing with that—we funded a vaccination programme, which farmers strongly supported.

Of course, the changes will affect the provision of water. That is why the water companies have to think 25 years ahead in their plans about how many houses they might serve, what the population will be and so on. It is also why we changed planning policy statement 25—the guidance on housing and planning—to provide that the Environment Agency, which has most expertise in the risks of flooding, must be consulted. It is encouraging to see that many planning applications against which the Environment Agency advised have not been approved. That shows that the change that we have made to the system is working.

I agree that we need to boost renewables. The current assessment of the Thames barrier is that it will see us to 2070. The important point about the projections is that, because they give us the probabilities, all a sun hat manufacturer needs to know is that the weather will be warmer, while those responsible for protecting London from flooding want to know what the 10 per cent. probability at the upper range is so that they can plan accordingly. The Thames barrier is a result of adaptation after the 1953 storm surge, which killed 300 people.

I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need such projections and information to be available globally. Anyone who examines what the scientists have to say to us cannot fail to understand the importance of responding, reducing emissions and adapting.

Sir Peter Soulsby (Leicester, South) (Lab): I warmly welcome my right hon. Friend's statement and the excellent scientific work that lies behind it. I note that he referred to the potential for some economic opportunities for tourism and agriculture arising from climate change. I have also heard it argued that there are potential benefits in the reduced incidence of winter illness as a result of climate change. Will my right hon. Friend take the opportunity to ensure that we and the public are not seduced by such small and doubtful potential benefits, and to emphasise that they are totally dwarfed by potentially devastating effects on vulnerable communities throughout the world and substantial infrastructure costs for us in Britain?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend makes an important point. We must tell the truth about the range of consequences that may flow. It would therefore be wrong not to refer to the opportunities that might emerge. We should want to take advantage of adaptation technologies and more efficient use of water so that we have the kit to fit to our houses to use water much more efficiently in future. However, my hon. Friend is right that the overwhelming message of the projections is that we do not want to end up in the sort of future predicted for 2070, 2080 and 2090. Whether we will is in our hands and those of other nations as we determine the emission reductions to which we are prepared to commit in Copenhagen in December.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde) (Con): The projections, especially those at the high end of the time scale, suggest that, for example, temperatures on the London underground might reach 47 °, although I think we might have got there already when travelling on the Northern line at 8 am. That raises important questions about the usability of major parts of transport infrastructure if the projections become reality. The Secretary of State has talked about the need for adaptation in a wide range of activity. What steps will the Government take to set up some form of adaptation fund to provide the long-term investment? The short-term political cycle of a Parliament that lasts four or five years, particularly when we face the economic pressures of the current situation, means that it is all too easy to postpone the necessary investment until another Parliament. Eventually, we could run out of time and not be able to afford the investments if the temperature projections reach the upper limits.

Hilary Benn: The right hon. Gentleman makes an extremely important point. The fact is that whoever is in government will have to deal with that issue, because that is the future that we are heading for. However, to be honest, I am not persuaded that a separate adaptation fund is the right approach, for this simple reason. If someone were designing a new school, would they say, "Right, I'll build it this way, like we've always done, but if a fund comes along, I shall change it, because you've given some extra finance"? Some of the changes are not very profound. Take highways, for instance. Let us say that someone building a new motorway wants to have drains of a certain capacity, but then decides to have slightly larger drains. That will not necessarily add hugely to the cost, but it does mean that as those concerned—whether they be businesses, councils or anybody else—think about how they are going to build, design and operate something, they will take those considerations into account. The message is that adaptation is not separate, new and special; rather, we have to build it into what we do every day.

Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell) (Lab): I really do welcome today's statement, given that its timing quite deliberately coincides with my presentation afterwards of a Bill to introduce climate change health warnings in all car adverts. I would like to ask my right hon. Friend about the central role that water companies will have to play in our future. Is he happy with the regulatory regime, which obviously places the supply of good, clean, potable water at its core, but which may also militate somewhat against water companies branching out into renewable energy? I am thinking of a recent analysis by National Grid which showed that we could produce some 50 per cent. of our gas from biogas by 2020. However, the regime under Ofwat is perhaps not quite good enough to help water companies to achieve that target.

Hilary Benn: Water companies already produce quite a bit of energy from anaerobic digestion, in order to power their works. With the publication of the draft Flood and Water Management Bill and the document that went with it, we are consulting people on what more we should do on water efficiency, which the Select Committee on Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is currently scrutinising, under the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack). Should what we do mirror what we

have been doing on energy efficiency? I would be very interested to hear what people have to say about that. However, my hon. Friend is right: if the current regulatory structure does not fit what we now know we need to do, we will need to revise what we are doing in the light of the new evidence. That seems a pretty sensible thing to do when we have new evidence, and the new projections are certainly that.

Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory (Wells) (Con): Spine-chilling projections are one thing, but may I ask the Secretary of State about his performance in meeting existing targets for emission reductions? Am I right in thinking that the Government have a legally binding commitment to source 15 per cent. of all energy consumed—not just electricity—from renewable sources by 2020, even though that is widely regarded as unattainable? Could he tell the House what legal sanctions and penalties will apply to Ministers, Departments and civil servants who sign up to targets that are legally binding in international law, but then fail to meet them? If the answer is none, does that not contrast with how the Government treat businesses, which have to sign up to and meet, by force of legal sanction, fines and even imprisonment, targets set by the Government?

Hilary Benn: The right hon. Gentleman raises an interesting point about who, in the end, holds Governments to account for the commitments that they enter into, and this is the Chamber in which we do that.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): And in the courts.

Hilary Benn: It is for the courts to determine what that means in practice if people seek to bring a legal case. Indeed, there was a judicial review recently in relation to the fuel poverty targets that we set. The issues were played out in the courts and a judgment was delivered.

The target for renewable energy is challenging—there is no running away from that—but we are putting in place the policies that we need to get there. We have seen significant change in recent years, through the renewables obligation and the further measures that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change is setting out and will be getting on with.

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend has rightly referred to the need for international agreement among Governments. However, does he agree that there is also a need for, in effect, an international movement of civil society, involving citizens and peoples, just as we saw with Make Poverty History and similar campaigns, to try to build up the pressure, particularly on the more recalcitrant Governments, to get the agreements that are so urgently needed?

Hilary Benn: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The truth is that pressure from below helps Governments to move. We need politics that is a combination of leadership and those pressures. Indeed, the Climate Change Act was the result of two forces at work. One was the Big Ask campaign, which was a movement from below that said, “We should have a climate change Act in the UK,” and the other was political leadership from the Government, who said, “Yeah, that’s what we’re going to do.” The Bill was drafted and the Act is now on the statute book.

That shows what we can do. Frankly, if we had asked someone 10 years ago what they thought the chances were that we would get a climate change Act, they would have said, “Well, I don’t think it’ll happen in Britain.” However, it did happen, for precisely the reason my hon. Friend described.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): Agriculture has a large part to play, through improved land management, increasing carbon sequestration and mitigating flooding by improving the permeability of the land, yet the Government have reduced research into agriculture over the years. Tomorrow I will visit Aberystwyth, where a lot of good work is being done along those lines. What plans do the Government have to increase the amount of money that they commit to agricultural research?

Hilary Benn: If the hon. Gentleman looks at the funding that goes in from DEFRA or the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council—in the end, it does not matter where the funding comes from; it is all public money going into research—he will see that the amount has increased. I draw his attention to the LINK programme in particular, which funds a range of practical projects that are near market and tries to turn our research understanding into practical applications that farmers can use. As we learn about what works, it is important that we have a way of translating it into action on farms. In truth, the way research projects have been conducted in the past has perhaps not paid enough attention to that onward transmission of the knowledge, because in the end, the purpose of the research, if we find something better than what we are doing at the moment, is to get people to use it.

Dr. Alan Whitehead (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I, too, strongly welcome the publication of these stark but important projections today and my right hon. Friend’s statement in support of them. Does he accept that they will mean the almost complete decarbonisation of our energy economy at an early stage and that success at Copenhagen, which I fervently hope for, will increase our targets in that respect, as a result of our arrangements for climate budgets? Will he commit his Department to move further on the circular metabolism of resources in our economy, and in particular on the use of waste as a recovered resource and a vehicle for decarbonising energy, through heat gain from biogas?

Hilary Benn: I agree with my hon. Friend about the need to decarbonise and to change the way we think about waste. Let us take a practical example: aluminium cans. Why would we want to chuck them away into landfill? We know that if you recycle them, we can get £550 a tonne for them. It takes about 90 per cent. less energy to produce another can, as opposed to making one out of virgin material. That is a practical example of why it makes sense to think about waste in a different way. If we are talking about the right policies, the landfill levy has been very effective in moving us from 8 per cent. of domestic household waste recycled 12 or so years ago to just over 36 per cent., which is what we have now reached, although we need to go a lot further.

Mr. Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Kettering is located in one of the driest regions of England—the Anglian Water region—yet, under Government plans, it

[Mr. Philip Hollobone]

faces an increase of about a third in the number of houses by 2021. Given the variations in rainfall that the Secretary of State mentioned in his statement, is it not time to reconsider proposals for a national water grid, perhaps using Britain's canal network, as well as, unfortunately, a rapid increase in Britain's reservoir capacity?

Hilary Benn: Anglian Water is indeed serving an area of the country where there is particular difficulty. The long-term plans that it and other water companies will have to bring forward will be the means by which they consider all the points that the hon. Gentleman makes. The difficulty with a grid is what might have to be built in addition, as well as the energy involved in pumping huge amounts of water around the country. This goes back to what my hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell (Colin Challen) said earlier. The projections give us better information that will enable those making planning decisions to take into account all the consequences, including ensuring that there is enough water. It is clear that we will have to use water much more efficiently in future. Just under a third of homes now have a water meter, and we all know that, in the water-stressed areas of the country, there will have to be near-universal application before 2030.

Barry Gardiner (Brent, North) (Lab): I welcome my right hon. Friend's statement. He will be aware of the intergovernmental panel on climate change's last, rather out-of-date forecast that remaining at just 2° would involve a figure of 450 parts per million. The latest projections would require a reduction from business as usual of 17 gigatonnes of CO₂ emissions globally by 2020. It would be possible to achieve only a 5 gigatonne reduction within the developed nations, which means that a reduction of 12 gigatonnes would have to be achieved by developing nations, with all the perceived injustice that that would entail. Of those 12 gigatonnes, it would be possible to achieve five through plans involving forestry. What funds will be required to produce the offsets from the developed to the developing nations to meet that target?

Hilary Benn: The straight answer to my hon. Friend's last question is "a lot". He is right to point out the dilemma. Negotiators will have to face the fact that even if the rich world could stop emitting CO₂ tomorrow morning—for the sake of argument—the developing economies would still have to make a contribution; otherwise, we would still face dangerous climate change. Financing for adaptation, mitigation and, crucially, technology will be a really important part of getting a deal. The announcement on coal by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change was significant not only because of what it said about the framework that will apply in the United Kingdom but because we will have to demonstrate carbon capture and storage operating on a commercial scale if we are to have any hope of achieving the reductions to which my hon. Friend refers. Those who develop the technology first will have the opportunity to sell it to others, and we will then have one of the means that we need to deal with this issue.

Mr. Peter Ainsworth (East Surrey) (Con): These are obviously challenging projections, and they reinforce the need for a robust deal at Copenhagen at international level and for stepping up domestic efforts, both direct and indirect. On the indirect front, will the Secretary of State confirm that it is becoming increasingly clear that imports of biofuel are contributing to the global problem of climate change, rather than helping to solve it? Is it not crazy that Government policies are helping to annihilate the rain forest in the name of the environment? Will the Government consider suspending the renewable transport fuel obligation until proper sustainability criteria have been put in place?

Hilary Benn: The hon. Gentleman makes an important point. In the end, we want sustainable biofuels, not unsustainable ones. That is why we asked Ed Gallagher to undertake his review last year. He recommended that we make some adjustment to the pace at which the renewable transport fuel obligation should grow, and we responded to that. The evidence is pretty clear in relation to the direct impacts of biofuels: some are better than the diesel and petrol that they are replacing, and some are worse. We do not want to do worse, do we? The real question, however, is the indirect effects. In fairness, Britain has been at the forefront in arguing internationally for precisely the sustainability standards that the hon. Gentleman calls for, because that is what we will need if we are to avoid the deforestation he has drawn to the House's attention.

Mr. Andrew Tyrie (Chichester) (Con): The Secretary of State is placing very heavy emphasis on these projections, and therefore on the complex models on which they are based. According to the Hadley Centre, there has been no global warming in the first nine years of this century so far. Did any of the models on which he is relying successfully predict that pause?

Hilary Benn: This century is nine years old. Courtesy of the ice cores in the Arctic and the Antarctic, we can go back 400,000 years and look at what has happened in the cycle of warming. It has gone up and down, but what has changed in the past 100 years is the rise in the concentration of CO₂ in the atmosphere. The fact that nine of the hottest years on record here in the UK occurred in the past 15 years shows that this change is happening. There may be some who want to deny this—[HON. MEMBERS: "There are!"] But they are in a diminishing minority. I am not a scientist and neither is the hon. Gentleman, as far as I am aware, but, given the overwhelming advice that we are getting from the scientific community about not only the uncertainty but the direction in which we are travelling, it would be a very imprudent Government who did not take serious notice and respond to it.

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute) (LD): Agriculture depends on a finely tuned climate balance, and the projected changes in the climate will have severe implications for agriculture in this country and throughout the world. What is the Government's strategy to ensure that farmers here can cope with climate change and that we have the flexibility to increase production in this country if climate change should cause natural disasters resulting in a drop in food production elsewhere in the world?

Hilary Benn: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point about the interdependence of world food supply. Some have argued for self-sufficiency, but we cannot be self-sufficient because some of the foodstuffs that we eat cannot be grown here. Furthermore, if a country were self-sufficient and something happened to affect its agriculture, what would it do? We need a combination of domestic and other production, although we are more self-sufficient now than we were in the 1930s and the 1950s. We also need to try to get production up, and to work with farmers to help them to adapt to the changing climate. We have been doing that with the industry; that is what part of the research programme is seeking to address. We have been giving guidance and encouraging people to think about the changes that they can make. I visited an apple farmer on open farm Sunday a week and a bit ago. In the corner of his field, there was a new water storage tank that he had built, because water supply is really important for growing the Cox's apples that he is so proud of.

Mr. Desmond Swayne (New Forest, West) (Con): The Secretary of State rightly pointed out in his statement that we have now established in law very challenging targets for the reduction of emissions. When are we going to get anything like a plan for how those targets are going to be delivered?

Hilary Benn: The hon. Gentleman will not have to wait too long. We are taking things in stages, and the first thing was to get the Climate Change Committee, which was established under the Climate Change Act 2008, to give us advice on what it thought the carbon budget should be. The second was for the Government to adopt those budgets, which happened alongside the money Budget, with which everyone is familiar. The third part will involve the publication of a plan to demonstrate how we intend to achieve the reductions set out in those budgets.

Andrew George (St. Ives) (LD): I represent an area of west Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, where there will be growing anxiety about the impact of the projected changes on the rise in sea levels. What impact will the Secretary of State's announcement have on the timetable for the publication of the Environment Agency's coastline management plans? How will it affect our assessments of coastal defence and future developments affecting the coastline?

Hilary Benn: Tomorrow will see the publication of the long-term investment strategy for flood defence as

part of a sequence of steps that we are taking. On Monday, we made an announcement about the help that we are giving coastal communities to prepare them for adapting to the impact of coastal erosion. It is right that the next stage should be to ask what we shall need to spend to continue to protect people from flooding, given the information in today's projections.

Mr. Peter Lilley (Hitchin and Harpenden) (Con): I am extremely grateful to you for calling me, Mr. Deputy Speaker. The Secretary of State will know that, as a physicist, I do not dispute the physics of global warming—that a doubling of carbon dioxide concentrations will produce, of itself, about a 1° rise in global temperatures. The cause for concern is the assumption in the models, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie) referred, that positive feedbacks will amplify the effects. Given that the models did not forecast the decade of stability, or slight decline, in world temperatures, have they been modified in the light of those facts? Are not the projections lower than they would have been if they had been made a decade ago when we had not seen the stability and the huge increase of CO₂ that none the less occurred, or is the Secretary of State's attitude the same as that of Hegel who, when told that his theories were refuted by the facts, replied:

“So much the worse for the facts”?

Hilary Benn: I would not make any such claim. I am not a physicist, but I will ask scientists at the Met Office Hadley Centre to respond to the right hon. Gentleman's point. I know from talking to them that they have done their work with care and thoroughness. They have brought together a range of models and they are very open and honest about the uncertainties—it is important to be aware of them—as the results are presented. Equally, however, there is not much doubt about the direction in which we are heading, which is the direction for which we have to plan.

BILL PRESENTED

MOTOR VEHICLE (CLIMATE CHANGE INFORMATION)

Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)

Colin Challen presented a Bill to make provision for the display of climate change information in motor vehicle advertising and registration documents.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 26 June, and to be printed (Bill 114).

Preparing Britain's Economy for the Future

Topical debate

1.12 pm

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ian Pearson): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of preparing Britain's economy for the future.

Nobody in the country today needs reminding of the difficult times the world economy currently faces. It is a hard truth that the global economy has contracted for the first time since the second world war. Output in the UK has fallen over the last three quarters by 4.1 per cent. and by 3 per cent. in the US, 5 per cent. in Italy, 6.9 per cent. in Germany and 9.1 per cent. in Japan—grim statistics indeed. Now is a time for action, a time for tough decisions. Moreover, it is a time to take decisions for the long term as well to respond to the immediate problems. That is why today's topical debate is so important.

Of course, the No. 1 priority has been to deal with the immediate problems, ensuring that the downturn is as short and shallow as possible. This means responding in particular to the threat to the economy posed by the banking crisis, but it also means taking steps to mitigate the impacts on real people—on those who may have lost their job or been unable to find their first one, on those worried about their financial circumstances and their savings, or on those perhaps having trouble paying their mortgages or getting on the housing ladder. The longer-term challenge is no less important. That means preparing for the upswing to ensure that we have a sustained recovery and make the most of the UK economy's underlying strengths.

Mr. Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Given the Minister's remarks on helping people through the worst of the downturn, will he take this opportunity to congratulate Kettering borough council, of which I am member, on hosting not only what it called a "credit crunch summit" that brought many local agencies together to see how best to help local people, but a jobs fair, which was attended yesterday by 300 local people trying to find out more about the local employment opportunities available as well as by a Minister from the Department for Communities and Local Government? Are not such local initiatives really important in helping local people through the worst effects of the economic recession?

Ian Pearson: I certainly applaud local initiatives such as those in the hon. Gentleman's Kettering constituency. I believe local authorities can play a great role and that local activism is essential, just as I believe that the Government must be active to help people and businesses through these difficult times.

I want to emphasise the longer-term challenge and the actions we are taking to prepare the UK for the upswing. Although there is more to be done overseas and at home, recovery will come. As the Chancellor said in his Mansion House speech yesterday, there is growing evidence that the steps taken at home and internationally are stabilising the banking system and supporting our economies. We expect the UK economy to return to growth around the turn of the year, and we are confident about the British economy in the medium term, but we

are not complacent. We must recognise the numerous risks that could threaten both a recovery in the short term and sustainable growth in the future.

We have taken steps in the UK to support the cash-flow, credit and capital needs of businesses. Banks have been recapitalised and steps have been taken to unstick wholesale markets. The enterprise finance guarantee and the working capital scheme are helping to ease the strain of the downturn, and banks are now committed to lending more. We have started to see conditions improve. At the same time, HMRC's business payment support service is allowing firms to spread tax payments over a longer and more affordable timetable.

As of 14 June, more than 149,000 agreements had been reached with businesses, worth £2.6 billion of tax. In the automotive industry, for instance, the vehicle scrappage scheme is providing a temporary and welcome boost to the industry at a difficult time. Figures released this month show that more than 60,000 new cars have already been ordered since the scheme was announced—and this is only part of a wider package of support for motor industry.

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute) (LD): Looking to the longer term, is the Minister concerned that when the economy starts to pick up again, we might run the risk of inflation? One lesson from the past is that the Bank of England should be instructed to take house prices into account when setting interest rates. It has not done so in the past, and we have seen low interest rates in the good times leading to house price rises, while in the bad times we have seen interest rates too high. Will the Minister instruct the Bank of England to take house prices into account when setting interest rates in future?

Ian Pearson: We have a very effective inflation-targeting regime. As the hon. Gentleman knows, the Bank of England was set up to be independent by the Government and it has a clear remit to bear down on inflation. We see no risks to inflation in the short or medium term, but these are matters for the Bank of England.

We are taking important action now to help business through these tough times. At the heart of our strategy for tackling the economic downturn is our ambition to build for the years ahead, which is where I want to focus my comments.

It has been my great privilege as a member of the Government to see from all angles both the challenges we face and the strengths we have as a country. As Minister for Trade, I saw how the UK was respected and trusted around the world for its openness and sense of fair play. I saw how China and India were already transforming the global economy and know how they will become even more prominent in the decades ahead. That highlights the central importance of our need strategically to partner with them in future.

As the Minister for Climate Change and the Environment, I saw compelling evidence on global warming and how it will affect our planet if we do not take action, but I also saw the tremendous opportunities available to businesses that can become the first movers in helping to build the low-carbon economies of the future. As the Minister for Science and Innovation, I saw the world-class research expertise in our universities and the opportunities for innovation it presents for UK

companies with the skills and the imagination to help us respond to the challenges of climate change in a globalising world.

As the world economy emerges from the downturn, there will be major new opportunities for British business, but global competition is getting tougher and technological change is always accelerating. We cannot afford to stand back as other countries invest and raise skill levels in high-value sectors.

I consider it vital for the United Kingdom to continue to invest in infrastructure in the economy, and to have an active industrial policy. In April the Government outlined their vision for Britain's economic and industrial future in a document called "Building Britain's Future - New Industry, New Jobs", which explains where Government action can have the most impact. We need to invest in growth to speed recovery and support the manufacturing and services that are essential to ensuring that British people and businesses can compete successfully for the jobs of the future.

If we are to succeed in the high-tech, low-carbon economy that lies ahead, we need to act wherever we can to remove the barriers that hold business back. In April, in the Budget, we announced a £750 million strategic investment fund to support advanced industrial projects of strategic significance, £250 million of which will be earmarked for low-carbon investments. The statement that we heard earlier demonstrates the need for us to continue to take action on the low-carbon agenda. A further £50 million will be spent on expanding the Technology Strategy Board's budget and its programme of support for business innovation, which is also vital to our long-term economic prosperity. It will help to drive future growth in areas such as low-carbon technologies, but also advanced manufacturing more generally in the life sciences. Those funds will help to turn more bright ideas into products that can succeed in the marketplace and improve our ability to identify the skills that are needed for future success.

As I have said, infrastructure—our energy infrastructure, water, transport and telecommunications—is vital to our future. I believe that, in that future, Britain will compete with other countries in the quality of infrastructure it can provide for its people and its businesses. Preparing for that future means adapting to the changes that are transforming the world in which our people and businesses operate. The digital revolution is one such transformation. The "Digital Britain" report that was published this week sets out clear plans for an active industrial policy to maximise the benefits of the digital revolution.

Mr. Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth, East) (Con): The Minister talks of the importance of the infrastructure of Great Britain, and Members on both sides of the House agree that that is paramount, but why is it taking so long to create a common gas market in Europe? The security of energy supply that the infrastructure is supposed to bring is as important as the infrastructure itself. At present we are seeing the problems created by Russia's turning the taps on and off and sending ripples throughout Europe. We must address that problem. It does not matter how robust our infrastructure is if no gas is coming through.

Ian Pearson: I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of an integrated European infrastructure when it comes to gas markets. He will know of the work

that the Government have done in seeking to promote open energy markets in Europe. It is important not only for Britain to have a 21st-century infrastructure but for Europe to modernise, and we recognise the interconnections involved in that.

Life sciences are also important to the UK economy. That is one of the reasons we created the Office for Life Sciences, which is working with industry to make further improvements in the operating environment for the pharmaceutical, medical biotechnology and health care technology sector in the United Kingdom.

In my view, there has never been a more important time at which to look to the future. Conditions will improve and confidence will return, in the United Kingdom, in Europe and globally. We are absolutely determined that when that happens, we shall be ready to take full advantage of the opportunities that the upturn will bring in a changing global economy. By setting out our vision for the long term, we are laying strong foundations for a prosperous and sustainable future. We will continue to work to deliver on that agenda to provide the support for new industry and new jobs that the UK economy needs and the British people want and expect a Government to deliver on their behalf.

1.25 pm

Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): When the Government's business managers tabled today's debate, I do not suppose they expected it to take place immediately after a very public spat between the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Governor of the Bank of England. At last night's Mansion House dinner there was more back-stabbing than back-slapping. The Governor made clear that

"fiscal policy... will have to change".

Very wisely, Mervyn King pointed out that in five years the national debt would be more than double its current level of around 40 per cent. of GDP. He said, without any ambiguity,

"it is also necessary to produce a clear plan to show how prospective deficits will be reduced during the next Parliament".

The spat was all the more stark as a result of the Prime Minister's very strange performance yesterday at Question Time. He seemed to find it impossible to give a straight answer on budget deficits, an issue to which I shall return shortly.

I am vice-chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on China, and last week I attended a conference about Hong Kong which had been organised by the Hong Kong trade office here in London. The message—the same message that we hear from the excellent Chinese ambassador to London—is that China is moving out of recession. Similar signals are coming from India. Some confidence is beginning to return to the London stock exchange, although it is probably too early to assert that the worst economic storm since the 1930s is over.

Professor Robert Shiller was in London a couple of weeks ago. It was Professor Shiller who predicted the end of the dotcom boom in March 2000. He was also one of the first to warn that the United States housing market was seriously over-valued, and that its collapse would have a huge impact on the world's largest economy. When he was in London, he warned that the recent stock market bounce should be treated with caution. He and others think that we could be in for a W-shaped

[Tony Baldry]

recession, with recovery so fragile that we could be plunged into another slowdown as soon as we emerge from the present one.

There are still a number of issues that threaten any long-term recovery for the British economy. Rising unemployment, mortgage defaults and a possible further wave of company failures could surprise us yet. Today's unemployment figures make grim reading. The ranks of the unemployed are now swollen to 2.26 million, the worst figure for 13 years. We seem to be losing jobs at a rate of 100,000 a month. There is every indication that unemployment will continue to rise, and will end up a great deal higher: an unemployment rate above 10 per cent. is almost certain. To put it more bluntly, unemployment may well reach more than 3 million.

As a result of the recession, Jobcentre Plus is becoming bigger by the day. It now has 70,000 employees. It is already the Government's biggest agency, and it is seeking to employ an extra 10,000 staff. Even if the economy does start to turn up, the prospects for the jobless do not immediately look good. In my constituency, local unemployment is at a 13-year record high. The number of jobseeker's allowance claimants continues to increase, a number of major local employers have had to make redundancies, and the local unemployment rate has trebled since March 2008. Locally, as a community, we are determined that no one should be left behind in the recession. We have set up two job clubs, one in Banbury and one in Bicester, to give every possible support to those who have lost their jobs: to support them while they are out of work, and to help them back into the world of work as soon as possible.

If the economy is starting to show some signs of sunshine, the clouds have yet to pass. As *The Economist* noted last week,

"another cloud already looms on the financial horizon: massive public debt."

The simple truth is that our budget deficit is the highest in our peacetime history, and the highest in any G20 country. The reality is that we face a debt crisis. As I made clear in the debate on this year's Budget, the reality is that existing Government plans show that whoever wins the next general election, Government spending will have to be cut. The figures are all there in this year's Budget Red Book.

The Institute for Fiscal Studies says that the Government's plans imply a cash freeze on Government Departments for three years from 2011 after debt interest and other unavoidable. Allowing for inflation, that becomes a 2.3 per cent annual real-terms cut, or 7 per cent over three years. Both the Conservatives and the Government have said that they want to protect health spending; that is obviously appropriate as we have a fast-growing population. As a former chairman of the International Development Committee, I am glad that we have made it clear that we will honour the promise we made to increase the development budget to 0.7 per cent. of gross national income. Given the reality of the Government's Budget figures, and given the bills of rising unemployment and the huge interest costs of soaring national debt, many Departments will inevitably face budget cuts.

I think that everyone is now pretty much agreed that we have reached the limits of our abilities to take on ever more debt without risking the economy as a whole.

"We need"

said *The Independent* in a recent editorial

"this acceptance of economic reality so that our political system can move on to the serious debate about where those public sector cuts should or should not fall. If there is to be a reshaping of the public realm, it must be enacted with serious thought."

In short, the debate that we need to have for the foreseeable future is how we tackle the debt crisis and deliver quality public services when spending is tight. Ministers—in particular the Prime Minister—seem incapable of acknowledging that reality. Let me give one example.

Even in the Department of Health things will be tough. Nobody is more respected on NHS research than the King's Fund, and in its briefing on the Budget it says that

"from 2011 this period of growth will end. Treasury forecasts issued with the Budget suggest that the NHS is set to receive low or zero real growth in funding after 2011. The Institute for Fiscal Studies' forecasts suggest real term reductions from 2011 are a strong possibility...the poor state of the public finances means that the NHS must prepare at best for very low or zero growth in funding from 2011 onwards. The government's forecasts for annual real increases in total government spending on public services and benefits from 2011/12 were 0.7 per cent. However, the Institute for Fiscal Studies has calculated that once debt pressures and growth in spending such as unemployment benefits are taken into account, this 0.7 per cent. growth translates into an average real reduction of around 2.3 per cent. a year between 2011 and 2014 for the public sector as a whole...the scale of the challenge is magnified further by rising demand for health services with an ageing population and a higher incidence of chronic disease. Recent falls in NHS productivity are also a concern. Productivity must rise significantly if the NHS is to sustain and improve performance."

David Nicholson, the NHS chief executive, put it even more starkly last week when addressing senior NHS managers. He told them to plan for spending cuts even more drastic than those already suggested. He says that NHS trusts will have to deliver between £15 billion and £20 billion-worth of financial savings over the three years from 2011 to 2014. Such cuts will be the equivalent of up to 6 per cent. of the current NHS budget. That is of very real concern to my constituents and myself. The most serious constituency campaign that I have had to wage during my time as a Member of Parliament in North Oxfordshire is to keep the Horton hospital a general hospital, to maintain all key services at the Horton and to ensure that we continue to have 24/7 maternity and children's services.

I put the King's Fund points to the then Health Secretary, the right hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull, West and Hessle (Alan Johnson), on 12 May. I asked:

"The King's Fund advises that the poor state of the public finances means that the NHS must prepare, at best, for very low or zero growth in funding from 2011 onwards. I would like to know what the Secretary of State is doing to advise strategic health authorities that they must now start planning for zero or very low growth within the NHS from 2011 onwards".

The answer from the right hon. Gentleman, who some say may be the next Prime Minister, was one of complete denial. He said:

"What we have done since the allocations that took place last December—it was a two-year allocation of 5.5 per cent. each year and included the ability to draw down £800 million of surplus—is

to say that there is a message here. It comes from the chief executive of the NHS as well, and it is that the NHS has to prepare for a time when we will not have such spectacular increases in growth... We cannot say at this stage what the expenditure will be in the NHS but we can say that it will continue to be our absolute priority. As the Prime Minister told the Royal College of Nursing yesterday, we hope very much to ensure that there are real-terms increases over the coming years, although they may not be at the same levels as in the past."—[*Official Report*, 12 May 2009; Vol. 492, c. 678.]

One wonders what sort of planet the right hon. Gentleman is on. I cannot believe that the Secretary of State for Health had not at least read the research from the King's Fund. I am sure that the Secretary of State must have been talking to the chief executive of the NHS. It is depressing that when everyone is talking about more honesty from politicians, there seems to be collective denial from Ministers because at best this is waffle and, at worst and in reality, it is a collective denial by the Prime Minister and Ministers to face up to the facts.

According to the Government's own figures, public spending in 2011 will see only a 0.7 per cent. increase. We have to start talking now in an adult and responsible way about how we can deliver more with less. We need some basic honesty, otherwise we know from experience what happens. We get a Treasury-led salami-slice approach to departmental budgets. Every Department regardless is told that they will simply have a smaller budget. We have been there before. All that happens is that it tends to harm front-line services as managers and mandarins push the pain away from them to those who are delivering services.

There are a number of ways in which we can make some easy savings. We certainly do not need to waste billions of pounds on ID cards. We need a sensible and grown-up debate on defence. We need to ask, importantly, how our public services can be made more efficient. Recent figures from the Office for National Statistics show that productivity levels across the public sector have fallen over the past 10 years. A cause for concern is that average public sector output in 2007 was 3.2 per cent. lower than in 1998. We have had increases in public spending but falling productivity from the public sector.

I have a simple plea. I suspect that, whoever wins the next general election, the next Parliament will be the hardest, toughest, most difficult and grimmest that any of us have lived through, but can we please have an honest and grown-up debate about how our public services do more with less, and can we please have an honest and grown-up debate about what the real figures are? Please can we cease this insane and mindless denial by the Prime Minister that what the Government have said in their Budget is the reality and the truth? If we can all acknowledge that, perhaps the public policy will be all the better for it. Otherwise all that will happen is that the country will waste a year between now and the general election. That is not in the country's interest and it is certainly not in the interests of our constituents.

1.38 pm

Mr. David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): I will speak on three areas: supporting the good work that is going on in the economy, stopping some failures in the economy, and suggesting something that should be positive for the banking system.

In the north-east we have had good support over the last few years from the regional development agency—something I understand that the Tory party would do away with. If that is the case, and if the Tories were to get into power at any time in the future, that would be bad news for the north-east. The north-east, with One NorthEast working for it, has been successful in supporting manufacturing industry. We have set up the manufacturing advisory service, which has worked closely with north-east business. Some of the examples of successful interventions include support to a Tyneside brush manufacturer that reduced its energy bills by 35 per cent., and productivity improvements of almost £1 million at a Northumberland electronics company. A Teesside chemical company has saved £360,000 per annum by reducing equipment downtime following advice from the MAS. MAS North East Energy alone has assisted 240 companies, helping them to save £3.7 million in the past two years by giving them advice on how to eliminate waste, and guidance on energy costs. Overall, its work has helped to cut CO₂ emissions by more than 25,000 tonnes in the last two years.

We are developing a range of new industries in the north-east, and we need the support of the regional development agency to keep that going, by taking both the opportunities given by carbon capture and storage and the chance to have a large offshore wind system; that is there for the taking, if we are prepared to go for it. To help in that, One NorthEast has set up the New and Renewable Energy Centre in Blyth in Northumberland, which has given support for those taking these measures forward. Ultra low carbon vehicles are also being developed; electric vehicles are being produced by Nissan. Companies in my constituency such as Tegel and Romag in Consett are delivering charging canopies that will use photovoltaic cells so that cars can be charged in areas such as public car parks. That is a positive step for the future; this could be a huge development for this country, and it is being led and supported by One NorthEast.

We are also leading the way in plastic electronics, industrial biotechnology, and health care. In particular, One NorthEast has given support to the Centre for Life in Newcastle; I am the chair of the all-party group on muscular dystrophy, and I have been involved in work on neuro-muscular diseases at the centre, which is leading the world on that. I hope that, regardless of what happens at the next election, the RDAs will carry on supporting businesses in the north-east and throughout the country.

I now want to talk about a policy that has been a total failure for this country ever since it was first announced in the early 1990s: the private finance initiative. It has let this country down. I agree that we have delivered projects: we have built new schools and hospitals—but at what cost? According to a recent report, the cost at present is that we have had £64 billion-worth of PFI projects built, but we owe £217 billion-worth of repayments between now and 2033-34. Therefore, we will pay in almost four times the value of what we have got out: for every brick we have laid, we are paying for four; for every pound of value we have got, we have given £4, which does not sound like a good deal to me now. It did not sound like a good deal in 1992, and it certainly has not proved to be a good deal.

We saw that with the failure of the public-private initiative for the tube: when Metronet went bust, it walked away. The whole point of PFI was supposed to

[Mr. David Anderson]

be that the private sector would take the risk, but when the risk is called in, the private sector walks away. It left the people of London with a bill of £410 million for the failure of the private sector. The private sector was not prepared to stand up for this risk, and PFI certainly has not been value for money.

I hope that my Government will take forward the development of the post bank, and that that will be supported across the House. Less than two years ago, if anyone in this House or anywhere else had suggested that we would have nationalised banks in this country, they would have been laughed out of court. The perceived wisdom was that if we nationalise a bank, money will flee away. The truth that has been shown over the past two years is that, rather than fleeing away, the people with money want to be involved in and supported by the nationalised banks.

The basis for a post bank is therefore already in place, and I draw the Minister's attention to the report produced by the coalition for a post bank. That coalition has brought together the Federation of Small Businesses, the Communication Workers Union and the Unite trade union, the New Economics Foundation and the Public Interest Research Centre. They believe that a post bank could be built on the post office network and that it could incorporate the following principles. It would safeguard the unique and popular post office network, which is something that we should all be committed to. It would be a key player in addressing financial exclusion. It would build in a universal banking obligation. It would also give real support to small and medium-sized enterprises.

The idea of a post bank is not new. Such banks exist all over Europe. In France, La Poste set up such a bank in January 2006. Since then it has built up 11 million accounts, and accounts for one quarter of La Poste's turnover. In Italy, BancoPosta was set up in 2000; for the first time in half a century, the Italian post office came into profit in 2002 as a direct result. In Germany, although there have been problems with Deutsche Post, its bank has 14.5 million customers, making it the largest retail bank in the country. There is, therefore, a model that we can take up and adapt.

The conclusion of the report that I mentioned is clear. It states:

"There is both a need and an appetite for transformative change in our economic and banking institutions. A Post Bank based on the Post Office network will provide a solid, trusted basis for new banking, new investment and the revival of local economies.

The Post Bank must be dramatically different from the failed commercial banking model. It must signify a departure from profit-driven, speculative banking practice and a return to locally based, sound financing. It must be inclusive, reaching out to other social and financial organisations concerned with the economic health of their communities. It must be a banking system for all the people.

A successful Post Bank would offer real, long-term financial security to individuals and businesses and provide a vital role for the Post Office commensurate with the high esteem in which it continues to be held by the British people."

Those are sound reasons for doing this now, and I suggest to the Minister that we should turn our hand to it. It would be a start towards that if the Government were to consider withdrawing or amending the Postal

Services Bill. They should work with the unions and others who have put forward alternative plans and develop the Post Office into the modern 21st century organisation that it should be, and Royal Mail along with it.

There are issues to do with the pensions of the workers at the Post Office and Royal Mail, but there are precedents here. In 1994, when the mines were privatised, the Department of Trade and Industry took on the role of the former National Coal Board. I accept that that was a different situation and the mineworkers pension scheme was in surplus, but what was different then was that nobody contributed to the mineworkers pension scheme going forward. In the current situation, we could develop the Royal Mail pension scheme with the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform—or the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, or whatever we are calling the business Department this week—playing its part as the employer. This is worth looking at. If we are serious, we should sit down with the unions and do it, and at the same time develop the post bank.

1.47 pm

Mr. Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth, East) (Con): May I first wish you all the best, Mr. Deputy Speaker, in the election on Monday?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): I am not sure that that is in order, but I am extremely grateful.

Mr. Ellwood: I was wondering how you were going to respond to that, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

I begin by sharing my concerns about how few Members are gathered here for this debate. This is one of the more important subjects for us to debate at present, but I count just one hon. Member on the Labour Benches and absolutely nobody representing the Liberal Democrats other than their Front-Bench spokesman. That is an appalling indictment, when efforts should be made to understand what is going on in the economy and to try to provide the answers that the nation wants to hear.

Tony Baldry: Is it not particularly tragic that the only Labour Back-Bench Member present has made a speech critical of Labour Front-Bench policies? It is pretty pathetic that the Government Whips cannot get at least one Member from their party to give a speech in support of the Government's economic policy.

Mr. Ellwood: My hon. Friend makes an important point. It is perhaps because the Government cannot get support on their own Benches that this debate has been tabled for the fag-end of the parliamentary week when many Members have dispersed to their constituencies. This debate should be held in prime parliamentary time and be given a full day's hearing, so that all Members can represent their constituencies and voice their concerns. Instead the Chamber is almost empty; we could, in fact, hold this discussion in a taxi cab. That is an embarrassment, and I am dismayed that so few Members are present. That does not take away from the quality of the speeches made, however, which I am sure will make up for the lack of numbers.

We are living in extraordinary times. We have just had some astonishing local election results, which left this dilapidated Labour party representing not one single county. We had EU elections in which the governing party scored only 15 per cent.—a score Labour last saw under Michael Foot. We have also witnessed 11 Ministers resign from the Government, and, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) teased out in the recent debate on Europe, even the Foreign Secretary considered resigning. I do not know why he felt the need to tell everyone he had considered resigning, and I am not sure how helpful that was to the Prime Minister; the Foreign Secretary must answer that for himself.

We should bear in mind the fact that the backdrop to all this is one of the worst economic downturns we have ever seen, and it is understandable why the nation is losing its patience with the Government. There is an increasing need for a general election to be called, rather than having a Government limping on towards the final date—the endgame—next May.

It is sad that we cannot muster many Members to come here to debate properly issues such as the obscene sums that the Government are throwing in such a reckless way at the economy. Their approach will encumber every newborn child with a debt to the tune of £22,500. The reason why the Government are able to cling on, and why the Prime Minister has not been ousted, is because his weakness is overshadowed only by the weakness of those who tried to oust him. Again and again we hear the call, which I am sure the Minister will repeat, that this is a global economic downturn, so many of the problems are not vested in Britain. It is a global economic downturn, but each country is having to manage the effects in different ways, and the cause of that is the rules and regulations that are or are not in place in each country.

What happened when this Government came to power? They made the Bank of England independent, and straight away the Bank lost crucial powers to regulate the banks. That was the first schoolboy error made by this Government, and it led to the level of borrowing getting out of control; banks were lending people sums that they could not afford, in ways that they did not understand. We hear again and again from the Prime Minister that the situation in the United States is to blame for the downturn in our economy. Perhaps some aspects of the situation there can be blamed—what happened to Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac and the sub-prime market—but it was not the Americans who were allowing Bradford & Bingley to offer 125 per cent. mortgages. That was very much a British issue, which happened under the tutelage of this Government. It went unrectified, and that is why we have the current levels of debt.

The Government then say that they have the answers and that other countries are copying them. Perhaps the hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), who speaks for the Lib Dems, will wish to expand on that. The coupon rate at which we lent to our banks was about 12 per cent. How can the Government, the lender of last resort, possibly expect to lend money to banks in that way and then expect those banks to pass the lending on to small and medium-sized businesses at the going rate of about 1 or 2 per cent? Banks will not do that, which is why small and medium-sized businesses up and down the country are suffering because they cannot get the loans they need to see them through this very difficult period.

Another Government initiative was to reduce VAT to 15 per cent. at a time when businesses up and down the country were slicing the cost of their products—the discounts were already 10 or 15 per cent. How was 2.5 per cent. off VAT going to help? That was a gimmick, but it is not over yet, because VAT will go back up to 17.5 per cent. Guess on which day that is due to happen? VAT will go back up when Big Ben chimes midnight on 31 December. The industry that I represent as a Front Bencher—the tourism industry—is up in arms, because that is one of its busiest days. Businesses will have to run two tills that evening; they will run one up to midnight and another from midnight onwards.

Ian Pearson indicated dissent.

Mr. Ellwood: The Minister is shaking his head. Well, some concessions have been made and those businesses have been given a couple of hours to adjust, but why on earth was that date chosen in the first place? That decision was madness, and shows that the Government were not in touch with the very people they were trying to help.

My next concern is the top rate of income tax. The Institute for Fiscal Studies has said that the increase will gain “approximately nothing” in revenue. The increase was a gimmick designed to appease Labour Back Benchers—those very Members who are absent today. I was interested to hear my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) discuss the increasing growth of Jobcentre Plus; it seems that the only place where people can get a job now is working for Jobcentre Plus, because it has grown to be one of the biggest employers for the Government. Unemployment is growing—it is currently 2.3 million and the CBI expects the number of unemployed to grow to up to 3 million. That is happening simply because we did not make arrangements to contain the scale of the economic downturn in time.

In the remaining minutes available to me, I wish to discuss tourism, the portfolio that I follow. I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Gauke), whose constituency includes the wonderful little village of Aldbury, where I used to live, is on the Front Bench to listen to this, because it is important that all Members, on both sides of the House, understand the relevance and importance of tourism. That is glossed over in this House on a regular basis. Tourism is our fifth biggest industry: it is worth £90 billion, 200,000 small and medium-sized businesses make up our magnificent tourism industry, and one in four new jobs is created by tourism. Yet it could be argued that tourism does well in this country in spite of the Government, not because of them. It is faring better than expected in this downturn; ironically, because people do not have money in their pockets thanks to this Government, they are forced to consider a domestic holiday, rather than go abroad. That is not an excuse for the Government to say that they are pleased with the tourism figures, because that is not how the tourism industry would have liked its figures to grow.

What this Government have done over a 10-year period is allow the infrastructure designed to support the tourism industry to get out of control. The hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. Anderson) spoke passionately about the importance of the regional development agencies, but they have creased a confusing, overlapping and costly system that has wrecked our tourism industry. One or

[Mr. Ellwood]

two RDAs have done well to promote tourism—the north-west's RDA is one example, but that is because it does not hold on to that money centrally. Nobody has heard of the north-west's RDA or the north-east's RDA, but they have heard of Blackpool and Newcastle. Those are the brand names that need to be promoted, rather than the RDA names, which have taken all the money.

Mr. David Anderson: The reality in the north-east is that because of the work that has been done by the RDA, including the development of a campaign called “Passionate people. Passionate places.”, the north-east has the highest growth in tourism of anywhere in the country.

Mr. Ellwood: I hope that tourism is growing by more in the north-east than anywhere else, because it gets seven times the amount of money that the south-west does, even though its tourism industry is seven times smaller; the irony there is that the money has not gone to where the tourism industries should actually be. The problem is not only in the distribution of funds, but in an overlapping of effort. It cannot be right that in Singapore there are five different offices representing and promoting tourism in different parts of the United Kingdom. That has come about simply because there is not one voice looking after English tourism, and we need to get back to that. The Conservative policy is to ensure that in this economic downturn we spend the money apportioned to tourism better, which means having a stronger voice for Visit England and a less powerful voice for the RDAs, but a stronger voice for the brand names of the areas that we actually know and love.

We should not forget that this country is the sixth most visited place in the world, which is amazing given that the whole of the UK could be fitted into one of the great lakes in Canada. Yet, as I have said, the Government do not recognise the potential for growing this particular business. That is reflected in what is called the “tourism deficit”: in 1997, the amount of money that Britons spent abroad taken away from the amount of money that overseas visitors spent in the UK gave a figure of minus £4 billion. We were spending far more money abroad than we are able to bring in, and that figure has jumped to minus £18 billion. That is how much we are losing, whereas countries such as France or Spain have a surplus, and are making money because they are able to attract people in. That is not just to do with the weather; it is to do with other aspects too.

Let us consider the UK's proportion of global tourism. In 1997 we had 6.9 per cent. of the international market, but the figure has dropped to 3.3 per cent. Those figures must be reversed if we are to get a grip on our tourism industry and what we can offer. We should celebrate our offering, because this country has things that cannot be replicated in new tourism industries in other places. Dubai and Thailand are great places to visit, but Oxford is Oxford and Brighton is Brighton. The culture offered in Britain is unique, but we need to sell it too. Another irony is that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is one of the few Departments that could make money for the Exchequer were the Exchequer to invest in it; for every £1 spent abroad, we bring £25 back. Does

the Exchequer recognise this? I do not think so, because it has cut Visit Britain's budget by 20 per cent. over the next three years.

We have a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity with the Olympic games coming here. It will be a fantastic chance to celebrate what is good in Britain, beamed to television sets with billions of watchers around the world. Not a single penny has been made available to harness that opportunity, and that is a scandal.

The Treasury has removed tax relief on second home lets. What conversations did the Minister have with the DCMS about that? It will affect the tourism industry, because fewer people will be able to afford to let out their homes for tourism purposes.

We have also seen a legal battle over VAT levels on bingo. Hon. Members who are familiar with the bingo scene will recognise that the industry has been hit by two taxes—VAT and gross profits tax. Gala Coral took the Government to court and won its case that the VAT imposition was unfair, because it was being hit twice. The Government have responded by getting rid of the VAT but increasing the gross profits tax from 15 per cent. to 22 per cent. Did the Treasury consult the DCMS on that? According to answers to parliamentary questions that I have received, no consultation took place. The consequences are not just monetary. Yes, the Exchequer will lose out because bingo halls will close, but bingo is part of our community. For many of the dear old ladies who play bingo, it is their one evening out in the week. It is as much a part of the community as the post office or the pub, and the Government seem unaware of the impact that this taxation will have on the community.

I mentioned pubs, and we have also seen an increase in alcohol duties, part of a grand sweep of hikes in taxation with no recognition of the impact on the normal responsible drinker. Instead of targeting certain types of alcohol, the Government have put a burden on all pubs, and that is why some 40 pubs shut every week. That is changing the fabric of our communities, especially rural communities, where pubs can be one of the main tourist attractions.

I urge the Minister to think beyond the numbers, the bean counters and the abacuses over which they toil, and recognise the wonders and the importance of our tourism industry. All these tweaks in VAT and taxation have a knock-on impact on things that are very important to us and have been around for such a long time, and it is destroying some of them. I am passionate about tourism. I hope that I have expressed that today, and I hope that that has come across to the Minister.

2.3 pm

Dr. Vincent Cable (Twickenham) (LD): I wish to touch on three of the themes that have emerged from our discussion—the general state of the economy, about which the Minister spoke; the budget deficit, on which the hon. Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) focused; and the state of bank lending, on which the hon. Members for Blyton (Mr. Anderson) and for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Ellwood) touched in different ways.

The Minister is right to say that the mood on the economy has changed, certainly compared with three months ago. We are no longer talking in terms of Armageddon and a return to the 1930s. There has been

a change of mood and greater optimism. On the objective evidence, it is clear that the economy is falling less rapidly than it was, although we probably cannot say any more than that. It is not surprising because the authorities—here, in the US and in other countries—have thrown the kitchen sink at the economy. We have had drastic cuts in interest rates, the creation of money, big fiscal deficits and, in the case of the UK, a massive devaluation. It would be amazing if all that had not had an impact.

I am more sceptical about where all this will lead. There are big areas of uncertainty. For example, unemployment is still rising, both in aggregate and among particular groups. This week we saw a big increase in the number of young people not in education, employment or training, and in two months a big graduate cohort will come on to the labour market, many of whom will not find work. The effect of rising unemployment is also significant in terms of confidence.

Nor do we know what will happen when the Bank of England withdraws the monetary steroids that are keeping the economy going at the moment. The Governor, in his speech yesterday—in one of his quieter passages—pointed out that next year, in order to prevent an excessive flow of liquidity into the economy and the danger of inflation, he will cut off the increased liquidity injection. We do know how that will affect growth. The Minister said he is confident in the medium term, and I hope that he is right, but we have to ask where that confidence comes from. Households and businesses are de-leveraging frantically and the Government will have to rein back their spending, so at this stage it is difficult to anticipate where the injection of growth will come from.

The hon. Member for Banbury spoke about the deficit. He is right to say that there is a serious problem. Government tax receipts are now 35 per cent. of GDP—lower than at any stage since the days of Harold Macmillan. We are in a low-tax economy—not by design but because of the collapse of revenue from the financial services sector and housing—and expenditure is some 48 per cent. of GDP, so we have a 12 to 13 per cent. gap that has to be borrowed, and that is clearly not sustainable. The Government have a problem with timing—I sympathise with them on this point—because it would be foolish to try to contract the deficit suddenly in the middle of a recession, but it will have to happen. Severe budget discipline will be needed, and it would be helpful to start from a platform of honesty about that. It is clear from the Government's own plans that current spending is being cut according to any meaningful measure, and anecdotes from local hospitals and other sources suggest that the cuts process has already started.

In addition, a very deep cut is planned in public investment—a halving from its peak. I introduced a debate on that point on 2 February, because it is a big problem. The Minister referred to the need for infrastructure investment, but it is difficult to see how that will be financed, given the scale of the cuts required. I agree with the hon. Member for Banbury that in this discussion of public finances, it would be helpful to get beyond broad aggregates about expenditure limits and get down to the particular programmes that we will have to talk about cutting. We have tried to inject into that debate discussion not only about the defence budget, as the hon. Gentleman suggested, but about tax credits—which may be good in principle, but have become over-extended—public sector pensions and many other items.

We will need a mature and grown-up debate on those, in which this House should participate. Sadly, for constitutional reasons going back a century or more, we do not have the powers that we perhaps should have.

There is also clearly a serious problem still with the banking sector. Many solvent, successful businesses with good order books and a good credit history cannot get credit on decent terms. They face big arrangement fees and unreal demands for security, and this is causing them to cut back and close their doors. Many of us see that at constituency level, and the business federations also report that back to us. There is a big lending problem. Many individuals have also been excluded, which enhances the relevance of the post bank proposal put by the hon. Member for Blaydon.

In addition to the lending constraints, the Government have bottled the big issue of banks that are too big to fail. As the Governor of the Bank of England pointed out yesterday, that whole concept is outrageous. If banks are too big to fail, they are too big, and the Government will have to take the initiative to break them up or find some effective way of regulating them so that the taxpayer is not taking on excessive levels of risk.

The Governor also said that we need to address the whole climate of irresponsible risk taking in the City and the banking sector, which still has not been properly confronted. We have seen a premature return to the culture of bonuses, although we have seen some limited restraint in the semi-nationalised banks. However, the Government still have not put in place a framework for dealing with that issue systematically.

2.9 pm

Mr. David Gauke (South-West Hertfordshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to speak in this afternoon's debate. It would be fair to say that it is not particularly well attended, but I thank those hon. Members who have taken part, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Ellwood). He is a passionate advocate for the cause of tourism in this country, and I thank him for mentioning the glorious village of Aldbury in my constituency, which he knows well. I also want to thank my hon. Friend the Member for Banbury (Tony Baldry) for his excellent speech on the public finances, and that is the issue on which I want to focus.

When we consider the future of Britain's economy, the central fact is that we have run out of money. We are borrowing record amounts. For every £4 spent by the Government, £1 is borrowed. We are borrowing more in the next two years than in aggregate over the country's entire history, with debt likely to double—if it does not grow by even more. The 40 per cent. sustainable investment target—that is, the target that debt should not be more than 40 per cent. of GDP—is well and truly broken and is not likely to be met until 2032. We are borrowing more than any other country in the world.

The central question for the Government is whether they have a coherent plan to get us out of this mess. We know that the Government have optimistic growth forecasts, particularly from 2011 onwards. We know that there will be unspecified fiscal tightening after 2014 of £45 billion. We know that spending restraint will be delayed until after the general election, but we also know from the Government's figures that cuts are already planned in public spending between 2011 and 2014. That is the

[Mr. David Gauke]

topical issue of the day, but the Prime Minister is characterising the facts in a somewhat different way. Only yesterday, he said that we never hear any figures from the Conservatives. Let me attempt to address that in the short time that I have available this afternoon.

In Prime Minister's questions last week, on 10 June, the Prime Minister listed cash spending in the years beginning 2010-11: £702 billion, £717 billion, £738 billion and £758 billion. He claimed that that showed more spending from Labour. However, if we take out inflation we have the following numbers: £702 billion, £699 billion, £701 billion and £701 billion. If we take out debt interest and benefits—I am using the numbers prepared by the Institute for Fiscal Studies, which give us the real departmental spending—the numbers are £391 billion, £382 billion, £373 billion and £362 billion. That is a cut of 2.3 per cent. per year or 7 per cent. over three years. If health is protected, as we intend it to be, the percentage would go up for the remaining Departments to a fall of 3.3 per cent. a year, or 10 per cent. over three years. Let us be clear: these are the Government's own numbers.

The Prime Minister had another crack at defending his position yesterday. He read out the numbers for current spending: £629 billion, £633 billion, £638 billion and £642 billion. However, if we deduct debt interest and benefits the departmental spending will fall from £344 billion to £341 billion, to £337 billion and to £332 billion. That is a cut of 1 per cent. per annum or 3 per cent. over three years according to the Prime Minister's own chosen measure of current spending.

Let us look at capital spending. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) was quite right to highlight that matter. Again, the Prime Minister stated yesterday:

"Capital expenditure will grow until the year of the Olympics. After that, it will be less".—[*Official Report*, 17 June 2009; Vol. 494, c. 295.]

The facts are very straightforward. Page 226 of the Red Book lists net investment in table C4. The figure for this year, 2009-10, is £44 billion, which then falls to £36 billion, £29 billion, £26 billion and finally £22 billion in 2013-14. There are two points to make about that. First, that is clearly a significant cut and it is a year-on-year cut. There is nothing about an increase until the year of the Olympics, 2012; there is a cut every year. Secondly, why highlight the year of the Olympics as if everything is explained by capital expenditure on the Olympics and as if that is no longer a relevant factor after 2012? Average capital expenditure on the Olympics is just over £1 billion a year, and that is clearly barely relevant to a reduction of £22 billion in capital spending.

What have Cabinet Ministers said, notwithstanding those facts? The Secretary of State for Wales told the BBC's "Question Time" last week that

"up until 2014 there will be real term increases in Government spending Departments."

The Secretary of State for Health told Channel 4 news on 11 June:

"I am also committing to you, in the way that the Prime Minister has, that we will continue to maintain growth in health spending in the following period".

The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families—a noted economist—told Radio 5 Live:

"I think we can see the spending on schools and hospitals rising in real terms after 2011".

The facts are very clear. I have outlined the numbers and the facts to the House this afternoon.

The Prime Minister has put his Ministers in an impossible position in the launch of his election campaign—assuming, of course, that he makes it to the election—by stating that it will be about Labour investment versus Conservative cuts. Never before has a campaign unravelled quite so comprehensively even before the election has been called. Columnists and observers from *The Guardian* and from every news organisation have lined up to describe the Government's position as silly, infantile and dishonest.

It is difficult for me to characterise the nature of the Prime Minister's position within the confines of the conventions of this House, but the Prime Minister must think that the British people are stupid if he thinks they will believe his claim that it will be Labour investment versus Conservative cuts. The facts point in a very different direction. Not one single respected commentator or observer supports the Prime Minister's line that the Government will be spending more on departmental expenditure.

I think we should spare a thought for Ministers of honesty and integrity, such as the Economic Secretary, who are forced to go out to defend the Government's position. I want to ask him two questions, and I hope that he has a chance to answer them. Does he accept that the Government's budget projections involve real-term cuts in departmental expenditure from 2011 onwards, whether we look at total spending or current spending? Secondly, does he accept that capital spending will fall in each of the next four years and will not, as the Prime Minister told the House yesterday, rise until the year of the Olympics?

It is clear that the numbers point in one direction. The country's money has run out. The public finances are in a mess and, whoever is in power after the next election, there will need to be real-term spending cuts. If the numbers and the facts do not suit the rhetoric, what will the Government do? I warn them that if they attempt to adjust the numbers or if bogus growth figures suddenly appear in the comprehensive spending review, that will do nothing for their reputation. It is time for some honesty; it is time for a grown-up debate. The Prime Minister has descended into self-parody and we need a change.

2.19 pm

Ian Pearson: With the leave of the House, I shall briefly respond to the debate, although I appreciate that it is not customary for a Minister to do so in a topical debate.

We heard interesting contributions from the hon. Members for Banbury (Tony Baldry), and for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Ellwood), and from my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr. Anderson), as well as contributions from Front Benchers, as is usual. My hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon talked principally about three issues: regional development agencies, the private finance initiative and the post bank. On the latter, I know that he has been in discussions with what used to be the Department for Business, Enterprise and

Regulatory Reform and is now the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. I would not want to say any more on that matter.

My hon. Friend made some good points about regional development agencies. I am not sure what the Conservative policy on RDAs is, but I think that it would be a huge strategic blunder to get rid of RDAs. They have been on a learning curve and, overall, they now provide effective assistance to businesses in their regions and contribute to their regional economies. He referred to One NorthEast and some of the success stories of the manufacturing advisory service. I can confirm that those success stories are not confined to the north-east, but can be found across the regions of England. He also talked impressively about the action that companies in the north-east are taking on renewable energy, plastic electronics, industrial biotechnology and electric vehicles. Those are all important areas for the UK economy for the future.

I have to say that I do not agree with my hon. Friend that the private finance initiative has let the country down. Under the private finance, many more schools and hospitals have been built than could possibly have been built using conventional financial routes. Independent investigation shows that there is good evidence suggesting that PFI projects are far more likely to be built on time and on budget than those built using conventional procurement, although the Government have made great strides to improve their record on conventional procurement.

My hon. Friend also referred to the fact that payments are made over a period of years, because the costs of running a facility are often a large part of the total whole-life costs, which are taken into consideration when we talk about the private finance initiative. If he looks back at the bad old days of conventional procurement under the Conservatives, he will see that often, the attitude was, “design, build and fail to maintain.” There was a scandalous record of failing to maintain the fabric of our infrastructure, and private finance has addressed that issue.

Mr. Ellwood *rose*—

Ian Pearson: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me, I will not give way to him. I want briefly to respond to the debate; as I say, it is not normal to do so. I want to come on to the points that he raised, and those made by the hon. Member for Banbury.

The hon. Member for Bournemouth, East, spoke with great passion about tourism. I acknowledge the importance of tourism to the UK economy. I do not particularly want to get into the issues of pubs and bingo today, as they are perhaps not central to preparing Britain's economy for the future, but he is certainly correct to point to the fact that tourism is a significant part of the UK economy. It is an important part of Britain's economic future, too.

The hon. Gentleman referred—I think I quote him correctly—to the Government throwing “obscene sums” at the economy. I have to disagree. The hon. Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable) talked about us throwing the kitchen sink at the economy. It is quite good that we did so. We needed to take action to stabilise the banking system. It is right, in the Government's opinion, that there should be a fiscal stimulus to support the UK

economy. Frankly, it would be irresponsible for a Government not to have thrown the kitchen sink at the problem.

As the hon. Member for Banbury suggests, however, we know that public spending cannot grow in the way that it has since 1997. I am enormously proud of the public investment made since 1997; we have largely rebuilt Britain's infrastructure. The hospital system and general practitioner practices across the country are in a far better state than they were when we came to power. Schools have been rebuilt. Each and every Member can point to new schools in their constituency that were built in the past 10 or 12 years, sometimes with private finance and sometimes through conventional public procurement. That is clear, important investment in the fabric of the country for the future.

With regard to spending figures—a point raised by the hon. Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Gauke)—we can trade different sets of figures, but he will be aware that public sector current expenditure is planned to rise by 6.8 per cent. this year, and by 4.4 per cent. in 2010-11. We believe that it is important to invest during these difficult economic times, but we have also said that we need to take a responsible attitude to the public finances in the medium term. That is why, in the Budget, we published figures showing a real-terms increase in public-sector current expenditure of 0.7 per cent. per year from 2011 onwards. The hon. Gentleman pointed out that we should take into account debt interest charges and welfare bills. I do not know what welfare bills or public debt charges will be between 2011 and 2014. We live in a time of great uncertainty. Given that uncertainty in the world economy, it is too early to say how those factors will pan out, and so much too early to say how the growth in public spending will be shared, especially as we are only one year into the current comprehensive spending review.

Mr. Gauke *rose*—

Ian Pearson: I will give way, and then I will conclude.

Mr. Gauke: I am grateful to the Minister for giving way. I note his comment that he does not know what interest payments or welfare bills will be, but presumably the Treasury has made its own projections, as the Institute for Fiscal Studies has done. Will he agree to release publicly the Treasury projections showing what it anticipates welfare bills and interest payments will be in the years 2011 to 2014?

Ian Pearson: We will make information available in the normal way, as we always do. I hope that he agrees with my point: it simply is not possible to know, and to forecast with any great precision, what welfare bills or debt charges are likely to be in the years 2011 to 2014. Given that uncertainty, it would be wrong to say how they would pan out, and wrong to speculate about the overall balance.

We have to get back to the fundamental argument, which is that the Government have invested massively in our public services. We are continuing to provide a fiscal stimulus this year and next year because we believe that it is important to help the economy through difficult economic times. On all assumptions, the Conservative party wants to spend less now. It wants to spend less in

[*Ian Pearson*]

the future than the Labour Government—that is a dividing line. It is important to recognise that the Conservative party would spend less on services than a Labour Government, and that will be an issue when it comes to the general election.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the matter of preparing Britain's economy for the future.

Food, Farming and the Environment

2.29 pm

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Hilary Benn): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of food, farming and the environment.

May I begin by giving a warm welcome to the Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Jim Fitzpatrick), who has joined the DEFRA team and to, in his absence, the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Wansdyke (Dan Norris)? I also pay tribute to the enormous amount of work done by my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy) and Lord Hunt of Kings Heath. They did a terrific job and we will miss them both. I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) and to the House if I am not able to be present for the wind-ups because of responsibilities relating to the oral statement that I made earlier.

I would like to update the House on the difficulties faced by the employees and farmer members of Dairy Farmers of Britain. As I told the House last week, that dairy co-operative, with 1,700 employees and 1,800 dairy farmer members, was put into receivership on 3 June. Since then, the receiver has found it necessary to close three dairies and 17 depots, but he has been able to sell two creameries and five depots, saving about 650 jobs.

I am able to inform the House that, as of yesterday, of the 1,800 farmer members on 3 June, about 1,600 had found alternative buyers for their milk, which represents about 96 per cent. of the 1 billion litres of milk that were being supplied by Dairy Farmers of Britain at the beginning of June. That is a major achievement in such a short time, so I pay tribute to the hard work of the receiver, the member council, the employees at Dairy Farmers of Britain's headquarters, and the rest of the industry who have stepped in to buy the milk. However, about 190 farmers are supplying their milk to the receiver at the end of this first fortnight. They are scattered around England and Wales, but the majority are in the north-east and the north-west. The job now is for all of us to find buyers for the milk produced by those remaining farmers. Although I am optimistic that buyers will be found for more farmers, we must recognise that some might not be able to find a commercially viable outlet for their milk.

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde) (Con): I—like others, I am sure—have been moved by some of the interviews on “Farming Today”, especially those with small-scale milk producers in remote rural locations. The Secretary of State said that “all of us” needed to work hard to find other outlets. Will he tell us who, apart from the receiver, the rest of “all” are? Does he have specific measures in mind to assist farmers in remote locations?

Hilary Benn: “All of us” includes the other milk buyers, the regional development agencies and DEFRA. Last week, in conjunction with One NorthEast, DEFRA took the step of offering finance to try to provide a little time to determine whether a management buy-out of

the Blaydon plant could be achieved. Sadly, the possible source of finance did not materialise the following day, and at that point the receiver decided he would have to close the plant.

Mr. David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his intervention last week on behalf of the Blaydon dairy in my constituency. I am worried that some of the work force believe that one reason the finance package did not hold together was that it would take four weeks to set up a bank account. Was my right hon. Friend aware of that and, if not, will he try to find out about the situation for me?

Hilary Benn: I shall do my best to get hold of further information. In the end, if a management buy-out is to be successful, finance is required. I thought that it was right to try to buy a little time—that was why I took the decision with One NorthEast—and I am sorry that that has not proved possible.

I was glad that the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) asked his question. We will determine whether we can provide any assistance by using the rural development programme for England flexibly, but I assure him that we continue to work closely with RDAs and others, including the Dairy Farmers of Britain member council, which continues to take responsibility for those affected by the collapse. I will, of course, keep the House informed about developments.

Despite such difficulties and other pressures, agriculture overall is pretty strong. When the Office for National Statistics published figures earlier this year showing that every sector of the UK economy had shrunk over the previous quarter, there was one exception: agriculture. As the House will be aware, the food and drink industry is the UK's largest manufacturing sector, although it is not always recognised and understood as such. It employs more than 3.5 million people. In the EU, we are part of the world's biggest agricultural exporter. The UK alone exported £12 billion-worth of food and drink in 2007, and farming incomes rose last year. I want—indeed, the whole House wants—a thriving farming industry. Farmers want that, too, but the sector faces some very big challenges and we have to be honest about them.

Food security hit the headlines last year, as soaring prices abroad caused unrest and put pressure on family budgets here at home, and, although prices may have fallen back again, the events of 2008 served as a warning to us all. The question is, how should we react in those circumstances? We should not, I would argue, aim for self-sufficiency, create targets for food production or go back to the subsidies, intervention and environmental degradation of the past. We need to take food security seriously, however, and that is why we will publish an assessment of our food security, setting out how we are doing, and why the UK's best way forward will be not only to produce its own food, but to trade with others.

As I have said, I want British agriculture to be able to produce as much food as possible, and, as I told the Oxford farming conference, no ifs no buts. The only requirements are that, first, consumers want to buy the food and, secondly, the way in which it is produced sustains our environment and safeguards our landscape.

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire) (Con): I would not want, in any way, to suggest that I do not accept the Secretary of State's sincerity on British

agriculture. However, does he think that it is helped by the fact that his own Department's website still publishes the 2005 document on its vision for agriculture? It clearly states that domestic food production is not necessary, as he well knows, because I have chided him on it before, and, in a number of places, the document says that that is the Government's policy. It does not go along with what he is telling the House.

Hilary Benn: The document was indeed published in 2005, and it says what it says, but the hon. Gentleman will also have heard very clearly what I have just said to the House and what I have said previously.

Mr. Paice: Why is it on the website?

Hilary Benn: A document once published is a fact, and it cannot be un-published. It is important that we do produce as much food as possible, and one great challenge that we will face in seeking to do so is climate change. As we discussed during my earlier oral statement, increased temperatures and changing rainfall patterns will affect yield and increase the risk of pests and diseases, so farmers will be among the first businesses to feel the impact of climate change. Indeed, when we surveyed farmers last year, from memory about half said that they had already felt its impact, and they will have a very important role to play in helping to tackle the problem.

We know that agriculture, land use change and forestry are responsible for about 7 per cent. of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions, for more than one third of methane emissions—from livestock and manure—and for more than two thirds of nitrous oxide emissions, mainly from inorganic fertilisers. So, bluntly, we need to change the way in which we do things, and, as we increase production to meet demand today, we must ensure that we do not destroy our ability to feed ourselves tomorrow.

The issue is not about a choice between the environment or production; that is a false choice. It has to be about both: agriculture needs to be truly sustainable. Farmers know all about sustainability, because they are, after all, the stewards of our land. They manage three quarters of it in England and play an absolutely vital role in preserving our landscape, our environment and the natural resources that we look after in the interest of future generations. Stewardship schemes have ensured that thousands of farmers and land managers have funding and advice to conserve wildlife and its habitats and to protect the natural environment. Some 5 million hectares are now managed under environmental stewardship schemes—that is, 54 per cent. of our agricultural land.

How do we meet these challenges? First, the industry needs skills for the future. Farming and food production are highly skilled businesses, but we know that skills are critical to profitability, to productivity and to helping farmers and food producers to respond to consumer demand. So, the initiative was taken about a month ago to call together industry representatives to discuss what needs doing, and the industry itself is going to develop an action plan on how it can meet its skills needs and on what help the Government will need to provide. The House will also recognise that we need to attract the next generation—the farmers of tomorrow—into farming. That is why we are providing a new diploma in environmental and land-based studies for 14 to 19-year-olds. It starts this September.

Mr. Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I appreciate the Secretary of State's good intent. However, there is no use in trying to reskill an industry such as dairy farming, given that the number of dairy herds has halved in the past 10 years. That represents a massive erosion of the farming skill base. Recently, I met local farmers at their office in Weekley village in my constituency of Kettering. They said that the introduction of the nitrate vulnerable zones will be the last straw; already, only two dairy herds are left in the borough of Kettering. Given all the slurry costs and gold-plating regulations that the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs is introducing, there is no use in talking about reskilling—the economics of farming are going down the pan.

Hilary Benn: As the hon. Gentleman will be aware, the dairy industry has become much more productive in recent years. On NVZs, I claim no credit or responsibility for the original nitrates directive. Those in government at the time, in 1990 or 1991, will have to answer why they thought it right to agree to it. We are required to ensure that the directive is applied properly and we have carried out a consultation on NVZs. We have worked hard to get a derogation from the whole farm limit, and have made progress on that. Furthermore, we have tried to apply NVZs as flexibly as possible.

I do not accept that we have gold-plated the regulation; actually, we have gone out of our way to try to understand the pressures to which the hon. Gentleman has referred. However, we are talking about European legislation, which we have to apply. We all bear the cost of the pollution of our water courses that results from agriculture. I remember visiting a water treatment works in Headingley run by Yorkshire Water. The company's representatives said that they had to put in kit to deal with the result of the run-off from farming. In the end, we have to pay for the consequences. If we can take steps on farms to reduce the likelihood that nitrates and other things will get into the water course, that is a good thing. However, I recognise the pressures, particularly on dairy farmers, in the current circumstances.

Mr. Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute) (LD): While we are on the subject of European directives, I should say that the directive causing great concern to sheep farmers is the one on electronic identification, which is due to come in on 1 January. I know that the Secretary of State shares hill farmers' concerns, but will he update us on what he is doing in Europe to make sure that the directive does not come in on 1 January? If it does, the hill farming of sheep will become completely impractical.

Hilary Benn: I will gladly do that. The hon. Gentleman should bear with me a little; I shall come to regulation and I will tell the House about the latest situation.

I turn back to the issue of skills. We continue to support apprenticeships in agriculture, horticulture and animal care, and about 4,500 young people enrol in them every year. We are supporting the fresh start academies, which are a really good idea. They give business skills to those who are currently farming and those who want to come into farming, and they offer mentoring to new entrants to the farming industry. The initiative is one of the most successful undertaken.

We must also work together on animal diseases. Last year, the industry and DEFRA, working extremely closely together, ran a successful campaign of vaccination

against bluetongue across England. That was genuinely impressive, and I pay tribute to all the farmers who vaccinated swiftly. There was a very high take-up of the vaccine—between 80 and 90 per cent.—in the south and east of England, although the rate was not so good further north. The result was that the UK was free from circulating disease; indeed, the only examples of the disease resulted from imports.

That makes the point that farmers importing animals from parts of Europe where bluetongue is found have a responsibility to ensure that those animals do not have the disease before they are brought into the country. That joint action was cost and responsibility sharing in action. That is a better way of doing things and a model for the future. That is why we are consulting on the responsibility and cost-sharing proposals that we have produced.

Mr. Roger Williams (Brecon and Radnorshire) (LD): Has the Secretary of the State any estimate of the percentage of stock that has been vaccinated against bluetongue in England this year?

Hilary Benn: I would need to check, and then I will write to the hon. Gentleman to give him the up-to-date figure based on the best information. The important thing about the programme that was run last year is that there was a choice between a compulsory and a voluntary programme. The industry reflected on that, and came to me and said, "Actually, you know, we'd like a voluntary programme but we'll give it all the support and encouragement that we can." I said, "Well, if that's what you want, that's exactly what we'll do." That is an example of sharing the responsibility. In the end, it is down to farmers to make that choice, but why would one not want to protect one's livestock in these circumstances when one has a vaccine that has proved to be effective?

Mr. Paice: This is a genuine inquiry; I am not trying to make any particular point. The Secretary of State knows that we supported the approach of voluntary bluetongue vaccination, which, as he rightly said, was handled pretty well last year and was a great success. However, we are now facing the future—and, anecdotally, a significant decline in the amount of animals vaccinated this year. That is a great shame but, as the right hon. Gentleman says, it is down to the industry. Scotland has gone for compulsory vaccination; that is its decision to make. As a result, however, we are facing increasing trading difficulties across the English-Scottish border. Cattle and sheep are widely traded across the border; it is an essential part of the industry. What discussions has the Secretary of State had with Richard Lochhead, or anybody else, about how we can overcome those problems and ensure that Scotland does not somehow end up with a slightly different status, thus hampering trade?

Hilary Benn: The hon. Gentleman raises an extremely important point. We have been discussing this issue with the Scottish Government. I know that the industry is very concerned about it. Indeed, if I remember rightly, we talked about it the last time I met representatives of the core group. We will have to find a way of trying to resolve it. One of the other reasons we did not go for the compulsory programme was that although with it would

have come the offer of European funding, the industry came to the view, having looked at what would be involved, the time it would take, the bureaucracy and so on, that it was not as attractive a proposition as it might first have appeared. If I may, I will come back to the hon. Gentleman on that important point, because we need to try to march in step in these circumstances.

On bovine TB, which I could not make this speech without mentioning, the whole House recognises, as I do, how extremely hard it is for farmers and their families living with this devastating disease. We now have the TB eradication group, with which we are working closely. Secondly, we have committed £20 million to the vaccine programme, and we expect an injectable badger vaccine to be ready and licensed for use in 2010. The TB eradication group has considered the six areas in which a deployment project could be started as soon as the vaccine is available.

The third thing that we have to do is get the regulation right. Sometimes there is a clear case for regulation. An example of that would be the decisions that were taken after the 2001 foot and mouth outbreak. Tough movement controls were put in place—that is a form of regulation—and lessons were learned. The benefit of those was seen in 2007 when, by applying them quickly, the outbreak that occurred was concentrated in a small part of the country and did not spread everywhere like wildfire.

Mr. Jack: The Secretary of State mentioned the trials for vaccination to deal with bovine TB. Many people would like to know when the announcement will be made on where the trials are going to take place, as 2010 is not far away. Secondly, does he yet have an answer to the question that I have now put to him twice—what will be the protocol when diseased animals are found as part of the capture process involved in enabling the vaccine to be injected?

Hilary Benn: On the right hon. Gentleman's first question, in all honesty the answer is as soon as possible. Discussion is taking place at local level, not least because for the trials to be successful we need people in the areas that have been identified to be up for taking part. I hope that he will bear with that process, because I believe that the right approach is to win support and involvement so that the trials work successfully.

On the right hon. Gentleman's second question, I repeat what I have said before about badgers with TB. As he will be well aware from his knowledge and expertise, there is a practical difficulty in attempting to identify badgers that have the disease, because there is not yet a reliable in-field test. There is provision in legislation for those responsible to take what they regard as appropriate action on badgers or any animals that are clearly very sick and on their last legs, if it is to relieve easily visible suffering. That is on the statute book and has remained there for quite some time.

If regulation is wrong, we take action. Why did we appeal against the judgment on pesticides in the Downs case? It was precisely because we thought it was right to do so. We have opposed Europe's wish to get us to agree to new controls on pesticides, because nobody can answer the question of what that would mean for the availability of particular substances. The Government have been leading in Europe on arguing that case.

The hon. Member for Argyll and Bute (Mr. Reid) made an important point about electronic identification for sheep. I have met sheep farmers from right across the country, and I know that a lot of them are very concerned about that. I am on record as saying that the costs outweigh the benefits, which is why we pushed for, and succeeded in getting, a delay in implementation and why we were able to get the slaughter derogation. It is why we are currently trying in the Standing Committee on the Food Chain and Animal Health to get agreement that recording can be done by third parties—in other words, at the market, not on the farm. That would significantly reduce the burden on farmers.

I have just written to all my fellow Agriculture Ministers in Europe to say that if we get that change, there will be a pretty strong case for saying that an electronic tag needs to be put on a sheep's ear only when it is about to leave the farm holding. That would require the European Commission to come forward with a change to regulation, and for that to happen we need other member states to come forward and support the UK and other countries such as Ireland, Hungary and one or two others that have been expressing concern about sheep EID.

That change would save farmers from having to scour the hills and tops from the date of implementation to find their sheep and attach ear tags. As we know, in any given year 10 to 15 per cent. of the tags may fall out, so they would have to be found and replaced. The change would be a practical step. It is different from third-party reporting, which can be brought in by comitology. It would require a revision to regulation, which depends on the Commission. I assure the House the I will continue to press the point, but I need support from other member states.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) (LD): Before the Secretary of State moves on from regulation, may I ask him whether he would be willing to enter into a dialogue with the industry about fallen stock? It seems perfectly obvious to me that there has been no demonstrable improvement in animal health, or indeed human health, from the ludicrous and expensive restrictions on what farmers have to do with carcasses, which are not even enforceable. It would be prudent for him at least to revisit the case for biodigesters on site and take a more relaxed view of what happens to fallen stock in the real world. He knows as well as I do that much of the time, fallen stock is not found before it has been consumed by wildlife.

Hilary Benn: I accept the hon. Gentleman's point about the facts of geography and remoteness in some of our farming communities. I will happily reflect on his point and respond to him, but it is important that we continue to take steps to prevent any spread of disease. That, of course, is what lies behind the fallen stock measures that we have in place.

Mr. Roger Williams: The Secretary of State has been generous in giving way. The falling stock system was introduced because of the bovine spongiform encephalopathy prion. We now know that there is no BSE in sheep and that the existence of prions in the cattle population is greatly reduced. Does the right hon. Gentleman think that it is now time to examine the whole falling stock system and ascertain whether the regulation is too burdensome and disproportionate?

Hilary Benn: I think that I shall be writing two letters as a result of the interventions by the hon. Members for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) and for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams). I will reflect on the points that they made and come back to them, if that is okay.

We need all the means at our disposal to meet the challenges that I set out, and research and development will be very important. I was fortunate earlier this week to launch formally the new Food and Environment Research Agency in York. It will help us to monitor and tackle disease and maintain the safety of our food. It is a world-class facility and I urge any hon. Members who have not had the chance to visit to do so.

Miss Anne McIntosh (Vale of York) (Con): It is in Ryedale.

Hilary Benn: Indeed, it is in the constituency of the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway). It is very impressive.

Along with the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council, DEFRA, the Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board, industry and some NGO contributions, we invest approximately £164 million a year. As hon. Members know, we have put more money into bee research because of the concerns that were expressed. I pay tribute to the right hon. Member for Fylde and the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee for being part of that process. That is an example of priorities changing in response to changing circumstances.

We have announced five demonstration projects, which will receive funding from our £10 million anaerobic digestion demonstration programme. We formed the anaerobic digestion taskforce to work with the industry to overcome any remaining obstacles so that we can tap that great potential for energy.

We are also working with specific sectors. As many Members know, perhaps partly thanks to Jamie Oliver's work, the pig industry has been through some tough times. As I said earlier, I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree for her work on that. The Select Committee recommended setting up a pig taskforce and we did exactly that. We announced it in February and it has been working hard to get to grips with the issues. Indeed, my hon. Friend the Minister attended a meeting of the taskforce on his second day in the job. It examines in detail what needs to be done to help the industry.

We are trying to improve public procurement to provide a better market for British produce, and the Government are buying more of it. Ministry of Defence procurement is up to 59 per cent. from 43 per cent. The NHS is up to 70 per cent., and almost 100 per cent. of milk used by Departments is British.

Following an idea from the Council of Food Policy Advisers, supported by the Eat Seasonably campaign, which, I am proud to say, DEFRA has funded, I will bring together people from the horticulture industry to examine how we can grow more fruit and vegetables in the UK and get more people to eat five a day, because we know the importance of fruit and vegetables to our health.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): We are all in favour of teaching children about a richer, more varied diet. However, does my right hon. Friend

agree that one problem, as Natural England found in a recent survey, is that the number of children who go to the countryside has halved in a generation? Is it not time that we put more emphasis on taking children to the countryside, and getting them to learn about it through any discipline, so that they understand where their food comes from and the importance of fresh, good food sourced locally?

Hilary Benn: I could not agree more with my hon. Friend. Open farm Sunday, which was the Sunday before last, is important. From memory, about 450 farms around the country opened up. Young people visited the apple farm to which I went in Hampshire. There is a—no pun intended—growing interest in understanding where our food comes from. One need only consider the enormous demand for allotments, the growth in farmers markets and the greater desire on the part of consumers to buy local produce.

It is important that we facilitate that, through clearer and more accurate labelling. That is why we are pushing in Europe for origin labelling to be significantly improved and why, at the same time as maintaining full public confidence about the safety of food, we need to address the 370,000 tonnes of food that is thrown out every year after passing its “best before” date, despite being safe to eat. As the House will be aware, last week I announced steps to look at how “best before” labels are used, because a large proportion of farmers' hard work ends up in the bin and then in landfill, where it produces methane, which adds to the problem of climate change, which affects the farmers. That is a small example of why we all have an interest in working together to deal with the problem. We have to be clear about what is safe and what is not, because nothing must compromise safety, but we also need to stop throwing away good food and stop wasting money in the process.

Mr. Sheerman: Before he leaves this point, does my right hon. Friend agree that if we want to get people to go back into the countryside, perhaps the Government should have a policy of giving back to the English common people the English common land that was stolen from them by the other place in the 18th and 19th centuries, and which is still owned by the same people, in the same landed estates? Is it not about time that our Government gave that land back to ordinary people?

Hilary Benn: I must confess that I was not anticipating that I would be invited in this debate to include a reference to the Enclosures Acts and the past 200 years of British history or say what we might do about it. I therefore hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me if I am not tempted to travel down the path that he has opened up.

Whoever owns the land, the way in which our food is produced is changing, as is our relationship with the environment, as we come to understand the importance of sustainability much more. However, one thing is certain: the world is going to need a lot of farmers and a lot of agricultural production over the rest of this century, not least because we have to feed about another 3 billion human beings. That is a big task, and we have to be ready. We all have to play our part, and there is a great deal still to do. I know that British farmers and food manufacturers are up for the challenge, and so am I.

3.2 pm

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con): We have waited more than six years for a debate on farming in Government time, so this debate is extremely welcome. It is also a timely opportunity, and I congratulate the Secretary of State on being here to move the motion himself.

The recent collapse of Dairy Farmers of Britain has sent tremors through the farming community and serves to remind us that farming is not an industry that can be taken for granted. However, under the current Government, one could be forgiven for thinking that agriculture is an afterthought or, worse, an obstacle in the way of DEFRA's broader objectives. Government policy tells us that

"domestic production is not a necessary condition for food security,"

as my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) reminded the Secretary of State. That policy document still stands. There is no mention of farming in the Department's title; indeed, it is not even mentioned in the Department's sole public service agreement. If food security is so important, why is it not reflected in the Department's primary mission?

Farming Ministers come and go with every harvest. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy), the latest to exit, left before the harvest, having completed little more than six months in office. I hope that the Minister of State, whom I genuinely welcomed to his place on Monday, is feeling secure. However, he and his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State can console themselves with the thought that they have, at most, 11 months left in their posts.

A lot has happened since the Government's last debate on farming. The single payment scheme has shaken up the system of support. Farmers face new disease threats, such as bluetongue, not to mention the travails of dealing with foot and mouth and bovine TB—a subject to which I wish to return. They also operate in an increasingly open and competitive marketplace, as the nature of support has changed. However, many things have remained all too familiar since that last debate: dominant supermarkets, inadequate food labelling, and excessive and growing regulatory burdens. All that is set against the backdrop of concern about food security, which the Secretary of State quite properly set out.

But what has been the Government's response to this looming crisis? Within a very short time the world will not be able to feed itself, as the Secretary of State has pointed out, and a Chatham House report has recently warned that the problem will have a particularly great impact on import-dependent countries and on poor people everywhere, yet the Government's response has been to preside over an increase in the United Kingdom's reliance on imports. They have overseen significant declines in the production of cereals, milk, vegetables and meat. In short, they have decreased our productive contribution to food security.

No one is suggesting that Britain either could or should be wholly self-sufficient in food. That would be impractical and, arguably, undesirable. Nor is anyone suggesting, as far as I am aware, a return to production subsidies or targets, and we are certainly not suggesting import controls or any kind of interference with the

market—of course not. However, one of the country's foremost experts on food security, Professor Tim Lang, has said:

"The present Government's food security policy creates unnecessary vulnerabilities."

We recognise the benefit of a diversity of supply, but that needs to be balanced against the sustainability of food miles, the importance and value of local production—to which the Secretary of State referred—and the threats posed by climate change and terrorism. Trade will continue to be important, but in our view the pendulum has been allowed to swing too far away from domestic production.

Lembit Öpik: I support the hon. Gentleman's observations about food security. Does he agree that it is contradictory to talk about having environmental policies on food production while regulations make it almost impossible to run a small abattoir? Would it not be more sensible, from a risk management perspective, to relax the regulations on small abattoirs to ensure that we can re-localise food production wherever that is practicable? Montgomeryshire is certainly one place that is crying out to do that.

Nick Herbert: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that the decline in small local abattoirs has been one of the highly regrettable trends in contemporary agriculture. It undermines the cause of local food production, which people support. I hope that we will be able to arrest that decline in future.

Professor Lang also states:

"For a country blessed with such fine growing conditions as the UK not to grow the food which it could, and to use imports as a substitute for produce which could perfectly well be grown here, is a waste of potential."

He is surely right about that. We must move away from importing vast quantities of food that we could grow ourselves. We have the infrastructure, the soils, the climate and the skills to increase our contribution to national and global food security, but we cannot do that if we go on seeing farmers as dispensable, as I believe the Government sometimes do. Of course food security must not be an argument for protectionism or for the re-intensification of agriculture. I would be the last person to advocate either of those things. However, there should be no conflict between the environment and food production.

Mr. Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): My hon. Friend is making an important point, which I wholeheartedly support, about the need to rebalance our food production and to see the pendulum swing back in the direction of local production. The hon. Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) pointed out that we have seen a decline in the number of local abattoirs, and many dairy farmers have quit the industry altogether. We are losing some of the local infrastructure that could have enabled us to increase the share of locally produced food that the UK consumer buys.

Nick Herbert: I agree with my hon. Friend. There is a danger in allowing relatively fragile parts of the agricultural sector, including the dairy industry, to face these difficulties. If we continued to lose them, it would be very hard to restore the agricultural infrastructure that would allow

[Nick Herbert]

us to rise to the challenges that we face. It is highly desirable that we should retain the means to grow the foods that it is possible to grow domestically.

Our food security ultimately depends on healthy and diverse eco-systems. That is why I do not believe that there is a conflict between the environment and food production. In the past, it was largely the fault of successive Governments of all parties sending out the wrong signals about what they wanted agriculture to do. Violent swings between production at all costs and the environment as the first priority of farming are, in my view, unhelpful. The stop-go approach—payments to rip out hedgerows one moment and incentives to replant them the next—has been enormously damaging, and has fostered the equally damaging notion that farming and the environment are at odds. What we need to pursue is a balanced agriculture.

Mr. Sheerman: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we have seen an amazing diversification of the agricultural products coming from our farms over recent years? He may know that I have an obsessive interest in the English poet John Clare. When we open the John Clare centre on 13 July—his birthday—we will sell a massive range and variety of home-produced local products that were not there 10 years ago.

Nick Herbert: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that there is increased interest in the local production of food, and there is still unexploited potential there. If that is to continue, we need to rely on a number of things, one of which is correct food labelling, which I shall come to shortly.

I was talking about the balance between agriculture and the environment. Today's climate change projections suggest profound effects on agriculture and the environment in the years ahead, as we discussed in relation to the Secretary of State's statement earlier. We will need a more sustainable approach to water management, and we will need to develop technology that can reduce farming's greenhouse gas emissions, through technologies such as anaerobic digestion. We will need smarter mechanisms to enhance our biodiversity where we continue to suffer biodiversity loss and miss important targets. We will need to promote carbon capture, ensure proper flood prevention and secure other environmental services.

The Wildlife Trusts have called today for a long-term vision for the future of our land, with joined-up decisions on agriculture planning, water management and more. I believe that this call for an integrated approach to land use is right, but it requires a fundamentally different approach, oriented around incentivising the right outcomes rather than imposing further regulation and being so worried about processes.

Mr. Roger Williams: I am listening carefully to the hon. Gentleman's argument; he is engaging in thought processes that many of us, too, are going through. Does he think that it is the duty of farmers and the farming industry to produce more food, or is it their duty to look after their own businesses? If the latter, how are we going to incentivise farmers to produce more food?

Nick Herbert: I said earlier that I believed in the market, so the trend of agricultural policy towards farmers decoupling and producing increasingly for the market is the right one. Where public support is necessary in the future, it should be oriented towards the delivery of public goods—things that would not be secured by means other than intervention, or public funds, if necessary. In my view, sustainable farming—producing to the market with profitable farms—will ultimately be necessary if the industry is to thrive. Farming can be successful only if it is carried out in an environmentally sustainable manner, which explains why I do not always accept the distinction sometimes made between farming on the one hand and the environment on the other. The balance has often gone wrong when the Government have interfered in the wrong way.

It is our farmers who manage most of Britain's wonderful landscape, so we must enable them to be competitive in a truly open market, and in harmony with the environment. We need a balanced approach that recognises that we cannot keep imposing regulations and hope that the industry remains viable. Farms are businesses, after all, as I think the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) was suggesting. They need to make a profit, and we need to remember that. Farmers cannot be told both that they must operate in a global marketplace, and that they have to compete with cheaper foreign produce that can be labelled "British".

Ministers have been promising a voluntary agreement with the supermarkets on country-of-origin food labelling for more than a decade, but consumers still cannot have full confidence that "British" actually means "British". There is still misleading labelling. Six months ago, the Secretary of State told the Oxford farming conference that labelling rules were "nonsense" and had to change. He said that he would meet processors and retailers to discuss how to bring about a voluntary agreement. Can he tell us what progress he has made? If he wishes to intervene, I shall be happy to give way.

I have been meeting representatives of the supermarkets as well, and I regret to say that although Waitrose and Marks and Spencer support our "honest food" proposals for clear country-of-origin labelling for meat and meat products, it is clear that Tesco, Sainsbury and Asda do not. I believe that while consumers are still being misled, if agreement in the European Union—which the Secretary of State says is slow to be secured—is still not on offer and if the supermarkets will not agree to the voluntary scheme that the Secretary of State appears to have been trying to establish for six months, the Government themselves must act. Consumers cannot go on being misled.

I urge the Government to support the Bill introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon), which is due to receive its Second Reading in a few months' time. However, I can give an undertaking that if the Government do not act and introduce a domestic labelling scheme—which is possible under European Union law—when our consumers are being misled, the next Government will do so. Farmers and consumers alike value action, not hollow promises.

We hear the same story from the Government about the proposed electronic identification of sheep. In Yorkshire recently I met a group of hill farmers who left me in no doubt about the damaging impact that that costly and absurd new requirement would have on an already

fragile industry. When I questioned the Secretary of State about the matter in the House on 21 May, he said that the Government

“showed leadership in arguing that the cost... outweighs the benefits”
.—[*Official Report*, 21 May 2009; Vol. 492, c. 1620.]

If only that were so. Back in 2002 the Government’s negotiating position was set out by the right hon. Member for Scunthorpe (Mr. Morley), who was then the Minister responsible for animal health. He declared:

“I am convinced that electronic identification of farmed animals is the way forward—especially in respect of sheep”.

Let us be clear. Following the example of Senator John Kerry, the Government supported the electronic tagging of sheep before they opposed it. Is that what the Secretary of State meant by leadership—leading on the imposition of another expensive and unnecessary burden, and then claiming to be trying to tackle it? I regret to say that on electronic identification of sheep, food labelling, pesticides and reform of the common agricultural policy, the story is the same: it is the story of a Government who have failed to stand up for British agriculture.

Farmers are striving to reduce their environmental impact, and want the industry of which they are so proud to be a part to stand on its own two feet without support. Most farmers to whom I speak would like that outcome. However, if we are to dismantle the market-distorting support which has inflicted so much harm on the developing world, which in my view has undermined our own industry in significant ways, and which farmers ultimately do not want, and if we are to shift resources to the environmental and public goods that farmers could deliver, we must be prepared to allow agriculture to become more competitive so that it can operate in that market. That means less and smarter regulation that delivers proportionate gains for the environment and animal health, and steps to ensure that the market works more effectively in the consumer and producer interest, with honest labelling, fairer supply chain arrangements and strong co-operatives. It also means action on TB, which is undermining the beef and dairy industries across large swathes of the country.

Since the right hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree left her post, she has given an interview in which she indicated her belief that the Government’s position on the culling of badgers could or should change. It appears that the Secretary of State is increasingly isolated in his position, which is to oppose such a measure. The Welsh Assembly has decided to go ahead with a more robust measure. My understanding is that the Liberal Democrats support a targeted cull. We have consistently done so. We cannot continue slaughtering 40,000 cattle a year, or preside over a bill now rising to £600 million a year and heading towards £1 billion, and do nothing, simply waiting for a vaccine that may or may not be effective.

The Secretary of State says that agriculture is pretty strong, but underlying that is a continuing fragility in important sectors. The dairy sector is one. We have already lost a quarter of our dairy farms. I referred to the collapse of Dairy Farmers of Britain and listened with interest to what the Secretary of State had to say about the measures that the Government are trying to take to support farmers who find themselves without a buyer. Only today I received an e-mail from a constituent who tells me that as a Dairy Farmers of Britain supplier, he has 34 days of unpaid milk, amounting to £17,500. He is concerned about the attitude that his bank is

taking and whether, even if he can find an alternative purchaser, it will supply. He wants to know what can be done to put pressure on the bank to honour its milk cheques. It is important that we recognise the fragility of the industry and the continuing need to ensure that a viable dairy industry remains in existence in this country.

The fragility also extends to upland farming. Again, the Secretary of State says agriculture is pretty strong but it is clear that even with the improvement in prices we have seen since their low point a couple of years ago, upland farm incomes are almost wholly dependent on the public support that those farmers are receiving. Therefore, both sides need to think hard about the long-term future of upland farming, as we consider the next round of CAP reform.

There are things that the Government can do, and public procurement is surely a good example. The pig industry is in dire straits, so why is it that not a single rasher of bacon served to our armed forces is British? At the very least, why cannot we move towards a system whereby all publicly procured food meets British standards of production? That is a legal requirement that we could impose.

There is no more important industry than the production of food. Food security sits alongside climate change as one of the greatest challenges of the 21st century. Indeed, those two issues are intimately linked. But at this critical period the department responsible for the industry has lost its way. We need a new mission for the Department, which occupies such an important role in the health, security and well-being of our nation. We need a commitment to the irreplaceable role of our farmers as custodians of the countryside and producers of food, and we need the actions to back it up. We need an approach that views farming and the environment as compatible, not in competition. We need a radical new policy framework to ensure the sustainable and integrated management of natural resources, including water. I regret to say that it is increasingly clear that the only thing that will bring about that much-needed change in approach is a change of Government.

3.24 pm

Mr. Ian Cawsey (Brigg and Goole) (Lab): It is an honour to be the third speaker in the debate and to follow the two Front Benchers, both of whom made splendid contributions to a debate that will be a good one. I do not want to detain the House but there are a number of things happening in my constituency that may be happening in other areas, especially if they are rural. I welcome the opportunity to draw these to the attention of the House and hope that the Minister will be able to respond later today.

My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State talked about Dairy Farmers of Britain, the collapse of which has been a real tragedy for all involved and traumatic for all those who suddenly found themselves as members of a co-operative that had gone into receivership. Dairy farming is not king in my area, but that has in fact worked against us finding a resolution to this problem. Only last night, I was speaking to Keith Wilson, a dairy farmer in the Isle of Axholme in the south-west of my constituency. He is one of only three dairy farmers now left in the area. Although we all welcome my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State’s announcement today

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that 1,600 of the 1,800 affected farmers—along with 96 per cent. of the milk—have now been placed with new companies, that still leaves 200 who have not, and anyone who is among that 200 faces a very bleak future indeed. Mr. Wilson and the other dairy farmers in my area find themselves in that position through no fault of their own. They have currently been given the receiver's standard four-week rolling contract. Under that, the milk gets taken away, which they welcome, although at a 10p a litre minimum price, and nobody needs to be a rocket scientist to work out that that is an extremely low price that does not cover even the most basic costs of running a farm. This situation clearly cannot continue.

Mr. Roger Williams: I am sure that many Members present in the Chamber have constituents who are in similar situations. Many of the farmers who are finding it difficult to get a contract would like to get out of milk in the near future, but they need a contract for six months or a year at a decent price in order to plan their exit from the industry and ensure that they get the best price for their assets so they can reinvest in another form of farming in the future. Would it not therefore be a good idea for DEFRA to get involved and see whether it can encourage those contracts to be put in place?

Mr. Cawsey: I endorse that comment entirely. DEFRA is always chanting the mantra to farmers that diversification is the way ahead and they must move with the times and look for new ideas, but they cannot cross the River Jordan instantly, and I think there should always be support for farmers who are trying to do the best for their companies and trying to keep farming going in their communities. I hope my hon. Friend the Minister might be able to respond to that later.

The dairy farmers in the Isle of Axholme are annoyed that they have so far been unsuccessful in their attempts to get placed with other contracts. The Isle of Axholme is quite remote, and there are only three dairy farms there, none of which is a large concern, so the problems are clear—except that the tanker that currently comes to collect their milk every day is collecting on behalf of the other companies, and there is therefore a slight frustration that it is the tanker of the same companies that will not take their milk that is coming to their farms. That seems absurd. Also, Dairy Crest has contracts placed in Gainsborough and Retford, neither of which is very much further away. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister might speak to the receiver about this. I understand that attempts are being made to try to get contracts for the farmers who are left, but might these companies, who are picking up milk now and who have already placed new contracts for farmers who are not far away, be encouraged to go that bit further? I hope that that might be achieved even if it is only for a period of time so that, as the hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) said, people can consider their options. That would be better than the situation they are in now—one in which they face a very bleak future and could be forced out of the industry very quickly. I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will respond to this point in his reply. For these 200 farmers, including the three in my constituency on the Isle of Axholme, it is no consolation that so much progress has been made for everybody else. They face a very bleak future, and DEFRA should do something to help them.

Of course, like most representatives of a rural area, I have meetings with my local farming representatives. I had a good meeting at West Butterwick recently with the local members of the National Farmers Union, at which I was heartened to learn that many of them are doing quite well at the moment—much of my area is arable—despite all the problems facing other farming sectors and the British economy generally. A lot of that has to do with exchange rates, subsidy and so on, and before we get too carried away it should be borne in mind that those farmers have been through a pretty rough time too, so if they are having a window of opportunity now, where things are a bit better, I say “More power to their elbow.”

“Farming” is not a generic term. One sector may be doing well while others are struggling—and not just dairy farmers; the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) mentioned pig farmers and I cannot help but agree with everything that he said. That is an unsubsidised part of farming that does a really good job producing an excellent product and it genuinely does have much better animal welfare standards than are found in other countries across the world—I say that as someone who has a passionate interest in animal welfare—yet the magic premium that we all seek for it never seems to come through, certainly not at the level it should. We must support the sector because if, as I do, hon. Members believe animal welfare is not an add-on for people involved in agriculture but should be an integral part of what they do, we should back British people who take that view and deliver it. There are a number of ways to back them.

We know that pig farming is an unsubsidised industry, but we can change things through procurement. It is a disgrace that the pork procurement rates of national and local government are as low as they are. I am sick to the back teeth of having this discussion with people who say, “We have to put things out to tender and we must have the same specification and so on.” I see no reason, and never have done, why an animal welfare standard should not be part of the specification. Let other people meet it and compete on it, but for goodness' sake let us not ignore it. We must ensure that it is part of everything we do. I am certain that if the Minister could get Departments to add that to their procurement specifications, it would make a real difference and British pig farmers would rightly be the beneficiaries.

This debate on food, farming and the environment is wide-ranging, and I welcome that because about six months ago—I am not claiming any glory for the fact that we are having this debate—I asked at business questions whether we could have such a debate. I did not quite use the phrase “food, farming and the environment”; I think I was more interested in having a debate on land use. However, what I was asking for could almost be fitted into that title, because we are in a quandary over land use in rural areas, and the Government, across all Departments, have to start thinking through what their response is going to be. I am sure that my area is not that different from everywhere else and, as I have mentioned before, people have concerns about food security, so they want to ensure that we keep good agricultural land, we keep Britain's farmers farming and we keep a high level of ability to feed ourselves.

Alongside that, there are pressures from people who want more rural housing—in particular, affordable rural housing. I have seen the effect of that housing need in

my constituency. I feel helplessness, as much as anything else, when, as happens time and again at my surgeries in one of the villages, I meet a young couple or their parents who want to be able to say that they have lived as a family for generations in the same village, but they cannot afford to pay the current house prices—these are very nice places to live and the market is king—and there is hardly any social housing for them to move into. I have no problem with the policy, but when it was decided that council houses could be sold off under the right to buy, it was inevitable that tenants in very nice rural parts of the country who could get a big discount on their houses did so—they would be fools not to. Nothing came after those houses and, as a result, there is a real shortage now and we need to do more about that.

We need to encourage local authorities to invest more in the social housing in their rural areas and we need to have a sensible—I plead for no more than common sense—approach to sustainability. There was a planning application in my constituency—it was in the East Riding of Yorkshire—a few months ago by somebody who wanted to build a new house for a family who had lived in the village for years. There had been a house on the site previously, but it had been demolished and they had been living in a mobile home, admittedly for some years. They simply wanted to replace that mobile home with a house again, but the application was turned down because it was an “unsustainable development”. It was simply the same people wanting to live in the same village. While we are making decisions like that, we are getting into a quandary about our use of rural land, and that needs to be addressed.

Flood defence is another key issue. My constituency is split by several rivers—the Trent, the Humber and the Ouse—and the Environment Agency is trying to draw up flood defence risk strategies and plans for the future. That is difficult for everybody, because people are concerned about the extent to which they will be defended in the future. It is clear that the Environment Agency’s thinking, given the pressures that it is under—and the fact that climate change is making such planning difficult for the next 50 to 100 years and beyond—increasingly includes the use of wash land. My hon. Friend the Minister will recall the DEFRA document “Making Space for Water”, and it is driving much of the consideration.

We have three competing pressures for land—the need for more rural affordable housing, the aim of food security in the future and the need to ensure that rural areas remain dry. The Government need to think carefully about a land use policy for the future. The farmers in my community accept that they are potentially part of the solution to flooding, but they do not want to lose good agricultural land. If it is to be used only occasionally during extreme weather conditions, they want reassurances that they will receive adequate compensation for anything that they lose, such as crops on flooded land.

I plead for common sense. The Government need to ensure that the different Departments and agencies that are considering how land should be used talk to each other and come to sensible conclusions. It may sound as though my whole speech is about the Isle of Axholme, but that area has had terrible problems. It is reclaimed land below sea level, and is no longer an island—although it used to be. For those hon. Members of a Methodist bent—as I am—it is where John Wesley was born. It

was reclaimed by Vermuyden, who was brought over from Holland to drain it. Drainage in the area is already complex, but as pressures grow—on surface water drainage because of increased building, and from the Trent, which flows through the Isle—there are real fears about protecting the area for the future.

The Environment Agency started its review of the Trent strategy, which includes the Isle, by saying that it probably did not need to be as well defended in the future as it has been in the past. That is not a great message to send to people who live on land that is below sea level. It took an enormous effort, but in the end we managed to get all the agencies together and the Environment Agency is now spending £1 million on a specific Axholme strategy to try to work out who will do what in the future.

The problem is that the agency was looking only at what it did, and was not talking to the internal drainage boards—the people with the real local knowledge of the area. They know where every drain goes, which pump is on its way out and which pump will last for a bit longer. We have solved the problem now, and everyone is sitting around the same table—I have the great honour of chairing our flood strategy—but that was not the direction that the agency was taking in the beginning, and I am worried that it is working in isolation in other areas.

The other problem with the agency is that all the river defence strategies cover particular rivers and particular areas, stopping at county boundaries, but water does not stop at the boundaries. For my area, there are several different strategies affecting the East Riding of Yorkshire, west Yorkshire and north Lincolnshire, but—as I have told my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State before—there is not enough co-ordination by the different teams in the Environment Agency that are working on those strategies. I am sure that they are doing a good job on each individual strategy, but where they meet is crucial.

The East Riding of Yorkshire council shares my concerns and has been in very difficult correspondence with me. In fact, I think it is still subject to a judicial review of the way in which the Environment Agency has done its work. We want to avoid that. We do not want to get into litigation about it; we want to get people to sit round a table, sorting it out. The Secretary of State has told me before that he is reinforcing that message to the Environment Agency and that that is what will happen in the future. I can only wish him more power to his elbow and I look forward to seeing the results.

May I finish on one other point that I think is important? It is certainly important in my area. It is the whole issue of composting and landfill. Composting is growing, and I represent several farmers who have moved into it as a way of diversifying. We need to ensure that there are good standards throughout. The example that I am going to give involves a farmer but the local council.

North Lincolnshire council is now doing all sorts of things about collecting garden waste, and its recycling rates have increased enormously as a result. The council is using open air windrow composting, however, which is causing concerns. There are two reasons. One is obvious: it is not nice for people near it, because it smells. I do not care how many times I have sat around a

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table with all sorts of experts—I willingly admit that I am not an expert—who tell me all the things they do to take the smell away and that it does not have to be a smelly process. That is bunkum; it smells. Sometimes it smells worse than others, but it always smells. In some respects, that is almost the least of our worries.

The other reason is the health risks posed by spores that spread from the site. The risks are well known, but the controversial point is the extent to which they spread in a concentration that could genuinely pose a health risk to an area. In the United Kingdom, we have gone for a minimum distance that is quite far compared with that in many other European countries. Germany, for example, is coming to the view that it should be only half the distance that we allow.

I went with a delegation of hon. Members to see the Secretary of State about the matter—we all have the sites in our constituencies—and I understand that the Department has commissioned research, which is being peer-reviewed. I accept that it is a job in hand, but all I would say is that while that job is in hand people are living near the sites. They know that there is a health concern and they know that the sites smell. They want to be reassured and they want the Government to move quickly. The compost should be covered, because that would help with the spores and with the smell. We all know why it is not done that way: it is cheaper not to. It is cheaper to do it the way it is being done, but finance is not everything. The environment that people live in is important.

I have several landfill sites in my constituency, and one of the great ironies is that every one who has a landfill site in their constituency wants it to be filled as quickly as possible, capped as quickly as possible and finished with as quickly as possible, but as councils increasingly hit their recycling targets, less and less goes to landfill. The date until which the sites might still be around moves further away. In terms of the greater good, that is not a bad thing, but we must be tighter and tighter on the operators, because they are going to be there for longer and longer.

In Roxby in my constituency, where Biffa runs a landfill site, there have been horrendous problems with smell over the past year, so much so that the company is undergoing a prosecution from the Environment Agency. Biffa is a very experienced company in this regard, but—although this is not true now because of the action that the Environment Agency took—on visits to the site, we found it uncovered and there was no apparatus to extract the gas. From the company's point of view that was plain daft, because on other parts of the site it was extracting the gas, generating electricity and making some money. On the part of the site I am talking about, the company was just letting us smell it and it was not very good.

Perhaps I should declare an interest. I live in Winterton, next to Roxby, and Mrs. Cawsey would want me to say that it is pretty bad where we live, too. That is not the key reason why the situation needs to be sorted out, however. It needs to be sorted because, thanks to recycling, such sites will be around for a lot longer than we thought. People who live near them need to know that they are safe, and that the smell can be taken care of.

I welcome today's debate. There is so much going on in rural areas at the moment, and people are looking for the Government to plot a way through it. People know that flood defences and housing have to be dealt with. Food security is rattling up the agenda at a rate of knots in a way that it was not only a year or two ago. We are looking for a comprehensive, cohesive way forward from the Government. I hope that when the Minister replies, he will be able to give some reassurance on that.

3.45 pm

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): First, I ought to apologise on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron), who cannot be here for family reasons; he would, of course, otherwise have contributed to the debate.

We often talk about Government's primary duty being to defend the people, but there is a second primary duty, which is to feed the people—to ensure continuity of food supply. There has been a feeling in recent years that perhaps the Government have forgotten the key priority of ensuring a prosperous farming and processing industry that enables us to maintain continuity of supply.

There is a widespread feeling that agriculture has somehow been airbrushed out of the political system altogether. It does not appear in the name of a Department, and it does not feature in our regular Question Times to anything like the extent that it did. It has been almost impossible to get a debate on the issue. That is why I welcome today's debate so greatly. I have called for such a debate year after year, in various contexts and wearing different hats. At least we have perhaps again established the principle that we should have regular debates on agriculture.

I invite Ministers to engage far more with the agricultural community than they have in the past few years. Of course, they attend the Oxford farming conference, but I would like to see a Secretary of State at the Royal Bath and West of England Society agricultural show. One always used to, but in the past few years, we have not seen a Minister attend the Royal Bath and West, or the annual dairy industry dinner in my constituency. I think that the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) snuck into my constituency and visited the Royal Bath and West; I am always happy to see him. [Interruption.] The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) visited, too. If they had only written to me to tell me that they were coming to my constituency, I would know these things, but they are very welcome. I always attend the show, and I always take a great deal away from it, in terms of making contact with my constituents.

Nick Herbert: I feel sure that we all let the hon. Gentleman know that we were visiting his constituency, and I apologise if we did not. I just wanted to draw to his attention the fact that my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron), the Leader of the Opposition, also attended the Royal Bath and West, and spoke strongly in support of the farming industry.

Mr. Heath: He did, and he was the only one who wrote to tell me so. Perhaps he has a better support system.

This country is amazingly blessed in its agricultural land. Despite the depredations in the dairy industry and the varroa mite, this is literally a land of milk and

honey. This country has huge potential for agricultural production, yet there has been a decline. It cannot be a sensible way of managing our affairs to encourage imports of agricultural produce and for there to be reductions in our industries. There is not only an economic but a moral imperative to reverse that trend, particularly given what we all know is coming—climate change and the need to feed an ever-increasing population across the world. We should be making best use of our natural advantages.

The decline in what we consume of our produce is quite noticeable. During the lifetime of this Government alone, 10 per cent. less of the meat that is put on tables in British households comes from home-produced sources. That is a marked decline. Only 50 to 55 per cent. of the vegetables eaten in this country now come from British sources, with the rest being imported. That is partly due to purchasers—not just consumers at the point of sale, but the supermarkets and retailers—and partly because of deep-rooted ignorance among a large part of our population who find no connection between the produce that comes from rural parts of Britain and what they actually eat, and who see things as coming in packets, rather than from fields. A farmer in my constituency was taken aback when a teacher—not a schoolchild—asked him whether it was necessary to kill a cow to get its milk. Such ignorance and lack of connection between urban and rural Britain is astonishing. It is imperative that that approach is changed.

The Secretary of State talked about employment. If nothing else, there is a need to recognise the number of people who are still employed in the sector. Even though fewer people are now directly employed on the land as primary producers, we should recognise that a large sector of our economic production and national employment is engaged in the whole business of food and produce.

Let me deal with some of the problems. Dairying is the big issue for many of my constituents in my part of the world of Somerset. I still say—in the absence of any Cheshire Members in the Chamber I can do so without a great deal of argument—that Somerset has the finest dairy land in the country, as is recognised. However, let us consider what has happened to dairy farming. There are now 13,600 dairy farmers in this country—the actual figure that I have is 13,601, but we are losing two dairy farmers a day and I do not know which day of the week that number was printed on. There were 14,296 in 2007 and 28,119 in 1997, so half the dairy farmers in this country have gone out of production in just 10 years, which is extremely worrying.

It is not just the farmers who have disappeared, of course, but the beasts in the herds and flocks. There are now 300,000 fewer cattle, 200,000 fewer pigs and 100,000 fewer sheep in the national herds and flocks than there were in 2006. Our capacity to produce food is shrinking, especially in the livestock sector. There are several reasons for that, and the one I always highlight is milk price. Until we have a sustainable price that allows our producers to get a return on their investment in milk, the dairy industry will continue to shrink. I return, as I have done many times in recent years, to the principle that we must do something about the horribly skewed chain in milk production between the primary producer and the supermarket. The huge economic strength of the oligopoly of retailers means that although we get a slight alleviation

on milk price every now and again, the problem constantly returns when times become a little more difficult. That has an effect on not only dairy farmers, but processors, albeit to a lesser extent. Processors are often lumped in as part of the problem, but any who talks to cheese makers knows that the retailers squeeze them every bit as hard as the milk producers, which puts them at a disadvantage. We will not do that by relying on a market whose structure is fundamentally skewed; it is absolutely clear, as has been shown many times, that, to rectify the anomalies in the market, we need a statutory code of conduct that is enforceable and backed by an ombudsman. The sooner we get that in place, the better, and the sooner the dairy industry will experience more stability.

Several Members have touched on the difficulties of Dairy Farmers of Britain, the co-operative that is now in receivership. The situation sends to dairy farmers throughout the country a terrible message—that, even when they think that they have a stable market for their milk and a co-operative arrangement that they hope is going to prosper, it can suddenly fall down. Although I hear what is said about the recovery arrangements that are being put in place, as far as I am aware, even those producers who have found new contracts have not received a milk cheque for May—effectively up until 3 June. For the average producer, that means £10,000 to £15,000 of lost income, and possibly more, as the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs said. The average bank manager is not just going to ignore that, so we need to ensure that producers are able to see themselves through the next few difficult months until they have a stable income stream again—without some computer somewhere telling them that they can no longer cash their cheques because the bank says no.

Mr. Roger Williams: My hon. Friend points to an important part of the problem, but the other part of the problem is that Dairy Farmers of Britain encouraged some of its producers to put money into shares rather than receive it for their milk, so there is a double loss.

Mr. Heath: There is a double loss, but I do not deplore the practice entirely, because a good co-operative includes a degree of member involvement in the business. None the less, it just shows how fragile the whole set-up is. Indeed, to return to my point, until we can be sure that liquid milk prices are sufficiently high to ensure producer and co-operative profitability, we will experience such fragility in the market.

We have already mentioned nitrate vulnerable zones, and I accept entirely what the Secretary of State said: the problem was not of his making and what was signed up to in Brussels predated this entire Administration. But, what was signed up to in Brussels was daft and needed unpicking, and some of us have argued strenuously over the past couple of years for proper derogations to ensure that we do not put our producers in considerable difficulty, given not only the capital investment that they will have to make, but the agricultural activities into which they will be forced. Those activities are not sensible in terms of proper land management and slurry spreading, given the latter's confinement to limited periods. They do not make sense for the land, for good husbandry or for the people who live around those farms and who, for a couple of days a year, will be subject to misery as a

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result. We should strenuously argue that case, and, until we have the right response from the European Union, the directive should be quietly put in a box somewhere, because it is too difficult to implement.

Bovine tuberculosis is a national scandal. In 2008, 41,718 cattle were slaughtered—a huge increase. One can almost see the front line, and the little arrows with bovine tuberculosis on them, spreading up and across the country from the south-west, like the introduction to “Dad’s Army”. But we are not prepared to do what is necessary to arrest the advance. It is no good saying that the principal vector is cattle-to-cattle transfer. We know that; everybody does. However, I know of all too many closed farms in my constituency that have had no cattle movements but where tuberculosis comes out of nowhere. But it does not come out of nowhere, of course; we know that it comes from the feral population. Yet we are not prepared to deal with that endemic badger disease, although it has to be addressed for welfare reasons. The situation cannot go on. Even if we did not believe that acting for welfare reasons was necessary, the situation is a nonsense in economic terms as the cost to the taxpayer is enormous.

Furthermore, when a farmer sees his or her herd slaughtered, the effect is catastrophic and appalling. That is especially true if the herd is of pedigree or organic stock and irreplaceable, or if it is destroyed on the basis of a gamma interferon test and the Department refuses to carry out a corroboratory test to see whether there is an infection. In such cases, the Department acts on the basis of a test for tuberculosis that has already been shown to be far from conclusive. We have to grasp that issue. I know that it is politically difficult and why the Government do not want to act, but that is not an excuse. The time has come, I am afraid, to do something about it.

We have mentioned the electronic identification of sheep. Again, I hear what the Secretary of State is saying; he is attempting to delay the introduction of the measure and trying to argue for a derogation. However, that is another nonsense, as my hon. Friend the Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) pointed out. The rationale behind the directive—if ever there was one—has already gone, and in practical and economic terms it is a nonsense. Why are we proceeding? Sometimes we just have to say to the European Commission that some directives are nonsense and that it is not sensible for the country to implement them in their current condition.

I am glad that the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) mentioned the pig sector. I am very fond of it, because I used to breed pigs myself—albeit only four breeding Tamworth sows, which hardly made me a major producer. The pig sector has to compete in a totally artificial and unfair trading environment, as it is not getting the benefit from the high welfare standards that it has rightly introduced. I do not argue for one moment against the pig industry’s welfare standards, but the issue of food labelling is critical. It has been pushed by the hon. Member for South Norfolk (Mr. Bacon); I am a co-signatory to his Bill, which I support strongly. Until we let the consumer know and give them the confidence that they are buying meat produced in the

most welfare-friendly environment, they will not have the option of choosing British and knowing that British is best. It is important that we give them that confidence.

Others have mentioned the problems of regulation. We still vastly over-regulate the industry in too many ways. The Rural Payments Agency, which got itself into one heck of a mess—an absolute fiasco—recovered slightly, but I fear that it is getting back into a mess. All the indications from my constituents are that it is again not doing its job effectively. I ask Ministers to intervene now to stop it getting into yet another disastrous situation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Montgomeryshire (Lembit Öpik) mentioned abattoirs. What a nonsense it is, when we are trying to develop good welfare systems and reduce mileage, that we should be closing all our local abattoirs and create circumstances in which we have to move animals over long distances to go to the abattoir. That confounds common sense.

My last point about the industry concerns marketing effectively and finding the right markets for our goods. I agree with the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole about public procurement policy. However, I am not sure that I entirely accept his remarks about the effects of what we used to call the compulsory competitive tendering regime, which the previous Government introduced for local authorities. I seem to remember cases going before the courts where it was said that it was impossible to add a moral dimension to the tendering process because that was anti-competitive behaviour. That led to the absurd situation whereby one could not specify the origin of the produce or the standards that it was required to meet. Surely we can do something about that. We are now 15 or 20 years on from CCT, and it is now right that public procurement agencies—whether the military, local government, or the national health service—do the right thing, which is to buy British, and to do so in quantity, to support our industry.

Let me finish by linking agriculture to the environment. We need to have systems in place that do not go back to the encouragement of over-production but reward good practice in agriculture and environmental stewardship. We need to protect the marginal areas of production, such as hill farms, which are very fragile, and wetlands, which are very difficult to farm, and ensure that they can be farmed effectively, not only for the inherent benefits that that brings but for the better management of the land and the success of the communities in those areas. We should ensure that farmers are able to enter into agreements for whole river catchment area schemes to maintain wetlands in order to reduce floods.

We should be encouraging farmers to be involved with anaerobic digesters. I remember arguing that case when I was a county councillor 20 years ago. I asked why on earth why we in this country did not have anaerobic digesters, as that was so obviously a better solution than many of the other forms of disposal. Yet the industry in this country is still in its infancy.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I am sorry to intervene on the hon. Gentleman, but I am having a brief respite from the Equality Bill. Does he agree that the problem with anaerobic digestion is not only one of capital costs but of local authorities’ unwillingness to consider dispersed solutions to waste? They are still obsessed with the idea that one size fits all; I have to say we suffer from that in Gloucestershire.

Mr. Heath: I do agree. They used to think of using the biggest possible hole in the ground, and now they can no longer do that, they think of using the biggest possible incinerator. That is not the solution.

Just like energy production, waste disposal is best done locally. I would like farmers to get a direct benefit for their activities in relation to carbon capture. We say a lot about methane release in farming, but agriculture, particularly horticulture and arboriculture, is capable of acting as a substantial carbon sump, and it would be nice if that were recognised in Government thinking. We should ensure that planning processes understand the needs of rural areas, particularly the agricultural dimension, but I fear that that is not the case. We talk about diversification, but as soon as anyone tries to produce it, or tries to produce rural housing, they find that some newly qualified planner—because planning authorities usually only have those nowadays—says no. It seems to be difficult to break through with any level of common sense as regards planning in rural areas.

We should be encouraging much more recreational use of the countryside, in combination with food production. The recreational capacity of the countryside is much greater than its current use. We could have a whole network of bridleways and much more equestrian activity if we planned for it and were prepared to stimulate it. I would like that to happen.

We have to find better ways of supporting the agricultural sector and rural areas in this country, and we can do that best by producing the context in which they can prosper, not just by feeding them money. We need to innovate and make available the skills that they need, and we need to find the markets for their produce, which is eminently marketable because British produce is still some of the best in the world. We ought to recognise and celebrate that. At the moment, I fear that we are doing neither.

4.10 pm

Mr. David Anderson (Blaydon) (Lab): It has become quite normal for some people to believe that Labour Members have no interests in farming or rural issues. That idea was clearly put to bed by my hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey). I come from one of the oldest industrial areas in the country, but a large proportion of my constituency is rural, and I wish to pick up on some of the issues that have been raised in the debate.

An issue that came to my mind while the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) was speaking was rural payments. It was like a bad ghost coming into the room. We probably had a smaller work load on that issue, but for the people concerned it was a serious problem. He said that it was possibly going to come back, and I hope that the Minister will get up to speed, so that if it does come back he can nip it in the bud and people will not have to go through what they did a couple of years back.

In our area, farmers have done tremendous work. There is some really good partnership work, and we are developing the Great North forest across the whole north-east and down into Yorkshire. That is possible only because of the work of farmers who have been prepared to work with local authorities and organisations such as Natural England to make it a real success.

Another example that comes to mind is the reintroduction of the red kite in my constituency. It was wiped out in the north of England sometime in the mid-1800s, and over the past five years there has been a tremendously successful reintroduction scheme. It is probably the first such scheme anywhere in the world where, within 3 miles of where the birds were introduced, there is an urban centre—the Metro centre, the biggest shopping centre in Europe. That scheme would not have been possible without the co-operation of farmers. There was great help from organisations such as Northumbrian Water, the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and Gateshead council, but if local farmers had not been prepared to buy into the scheme, it would not have been the success that it has been.

On the back of that, a red kite trail has been developed and is bringing tourists into the area. The local bus company has branded nine of its buses with the red kite, at a cost of £9,000 a bus. It has taken that cost on itself and won a national award, but it did not do it for that reason, it did it to publicise what was happening. The scheme has been very successful, particularly for young people. There are not enough kites for each school that wants to adopt one to do so, and we pray that the kites will get on and do what they should be doing. Some 94 were released, but there are a lot more than 94 now, thank goodness.

The scheme has been a huge success, and there has even been feedback from the kites to the farmers. The farmers report to us that on a farm within 400 yd of what was a huge council estate, the red kites are now eating sheep's afterbirth when lambs are born. The farmers calculate that they are saved two days of work a year in cleaning up afterbirth, so the kites are already giving their thanks to the farmers for helping them flourish again. It really is a success story.

I spend every moment that I can—like everybody else in this place, I do not have much time—trying to get away and get some peace. My place to go for peace is Teesdale, a fantastic area. To survive there is a tough job for the farmers, including hill farmers. Some Members in the Chamber—looking around, probably all of us—are old enough to remember the story of Hannah Hauxwell, who was featured in a 1970s television documentary about where she was living in the dale. The conditions were very tough, and she had no running water and no electricity. Thankfully, most places there are not like that now, but some of the arctic conditions remain.

There is a reservoir in Teesdale called Cow Green, and the weather station up there maps weather models like those of Reykjavik. That gives some idea of what the conditions are like. The people who work there are the salt of the earth. I have the great pleasure of meeting some of them in a fantastic public house called the Langdon Beck hotel. I would welcome the Minister there. If he really wants to see farming in the raw, he should go there—we would make him welcome. We disagree about many things in the House, but we should all agree that we owe a tremendous debt to the people who work the farms of this country. We should never forget that.

I want to talk specifically about the dairy in Blaydon. This time last week, we thought that we were close to getting a deal to keep it open. The Secretary of State was very supportive and involved himself personally in getting the receiver to give us some breathing space last

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Thursday. We thought that there would be a deal. The union and the work force worked hard and the bank that was involved seemed to be saying all the right things. Sadly, on Friday morning, the news came through that the bank had decided not to go ahead.

As I said in my intervention on the Secretary of State, there is a rumour—I would like to think that it is just a rumour, not a fact—that the plug was pulled because the bank account could not be put in place for four weeks. If we are facing that sort of bureaucratic nightmare in this country, the problem must be resolved. The outcome is that 299 dairy staff are out of work. The 288 farmers who fed into the dairy may, thankfully, have been relieved by the Secretary of State's words today. However, problems clearly remain for many people in the north-east. I hope that, if there is any more we can do, we are doing it.

The regional officer for the FBU—I mean the NFU; I said FBU because the former fire Minister is on the Front Bench. Dennis Gibb, the National Farmers Union regional officer, said about the impact of the dairy closure:

“The thought of Blaydon having to close down fills me with absolute horror... The worldwide milk market will be partly to blame. The world is saturated with dairy produce at the moment, which has undermined the milk price, which has of course made it more difficult... Over the last few years we have seen the gradual erosion of dairying in the North East and I fear this closure will be another hammer blow for milk production in this part of the world.”

I would like to think that that is not the case. If the Secretary of State and the Minister can do anything to support the reintroduction of the dairy business in the north-east, I urge them to do so.

The debate on the rural economy on Monday was closed by the Under-Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Wansdyke (Dan Norris). I cannot believe what he said—I thought he must have meant it as a joke. He said:

“It is difficult to provide any further information at this point, because the situation is very fluid.”—[*Official Report*, 15 June 2009; Vol. 494, c. 85.]

The situation is not very fluid; it is very sad. I hope that the Minister can give us news about any possible help for the people in Blaydon. Even if the dairy cannot open, is there a role for DEFRA in helping those people try to find work?

4.17 pm

Mr. Michael Jack (Fylde) (Con): I compliment the hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. Anderson) on a moving speech, in which he alerted us to the importance of integrating the environment and farming in the context of the exploitation of his lovely part of Northumberland through the example of the red kite and the benefits of its reintroduction and farmers' work to sustain interest from urban dwellers in rural Northumbria. He also reminded us poignantly of the human situation, which has tragically evolved, of Dairy Farmers of Britain.

The hon. Gentleman put his finger on a crucial issue as we debate some of the long-term factors that affect the security of supply of food and the short-term developments in the marketplace, which operates on a

day-to-day and sometimes an hour-by-hour basis. One of the challenges that I would like to address is how to reconcile the long-term aspiration of a safe and secure food supply with the fact that, on the journey, the marketplace will have its ups and downs, as the hon. Gentleman just discussed.

I stand before the House as the president of the Shepherd Road allotment society in my constituency. I know from bitter experience the genuine problems that the producers of agricultural produce have to face. In August, I face an army of caterpillars. If I am not there immediately to administer the coup de grâce, that rampaging horde undoes all my hard work to ensure that I have a brassica crop ready to eat in the winter.

I mention that little personal anecdote because when we consider the provision of food, we realise that we have all become entirely reliant on somebody else producing our food for us. More than 40 per cent. of our food spend in this country is outside the home. Mention has been made of supermarkets, and when we go down to Sainsbury's, Tesco or Marks and Spencer, we see that they are absolutely full, seven days a week, of an unbelievable array of produce.

I can remember my mother taking me when I was a little boy in the '50s to a fruiterer's shop in York, where I grew up, and showing me an avocado pear. In those days they cost £1, which would be 10, £12 or £15 now. Today, people can buy avocado pears for less than 40p. They have become a commodity. In those days there was wonder—there was something different; there was seasonality—but today we have a 52 weeks-a-year supply of a glittering array of produce, because the world of agriculture has so adapted to meet the demands of the consumer.

That is one of the dimensions of the debate which has been missing to date, so let us reflect for a moment on what the 21st-century food consumer is asking of the supply chain, of which farmers are a key part. However, that perhaps also reflects the context in which I make that remark, because the food and drink industry in the United Kingdom is worth a staggering £162 billion. It generates the equivalent of 7 per cent. of our GDP and employs 3.7 million people. Food and drink is very big business. Depending on which estimate we use, the food part of the industry is worth somewhere between £65 billion and £80 billion. If we consider that on a global basis, we see that we are dealing with a very big industry indeed, which employs many millions of people globally, and that ensuring that the supply chains work on the 24/7, 365-days-a-year basis on which we operate is incredibly complicated.

When we as politicians give our views about the industry, we have to take into account the aspirations of the consumer. Consumers want affordability, availability, high quality, variety and choice. They also want things that taste good and they want to know more about the provenance of their food. We could have a debate on any element in that list. Ensuring that we in this country enjoy the food that we have is a complicated business. Indeed, given certain other targets, which I shall talk about in a moment, we have some genuine challenges for the future.

It is against that background that I want to address a remark that the Secretary of State made, which I wrote down. He said, “I want British agriculture to produce as much as possible.” One of the problems with which I

have concerned myself, and which the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Committee, which I have the honour of chairing, also looks at, is the difference between the declaratory statements of politicians, who perhaps believe that if they say all the right supportive things, something will happen, and the policy levers that they have to pull to make things happen. Saying that we would like something to happen is very different from actually making it happen.

One of the themes underpinning agricultural policy is a withdrawal by politicians from the decision-making processes by which farmers decide what to do with their land. The reforms of the common agricultural policy; compulsory modulation; the ending of payment schemes based on the quantity of agricultural produce that a farmer grows or, in the case of livestock, raises on his land—those days have gone. Farmers throughout the European Union now have to make their own commercial decisions. Because of the scheme under the mid-term review that we adopted, the United Kingdom is further down the road than more or less anybody else in Europe. Against that background, it is interesting that, in discussing the arguments that will shape the 2013 reforms, Mrs. Fischer Boel, the Agriculture Commissioner, is talking about possibly withdrawing the Commission's agricultural remit further, by not using the public's money for anything that affects what farmers produce.

However, we face certain challenges that will pose important questions for political decision makers about how they can meet the consumer's aspirations for a safe, long-term, sustainably produced food supply, yet as legislators have less and less to do with the commercial decisions that farmers make daily. We understand from the debate on the Dairy Farmers of Britain that short-term fluctuations in the market could affect the long-term achievement of those aspirations. In this debate, we have heard about the restructuring of the dairy industry and about the decline in the number of pig producers and in the number of animals produced in the livestock sector in general. We can see the difficult interplay between the short-term market situation and the long-term aspirations of consumers, who hope that the decision makers will play their part in fulfilling them.

Some of these matters have formed the work of the Select Committee. We have covered fields as diverse as animal disease, the reform of the common agricultural policy, the milk industry, and, more recently, pigs and the rural economy. The work that we are undertaking on food security at the moment is highly germane to this debate. I do not want to anticipate the findings of the Committee, because our work is still at a formulative stage. However, hearing a great deal of evidence on the subject has inevitably conditioned my own reaction to some of the issues that we have been discussing today.

One of the most interesting aspects of this work was the Secretary of State's appearance before the Select Committee last November to talk about his Department's policies. Given that climate change had been removed from his Department's principal areas of activity, I asked him what his main priority had become. He hesitated briefly before answering, "Food". It was almost as though DEFRA had rediscovered one of the key activities for which it was responsible. It is, after all, the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I do not blame the Government for having attached a high priority to climate change issues, but I think that

that had resulted in the Department taking its eye off the ball when it came to its food policies. The fact that we last debated this subject in Government time in 2002, as my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) reminded the House earlier, perhaps tells its own story.

I am glad that DEFRA has rediscovered food, because the Select Committee was concerned about the joint DEFRA-Treasury document produced in 2005, which suggested, when discussing reform of the common agricultural policy, that everything would be all right because the world's markets would ensure supply and that we should not worry about food security. Only a short time later, in 2007, we saw the first signs of what became a major increase in world food prices, at which point real questions started to be asked about the world's food supply chain.

A combination of crop failures in places such as Australia, the intervention of speculation in buying commodities such as wheat and rice, the sudden restrictive activities of countries such as Argentina, which decided not to export their products, and the rise in the price of fertiliser in China as it attempted to deal with its own agricultural problems meant that, after a decade of falling prices for food, we suddenly had a price spike. All of a sudden, decision makers around the world got very interested in food.

In the United Kingdom, the Cabinet Office was commissioned to undertake a study. It produced a remarkable document which dealt with everything one ever wanted to know about food. It did not contain much about farming, but it had a lot about food. Then, we had "Food Matters", another glorious publication from the Cabinet Office, after which DEFRA entertained us with the start of the process that the Secretary of State has said he will soon bring to a conclusion, with the publication of its own strategy. Behind all that, there has been a plethora of activities, meetings and all kinds of other things that I shall come to in a moment. So, all of a sudden, now that we have rediscovered food and had a kick up the backside from what was happening in the world markets, food security is marching up the agenda and we have to do something about it.

What worries me is that, having got past the food price spike, we might well relax. It is perhaps worth reflecting on the fact that the world food price index produced by the Food and Agriculture Organisation stood at 208 in April 2008, but had fallen to 143 just one year later. For cereals—a key ingredient of concerns about food and food security—the index was at 274 in April 2008, but has dropped to 179 today. The paradox is that during that period, farmers responded and increased the amount of cereal that they were producing. Some American farmers produced perhaps a bit less biofuel, deciding that the food-fuel paradox could be put to one side for a moment, and we saw an increase in production. In the short term—surprise, surprise—prices fell.

It is against that background that I draw again on my theme of the juxtaposition of the long-term supply challenges we face and the short-term operation of the market. The Rome summit of 2008 was a response to and addressed world food security issues. I had the honour of representing the Select Committee in Rome over two days, and it was a remarkable meeting. There was such a diversity of opinion that it illustrated the intermingling of complexity in dealing with food supply

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chain issues, the relationships between modern western agriculture and development issues, the problems of sub-Saharan Africa, the challenge of developing economies around the world and some of the important political issues that are starting to emerge and influenced the conference.

Let me draw the House's attention to a worrying development, which was a sub-plot to what was going on in Rome—the development of food colonialism. The phrase “the world will supply” in the vision document, to which I referred earlier, was predicated on the facts that organisations such as the World Trade Organisation would come to a conclusion, that we would have a more liberalised trade regime, that everybody would play fair and that the rules would apply. It is also very clear—and borne out by the Select Committee's visit to Brazil during its recent inquiry into food security—that an awful lot of international investors, particularly from countries such as China, are going around the world and buying up productive capacity in other people's back yards. International investment is making its way to places such as Brazil because of the country's huge potential, but that begins a transformation of the supply chain of food in the world in a way that could be quite threatening to our quarter of the globe.

If we view that against the background of what we should be doing to bring us full circle back to questions about the common agricultural policy and our domestic agricultural policy, it is evident that we have a more complex situation to deal with. Let me make it even more complicated by saying that there was, sadly, no DEFRA representative at the conference; the Government were represented—very ably, I am sure—by the Department for International Development. This demonstrated that the UK Government's perspective at the time of the conference was that it was more about development issues than about making a rounded response to food security issues.

Targets were set at the conference by both the FAO and the UN General-Secretary, Ban Ki-moon, demonstrating that we needed a 50 per cent. increase in food production by 2030 and a doubling by 2050. That made me stop and think for a moment. I am getting on a bit—I am in my last year in the House; this may be the last speech I deliver on a major subject. Here we are, I thought, nearly on the doorstep of 2010—to make the maths right—and we need to achieve a 50 per cent. increase in our food supply in another 20 years. If we add on another 20 years, we have to double it.

By the time we have addressed the technological and sustainability challenges and a good many policy issues, time starts to run very quickly indeed. When we add to that the complexity of global warming, which we discussed earlier today, we have an interesting mix with which to deal.

When the Committee was working on its report, we went to Rothamsted and talked to the scientists there about the potential of UK agriculture. They made the point that while we are very good in the arable, livestock and dairy sectors, we should ask ourselves how we can maximise those advantages against the background of the demands of sustainability, but also within the complex world picture that I have painted.

A fact from which we cannot run away in a debate such as this is that, however much we may urge our own Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to do all that it can to support UK farming potential, in a world of uncertainty where, for example, an unknown animal disease can suddenly decimate a particular part of our livestock sector and climatic change can dramatically alter the food chain, we must ensure that we have security at home. That does not mean saying, “I want to keep out Johnny Foreigner's food,” but it does mean saying, “I want our population to be safely fed.” We need to exploit both our national—in the sense of large-scale—agricultural potential and our localised food chains, because that will add another dimension of security. If big fails, small can at least make its contribution. In our discussions about policy, we need to focus just as much on smaller-scale as on large-scale agricultural activity.

Before I became a Member of Parliament, I made my living in horticulture. The enterprise for which I worked as marketing manager had 12,000 acres of horticultural crops to manage, and 400 acres that we grew. I understand what it is like to operate in the non-subsidised sector—to live or die according to one's ability to meet the demands of customers or consumers—but I recognise the incredible change undergone by our horticultural industry in order to survive. We have the world's largest indoor protected facility in Planet Thanet, which is a remarkable facility to have in this country. It shows that we can be innovative in a way that enables all parts of our agricultural potential to contribute to the task of securing our long-term food supply.

I want to say a little about reform of the common agricultural policy. One of the subjects on which the debate on the Lisbon treaty, for all its controversial nature, chose not to alight was a change in the treaty obligations. I welcome the new Minister to his post. He follows the right hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy), who did a great deal of work to get up to speed with a complex brief in as short a time as possible. One of the issues that he will have to tackle is the question of what drives Europe's agricultural policy.

The question posed at Rothamsted can be widened slightly. What is the responsibility of western agricultural nations for meeting their share of the long-term targets that I mentioned earlier? That does not mean British Ministers going along and pledging an X per cent. increase in production. They cannot do that. It is not like setting an aspirational target; they must do something else to encourage our farmers to play their part in helping to meet the challenge. But what about the rest of Europe? We know how politicised French agriculture is, and how domestic Italian agriculture can be. We know that there is big agri-business in Germany. All those countries have very different perspectives, but they must all operate within the terms of the common agricultural policy.

Article 38 of the Lisbon treaty refers to the establishment of a common policy for agriculture and fisheries. Article 39 states:

“The objectives of the common agricultural policy shall be...to increase agricultural productivity by promoting technical progress and by ensuring the rational development of agricultural production and the optimum utilisation of the factors of production, in particular labour”.

That is shorthand for “Let’s keep lots of small farmers in Germany going because it’s politically difficult to do otherwise.” It talks about assuring the availability of supply, and the particular nature of agricultural activity that results from the social structure of agriculture and from structural and natural disparities between the various agricultural regions. I could go on, but the treaty makes no mention of sustainability, climate change or the kind of global challenges we face. Commission officials and commissioners are fond of terms such as “multi-functionality” at which the eyes of most people in this country would glaze over, as they would not recognise it as an expression that tries to describe the integral role of agriculture in rural communities, providing the glue that holds them together.

I am sad that the Lisbon treaty did not address the need to bring up to speed the approach that will guide the common agricultural policy for some time to come, and make it a 21st-century treaty obligation to help with the reform process, which must get real; in fact, the comments from both Front-Bench speakers about, for example, the pesticides directive, the tagging of sheep and so on illustrate the fact that in the short term the things that drive change in the CAP do not give much chance to enable Europe to address the fundamental questions in a part of the globe where we have a tremendous productive advantage and where, against a background of climate change, we will be able to produce. We will have water and we have good soil. We have the techniques and the technology, but what are we going to contribute to meeting the global targets when Ministers cannot press buttons to set targets for individual farmers?

That brings me to the question of how DEFRA is organising itself to interact with that matter. One of the things on which we cannot fail the Government is that apart from the documents that I mentioned earlier, we now have a Cabinet Sub-Committee dealing with the matter; we have an official food strategy task force and a council of food policy advisers and so on. The only slight problem is that apart from the council of food policy advisers, nobody has a clue what the rest of these good people have been doing. Nobody knows how many times the ministerial Sub-Committee on food (DA(F)) has met, let alone what it has been discussing. I heard today on the radio—I think on the “Today” programme—that we are in the decade of transparency. If we are, can we have some transparency about what this Cabinet Sub-Committee is actually doing? If DEFRA is using this as a chance to reassert leadership in terms of the UK Government, that is good, but can we know what it is actually trying to achieve?

Rightly, the Department of Health is involved; dealing with food security means that we have to address questions such as how much food we do not eat and how much more food we should not be eating—the obesity issue. Many of the business issues that affect our great food companies are more in the province of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills than that of DEFRA. I have touched on DFID, which is also important in the issue. The Sub-Committee is made up of the right players, but we need to know its agenda and what it has been doing.

Likewise, I know through meeting people from the food industry that the food strategy task force’s meetings pop up all over the country. I do not know what the outcomes of those meetings are, or what DEFRA has

been discussing. The Department has a real opportunity to start achieving one of its objectives: helping the food chain to respond to long-term challenges and to know what the agenda is. I looked at DEFRA’s own document “Ensuring the UK’s food security in a changing world”, and some of the questions are so general as to make one wonder whether it has thought through some of the issues. However, I am sure that it has, and I look forward to the publication of the strategy, and I also hope that our Select Committee, which aims to have its report out before the summer recess, will be able to make a contribution to that exercise. We recognise that an agenda for action must be set, and that we will not solve all the problems of our food and farming industry overnight.

I shall now concentrate on an issue that underpins all that I have said. In order for farming to achieve the aims and deal with the challenges of world food security, the Food and Agriculture Organisation targets, global warming, world disease, pandemics and the growth in population, and to do so in a sustainable way, it must have the right degree of knowledge. It is ironic that within the last few days we learned that Manchester United had sold Mr. Ronaldo—yes, a talented footballer—to Barcelona for, it is alleged, some £80 million, as that sum somewhat exceeds DEFRA’s annual research budget. That puts into context where our priorities lie. The budget of John Innes, a remarkable research institution, is £25 million. It is among the world leaders in analysing the DNA of our plants and dealing with the diseases that could threaten crops on a global basis, yet how much money can it rely on annually from Government? The answer is £12.5 million. The other £12.5 million of its earnings have to be derived from competitive contracts. I want the best scientists we can get hold of to be working on these problems, for this country and also for the world.

I say “for the world” because, although Rothamsted made it clear to us that the paucity of funding in this area is making it difficult for it to keep its talented scientists, we know that those that we have are recognised internationally as among the best. That is why the Brazilian EMBRAPA organisation, which handles all its agricultural research and spends some £375 million a year on research, has invested in an exercise called Labex at Rothamsted. It wants to work with our scientists to help solve its problems. That is an indication of the quality of our science, but it needs to have some support.

I acknowledge that in addition to DEFRA’s money, the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council put £185 million into agricultural research, but the chief scientist, Professor Beddington, indicated that we needed to have an uplift of some £100 million a year of spending on agricultural research. Although the BBSRC sums have increased, we know from evidence that the Committee received from the National Farmers Union that between 1986 and 1998 there had been a 45 per cent. real-terms cut in publicly funded agricultural science in the UK. I say that that situation is unacceptable. A lot more investment than we are currently making is needed if we are seriously to take on the task of securing the world’s, and our own, food supply, because we must have more knowledge if we are to learn how to increase sustainably, and securely so as to deal with crop disease, the potential of UK agriculture from, for example, our 4 to 4.5 acres a hectare arable to perhaps 9 or 10 acres.

[Mr. Michael Jack]

That came out when the Committee visited Pirbright to look at the whole question of how we can deal with the world challenge of transmissible diseases. When I found out that DEFRA had pulled out of the redevelopment of Pirbright, leaving that to the BBSRC but only giving Pirbright an annually renewable £5 million contract for monitoring animal disease, that told me that somewhere in the middle of Government we are, yet again, not getting right the sustenance of one of the world leaders in monitoring animal disease. We are the reference point in the world for foot and mouth outbreak. We are also dealing with avian influenza, bluetongue and West Nile disease, and various other diseases are out there champing at the bit to get into this country. We need to make our defences as strong as possible.

If, when the new Minister is looking at his diary, he decides that he wants to spend a profitable morning, he should go to see what is being done at Pirbright, and he should visit Merial to see how to defend against animal diseases. That would allow him to understand without a shadow of a doubt why, if we are to be able, as we have been, to deal effectively with our animal diseases, and if the sharing is to mean anything in terms of cost, we must ensure that places such as Pirbright are properly equipped with the right scientists, we must reform the Institute for Animal Health properly, and we must establish a proper working relationship with the Veterinary Laboratories Agency. Those are high priorities for DEFRA if we are to have a comprehensive and viable livestock sector.

Hon. Members will be aware that this is a challenging subject, and I shall conclude by making one or two observations about what we saw in Brazil, because it is sometimes extremely useful to see how other people do things. Brazil is very different from the United Kingdom. Brazil is an agricultural giant in terms of its potential. There, one can visit a farming enterprise that has 220,000 hectares under cultivation, which is, by my calculation, about 500,000 acres, and meet people who will say that they want to expand—for example, in soya, cotton or coffee production—by doubling the amount of land on which they operate. That is put into context by the fact that Brazil could bring into production anywhere between 90 million and 200 million hectares, which allows one to understand not only the potential but the need for capital, science, infrastructure development and sustainability. One can see the need for the west to give Brazil sufficient assistance—but not to direct it—to safeguard the rainforest and ensure that the removal of certain forest areas and the turning of them into savanna is done in a sustainable way.

All that emphasises the fact that if we are to draw a modicum of security from the fact that Brazil is out there with the potential to help our food supply, we need to contribute to what it is doing. Brazil takes its responsibilities seriously; it contributes to help sub-Saharan Africa deal with its agricultural problems and overcome the lack of productivity, the difficulty of post-harvest handling and so on. I make that point merely to say that the UK has a role to play in helping, but it also illustrates the global nature of food, farming and the environment, which is the subject of this debate. We cannot solve the problems on this subject on our own; we have to solve them, in policy terms, in both a

European and a global context. We must develop the right bilateral relationships with other countries if we are to be assured of a safe, secure, affordable and sustainable supply of food, which would be a source of pleasure to consumers, and indeed electors, in this country.

4.53 pm

Mr. Stephen Crabb (Preseli Pembrokeshire) (Con): I am grateful for the opportunity to participate briefly in this extremely important debate. First, may I apologise to you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, and to other hon. Members for the fact that duties elsewhere in the House have meant that I have missed portions of this debate?

As has been noted, this is the first debate in Government time on food and farming in five or six years, so it is long overdue. There are some serious issues facing our food producers and our farming industry, and they have not been addressed sufficiently in Government time or in Opposition time on the Floor of this House in recent years.

I genuinely welcome the new Minister to his post. He has an opportunity to recalibrate things and demonstrate again that this Government are committed to the UK's agricultural industry. Personally I could not care less whether he is a vegetarian—that has nothing to do with the issue; what matters is his commitment, and that of his Department and his ministerial colleagues. He has a fresh opportunity to show that.

I wish to focus on two particular issues in the time available to me. The first is bovine TB, which has been mentioned this afternoon. Hon. Members should be in no doubt about what a disaster bovine TB is for many farmers up and down the country. It has hugely damaging consequences. I have sat with a farmer who has just lost his herd and seen his business subjected to huge movement restrictions, and that tough, practical man was reduced to tears—a very sad thing to see.

The disease is spreading, as the most recent map of the disease zone shows. Farming representatives come here every year to lobby Members of Parliament and to speak to Ministers and officials. They can be forgiven for thinking that it is like “Groundhog Day”, as they keep making the arguments and providing the evidence, but see precious little real action. Given that the evidence base from which Ministers are working is the same in England as it is in Wales, why is it that the Welsh Assembly Government have adopted a different—and far more progressive—approach to tackling the disease? I am not known as someone who lavishes praise on the Welsh Assembly, but they have got it right in this regard.

I want a clearer explanation from the Government of why a targeted cull is still out of the question. Is it just because the politics are too difficult? That answer will not cut it with the farming community, which is sick of the issue and wants some real action and solutions. I encourage the Minister to address that question and to liaise closely with the Welsh Assembly Government to see what lessons can be learned.

The second issue, which has been referred to several times by hon. Members, is the collapse of Dairy Farmers of Britain and, more generally, the state of the UK dairy industry. My first Adjournment debate, which I secured shortly after becoming a Member of Parliament in 2005, was on the state of the dairy industry, which is

hugely important to my constituency. Dairy farming is woven into the very fabric of life in Pembrokeshire, but it lurches from crisis to glimmers of hope—so farmers start investing again—back to crisis. Just in the last few days, I have received six or seven e-mails and letters from farmers in my constituency who have supplied Dairy Farmers of Britain and are under considerable financial pressure as a result of the collapse of that co-operative.

One of those letters was from a medium-sized dairy farmer in my constituency, and it tells me of his membership arrangements with the co-operative. He says:

“I am a dairy farmer milking 110 dairy cows, and was a member of, and supplied our milk to DFOB.”

He says that his membership investment over the past seven years has seen

“£32,000 deducted from our monthly milk cheque—this figure was calculated based on our milk production figures.”

He continues:

“In October 2008, DFOB failed to pay the interest on our Membership Investment, stating that the global financial crisis meant that it was not prudent to pay the interest. This set alarm bells ringing”—

as it did for other farmers in the area supplying that co-operative. His story goes on:

“From 1 November 2008, DFOB introduced a price cut of 2p per litre—this money was supposedly used to close down two of their factories...and put the company back on its feet. We estimate that this price drop cost us £10,000 from November to May.

On 3 June 2009, DFOB went into Receivership, calling in PWC to administer the Receivership.”

He also says that between 3 and 10 June, PWC—PricewaterhouseCoopers—will pay him a nominal fee for his milk, rumoured to be about 10p per litre, but what really concerns him is what will happen to his main milk cheque, which should be more than £14,000. That will be lost, and other farmers in my constituency are in the same position of losing payment for a whole month's worth of milk production. Those farmers are in no position to lose that kind of money. They have been operating on a knife edge for some years, they have been trying to invest where they can and cash flow has been very difficult. To lose such sums of money—an entire month's worth of milk payment—is very severe.

I do not expect the Minister to be able to wave a magic wand, but will he inform the House what discussions he is having with his colleagues and the industry about how they can support farmers affected by the collapse of Dairy Farmers of Britain? I appreciate the financial constraints that he and his colleagues are under, and I do not think that anybody expects him to start writing cheques to bail out farmers who have been hit, but farmers want to see that the Minister is alive to the issue and is taking it seriously.

In particular, I would welcome his thoughts on the behaviour of the banks in this case. One concern that several farmers have raised with me is the timing—the calling in of Dairy Farmers of Britain's loans in such a way that suppliers would lose that entire May milk cheque. I would welcome the Minister's response on that point.

5.1 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire) (Con): I remind the House of my interests as registered.

Although I obviously accept the apologies that the Secretary of State has given, I am sorry that he could not arrange his affairs so that he could be here, because he has missed a good debate. He has missed some very sensible, wise contributions from both sides of the House, without exception, from colleagues who have described issues in their constituencies from a heartfelt position. It is a great shame that the Secretary of State was not here for that.

The Secretary of State started his speech by referring to the general recession and suggesting that agriculture was the one industry that was doing quite nicely and was not in recession. Many farmers would say that that is because they have been in recession for the past 10 years. Indeed, many of the statistics would support that. Other Members spoke about the decline in production overall and in livestock numbers; they referred to the 500,000 fewer dairy cows, and the fact that beef production is down from 110 per cent. of consumption to 80 per cent., as well all the other statistics.

One statistic that has not been mentioned but that needs to be mentioned is the Government's figure for total income from farming when considered per capita. Hon. Members should remember that that is the total income from farming—it includes diversification such as holiday lets, adding value by turning milk into ice cream and so on. Yes, that figure went up last year. That is good news. The bad news is that it went up only as far as £18,000 a year. That is the figure across the whole work force, from the tractor driver to the cowman to the farmer and their investment. I do not think that there are many sectors of our economy where the average income per person employed in it is just £18,000. When we add in the capital investment to which so many hon. Members have referred, that puts it into context.

The hon. Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) referred to housing, which we discussed at length in Monday's debate. He said a lot of wise things. He also referred to composting, to pig farmers and to a number of other issues, most of which I agreed with. In particular, I agree with him about the smell in Winterton, because I have been there myself.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) rightly reminded us of the importance of the industry, and he quoted some statistics. I am assured by my office that his office was informed that I was going to the Royal Bath and West show—I have checked that since we spoke about it.

Nick Herbert: Mine too.

Mr. Paice: Indeed, my hon. Friend says the same, but whatever. We had a good time—that is the important thing. The cider was excellent. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome also referred to the importance of public understanding and knowledge of the industry.

The hon. Member for Blaydon (Mr. Anderson) made a heartfelt, moving speech. He spoke about the red kite, and I share his joy at the success of its reintroduction; it has been reintroduced all over the country, and not just in his part of the world. It is a great joy to drive up the M40 through the Chilterns and see them in the air, by the dozen sometimes. I was also touched by his reference to the debt that we all owe to farmers. If I may say so, it was all the more heartfelt and appreciated for coming from a Member on the Labour Benches. Many years

[Mr. Paice]

ago, in the days when everybody had car stickers, there was one that said, "Don't criticise farmers with your mouth full." That sums it up, in some ways—we should not forget that most of our food comes from them.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack) raised the level of the debate to take in global issues, the international aspects of policy, trade and the development of agriculture. I want to come back to his comments about the common agricultural policy. My hon. Friend the Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mr. Crabb) referred to the harsh, difficult and personal aspects of bovine TB, and to Dairy Farmers of Britain; I wish to refer to both those subjects, as virtually every other Member has done.

On Dairy Farmers of Britain, I said in the debate on Monday that I hope that those who are less enthusiastic about co-operatives than I am do not use the failure of Dairy Farmers of Britain as a stick with which to beat the concept of co-operation. I fear that the management of DFOB will have some pretty testing questions to answer in coming weeks. That is not an issue for us politicians; it is a matter for the former shareholders, and perhaps for DFOB's creditors and others. It seems quite clear that there have been some odd management decisions. Frankly, it has been an open secret for months that it was in serious trouble. I was told by the dairy industry back in September or October that DFOB would go down this summer; that was widely expected, and there are questions to answer.

In the short term, the issue is the state of the supplying farmers. Obviously, it is extremely good news that such a huge proportion of them have found other outlets—that is great—and that the receiver has managed to sell some of the factories, despite the failure to find a buyer or a management buy-out for the Blaydon plant. However, we should not run away with the assumption that for the vast majority of the dairy industry everything will be all right. Apart from other issues, which I will come to, there is the fact that milk prices are falling, generally. The farmers who contract directly with supermarkets to supply liquid milk are paid a reasonable price—nobody would say that it was excessive—but those who are selling to the manufacturing side, which is half the marketplace for British milk, face much lower prices, with worse in prospect. Global prices for cheddar, skimmed milk powder and other products are low and falling.

I wish to mention one of the issues that must be at the heart of the problems of our industry. I cannot fully understand why, with the major exception of Dairy Crest, British investors do not invest in British manufacturing. Other investors do. Müller, a German company, invested a large sum in the yoghurt plant in Shropshire, which is doing quite well, as are the producers involved. Arla, a Danish co-operative, came to this country and invested massively in our milk production. Yoplait has done the same. There are many other such examples, but where is the domestic investment? If we are to fight back against the imported dairy product market, we have to make that investment.

The Secretary of State and others referred to food security. I am concerned that, in some quarters, the attitude still seems to be that the issue is just the flavour of the month, and that we can forget about it. Some of the conservation bodies are saying such things, which is

a great shame, and is counter-productive. For all the reasons that the Secretary of State and my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde mentioned, food security is hugely important. No country can say, "It's up to everybody else." Just as with climate change, we cannot say, "We'll do our own thing and leave the matter to somebody else." Every single country on this planet has a responsibility to improve its food production—our country, too.

I want to address something that has not been mentioned at all in the debate: set-aside and the question mark over whether the Government should allow the industry to address the issues raised by an abolition of the voluntary scheme or, as some would have it, a further move to a compulsory scheme. A consideration of where we go with set-aside gives us the opportunity to take a quantum leap forward. Over the past few years, set-aside has provided environmental gains, although that was not the intention behind it. The Government and most of the farming industry, as well as the conservation groups, wanted to retain that benefit, even though it had been achieved by accident, so the first idea was, "Let's keep setting land aside." However, when we look at what else has happened, we find that although there has been considerable take-up of the entry level stewardship scheme, many farmers are saying that they will not continue with it and are fed up with the bureaucracy involved for relatively little money, so I fear for the scheme's long-term future.

Whether we are talking about set-aside or the ELS, we know that we will miss most of our biodiversity action plan targets for 2010. The farmland bird index continues to decline, despite 16 years of set-aside, which we are told is important for such birds. We are missing the whole point. We need to be thinking about managing, maintaining and enhancing biodiversity on a whole-landscape basis, rather than having a situation in which some farmers opt in and others opt out, or taking bits of land out of production. We need to farm and manage our landscape in the way that has the best effect, but I am worried that the response to the consultation on set-aside showed that some, including Natural England, still say that there need to be targets on taking X thousand hectares of land out of production. We should be thinking not about such targets, but about genuine biodiversity targets. We should be looking at indicator species of birds, wild flowers and insects, and all other aspects of biodiversity and our wildlife. If we can start by getting the real targets that we want, we can then devise schemes and involve the whole industry so that rather than some farmers doing a bit and their neighbour doing nothing, they can work together. They are worth far more together than the sum of their parts because that can lead to such things as the creation of wildlife corridors between natural habitats. Everyone needs to engage to make a voluntary system work and to recognise the huge step forward that can be achieved if we can get that right.

I do not believe that the future for farming lies in a choice between producing food or looking after wildlife—we must have both. However, if farming is to have a role in producing our food, we must make the marketplace work. I will not rehearse again the arguments that have been made about the importance of food labelling, and we have heard about public procurement. Although the Secretary of State was anxious to advance the

improvements—no one can deny that any step forward is welcome—there is still a long way to go, as my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert) clearly pointed out. To hark back to the milk market, although we have heard the Secretary of State refer to the fact that all the milk that we publicly procure is British, we must ask an interesting question: what price are our Government paying for liquid milk and how transparent is the supply chain?

If we are to make the marketplace work, we need to consider the quality of imports. I agree entirely with the hon. Member for Brigg and Goole that public procurement can be dealt with through proper specifications, which is why we say that the specification should be the little red tractor standard. It cannot be the little red tractor itself, because that means that the product is British, which an import cannot be; however, we could lay down such a standard, and it would at least create a more level playing field for our producers.

None the less, we would still have the absurd situation with the pesticides directive and thematic strategy, to which the Secretary of State referred, whereby our farmers will be prevented from using a range of active ingredients, yet we will still be able to import products on which overseas farmers have used them. That is ludicrous and patently daft. If there is a human health, animal health or animal welfare issue, the directive should apply wherever the food comes from and whoever grows it. Even if the risk is only to the operator, are we actually less concerned about an overseas spray operator than we are about a British operator? It is just crazy.

These problems are not all in the future, either. In my constituency, manufacturers from the fresh product sector, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde referred because of his experience, are already withdrawing products; next year, some existing lettuce crop products, for example, will not be available. The problem is here and now and the Government need to claim whatever derogations they can.

We also need to do more to make co-operatives work more effectively, and that is why I made my comment about DFOB. My hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs, in his opening speech, also referred to supermarkets, and we strongly support the Competition Commission's proposed code, which the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome mentioned. It is a very robust code, but it must be properly enforced. I am not too worried whether it is enforced by an independent, self-appointed ombudsman who is paid for by the supermarkets, by the Office of Fair Trading or by anybody else; what matters is that the code is properly enforced.

If the supermarkets genuinely care about long-term British food production, they have to think about their supply chain. When I speak to certain supermarkets, I find it quite galling when they say, "Oh, we never buy any livestock in the market; it is all procured direct from farmers and we have a jolly good relationship with them." The directors may believe that, but it is not the case on the ground. I can take Members to livestock market after livestock market to talk to real auctioneers, who will say, "That guy there is buying for Tesco." It is fair to say that those bullocks will not go straight from the market to the abattoir; they will go on to a farm for a week—and then they will go to the abattoir, together with dozens of other bullocks bought for Tesco from other markets to go to the same abattoir. Strictly, then,

supermarkets are not buying directly from the market but, if anything stretches credibility, it is that sort of practice. When everybody knows such practices occur, it makes people take all the supermarkets' other protestations with a significantly large pinch of salt.

Mr. Drew: Surely the problem is now with the ombudsman. Some supermarkets are resistant and reluctant to agree to the idea, but if the Government are seen to roll over, given the time that the issue has taken up with the Office of Fair Trading and the Competition Commission, the supermarkets will for ever think that, if they just hold out, the Government will give in. That cannot be right.

Mr. Paice: I am not quite sure that I follow the hon. Gentleman. If he is saying that the Government should impose the ombudsman quickly, I have a lot of sympathy with that point of view. We certainly cannot let the current arrangements go on ad nauseam.

Several Members referred to research and development, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Fylde referred to the fact that DEFRA now spends less on R and D than Barcelona spent on Ronaldo. That puts the matter into some context. What is equally worrying is the fact that the amount has gone down dramatically. In one of DEFRA's own parliamentary answers, it said that its spend on agriculture R and D was down from £82 million in 2001-02 to £63 million last year. The Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council has partly compensated for that, but the amount is certainly going in completely the wrong direction. Wherever I go, and wherever the Minister goes, as he will find as he gets into his job, he will find the industry saying that we have to invest more if we are to increase production from what, after all, is a limited and shrinking area of farmland in this country.

Several Members have referred to electronic identification. The Secretary of State said that he had written to other Ministers and that he is successful in persuading the European Commission to put the issue on the agenda. However, little has been said, except by the Secretary of State, on the issue of cost sharing. I agree with him that last year's bluetongue exercise was a significant step forward in co-operation, but that does not have much to do with the Government's consultation on cost sharing, which does exactly what most of the industry feared it would do—provide justification for getting the industry to pay half the costs of the Government's current disease control system. That is the wrong way round, and it does not even take into account the possibility of delivering the strategy more cheaply. The industry must be involved in developing the strategy.

The nitrate vulnerable zone issue has also been raised by a number of hon. Members. I cannot think of a more ridiculous piece of legislation. Of course it is true that it goes back to a directive that is itself long outdated; some of the science is hugely dubious. The Government should have gone back to the European Commission and said, "Come on, let's review the directive on which this thing is based." The Secretary of State will go down in history as the politician who put national muck-spreading day into statute—four national muck-spreading days, to be precise. Laid down in the statute of the United Kingdom are four specific days on which farmers can start spreading their muck. It does not matter what the

[Mr. Paice]

weather is, whether the farms are on flat or hilly ground, whether it is pouring with rain or there is bright sunshine or whether the county is in Cambridgeshire, Cumbria or Cornwall—those days are laid down in statute. What a ridiculous situation!

The hon. Member for Brecon and Radnorshire (Mr. Williams) rightly raised the issue of fallen stock and the fact that sheep and scrapie have been taken out of the whole BSE equation. Why do we still require sheep to be removed? Why can we not return to the on-farm burial of sheep?

Above all that hangs the whole issue of regulation. I do not suggest that the Secretary of State does not genuinely desire to lift the burden of regulation, but it is clear that it is not happening. One of the reasons is that the Government are still obsessed with process—with how one complies with a regulation, not with whether the necessary outcome has been achieved. That approach has to change; farmers have to be trusted. That is what we are trying to achieve, whether the issue is a lower nitrate level in ditches or higher standards of animal welfare. By all means, give farmers the target and tell them what they have to do; yes, jump on them if they do not achieve the objective. But do not lumber them with books and books of guidance, and inspectors to check whether the right boxes have been ticked. That is where the cost burden on business falls.

Several Members have referred to our uplands, and nowhere could the plight of agriculture be clearer. There has been a huge flight of stock from the uplands. I want to stress how important it is that we keep an adequate level of stock in such areas. We need to keep farmers in the uplands, for socio-economic reasons—they are important, and often the main part of the rural community. Furthermore, if the stock is not on the hills, there will not be the right vegetation; if that happens, the wildlife will go. Incidentally, gamekeepers are also important for the preservation of wildlife. If the wildlife is not there, the tourists do not come and the cycle continues in decline. All those issues are interlinked. We need to put more resources, even if from elsewhere, into the rural development programme for England and into the uplands.

It would be lovely to have a debate on forestry, which applies to the uplands but also to the whole of Britain. The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome touched on that issue, which falls within the broad subject area for this debate. Time, however, prevents me from addressing it.

Members have referred to the Rural Payments Agency. I share the view of those who think that we are rapidly going back to the shambles that we faced at the beginning. Only this morning, I had a letter from a constituent who has still not received much money, and the payment window closes next week. In April I was promised a full reply from the RPA about what the problems are—and there are many others—but I still have not got it. All the indications are that it does not reply to letters from us, and it certainly does not deal with communications from our farmers; indeed, they regularly report that every time they phone up they get someone different. That was supposed to have been resolved years ago. There is also slowness of action in other spheres. As

regards speciality produce, where the Government recently lost a legal case, the RPA is digging its heels in about implementing the legal decision.

The rural development programme for England is hugely important. It involves a lot of money and, as I said on Monday, there are big question marks about how effectively it is being spent—most importantly, about how axis 1 is being spent. Axis 1 of the RDPE is about equipping our farmers for the future. It is about farm modernisation, improving their competitiveness, and enabling them to meet a future where there will be a declining single farm payment, which we would all see in our crystal balls as being inevitable. I hope that when the Minister has got his feet under the desk he will have a look at how ineffectively that money is being used in equipping farmers for a future where, as Mariann Fischer Boel has said, there will be a shift of resources from pillar 1 to pillar 2, and other major problems will need to be faced up to in the next couple of years.

Our farming industry has, in one way or another, provided the food for the population of this country for thousands of years, and it is only right and proper that we expect it to do so for the future. It is not just an industry of some ancient, quaint past, but one with a massive part to play in the long-term future of our country. It will not always be as it has been—it will change. Farmers are learning to look after their soils better—to conserve organic matter because of its water retention properties, and to reduce erosion. If we look back using today's standards and values, we see that some practices of the past have proved to be wrong. There are huge challenges about fertility, with the decline in the supply of phosphates as well as nitrogen from fossil fuels. These are all big challenges.

All the industry expects, if it is to play such a huge role in the food security of this country, is that wherever possible the Government get off its back and create a better environment with more research and a more understanding means of dealing with competition from abroad as regards regulation and cheaper, lower-standard imports. Given those opportunities, I am certain that our industry has a great and profitable future—but, by goodness, things need to change to enable that to happen.

5.28 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Jim Fitzpatrick): I am delighted to follow the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), who is highly regarded for his knowledge of and commitment to farming, as well as for his courtesy as a senior Member of this House. He spoke, as ever, with great authority and summarised many of the excellent contributions that we have heard; I agree with him wholeheartedly in that regard. I assure him that the Secretary of State will not miss any of the issues that were raised, which will be picked up from his officials, from *Hansard*, or from meetings that he and I have planned in the days ahead.

We know that English farmers are doing an essential job for us all. I am honoured to have been appointed to this job by the Prime Minister. I know that there have been many raised eyebrows given the view of some that, as an inner-city MP, I may have a credibility gap to overcome. I was a child of the '50s and '60s, like the right hon. Member for Fylde (Mr. Jack). I was brought

up in a more respectful age, and I was brought up to admire and revere the countryside, even from the Gorbals, Pollokshaws and Pollokshields in Glasgow. I know that in my predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Jane Kennedy), I have a hard act to follow. I hope that I will be able to live up to the standards that she set and the expectations of those who are watching us all.

This morning, I was fortunate to be able to visit the farm of Mr. Peter Kendall and his brother Richard in east Bedfordshire. We received the hospitality of Peter's wife Mrs. Emma Kendall, who provided tea, toast and coffee to me and my officials, which was most welcome. We went to hear at first hand about the issues facing the farming industry today. They are proud of what they are doing, and rightly so. Listening to them and to others whom I have met in my first week or so in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, I have become more aware of the challenges that we need to address. Set-aside, which the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire mentioned, was high on the agenda this morning. As I am sure he is aware, the Secretary of State is scheduled to announce his conclusions on that before the summer recess.

Notwithstanding the challenges, at the same time there are real opportunities to ensure that we meet our agreed long-term vision for the farming sector—a thriving industry that is resilient and focused on sustainability. There are challenges facing the industry, however, and we are taking steps to address them. For example, I was pleased last week to be able to chair the pig meat supply chain taskforce, which was established earlier this year. It is looking to address some of the challenges that right hon. and hon. Members have mentioned. The long-term sustainability of the pig industry must be safeguarded, as it has a significant contribution to make to a thriving farming sector and a sustainable, secure and healthy food supply that offers consumer choice.

I know that many farmers are concerned about the need for proportionate, sensible legislation. We share their concerns about the implementation of the electronic identification of sheep, which my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State mentioned at great length. He said that although there are benefits, such as enhancing disease control and providing management benefits for the keeper, the costs of EID outweigh the benefits for the industry as a whole. We are working with the industry to find a way to implement EID, as he outlined, while minimising the burden.

Climate change is another key issue for agriculture. The agricultural, forestry and land management sector is a significant emitter of greenhouse gases, being responsible for 14 per cent. of total global emissions and 7 per cent. in the UK. I have taken to heart the warning on Monday from the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire not to hide behind a barrage of statistics, but one has to refer to some statistics in any contribution. The Government are currently developing a policy framework to reduce all greenhouse gas emissions in the agricultural sector.

Further, we are committed to making the most of the potential of anaerobic digestion to contribute to climate change policies and wider environmental objectives. The aim is to publish by July an implementation plan on practical measures identified by the task group on the matter, chaired by Mr. Steve Lee.

English farming has an important part to play in ensuring our food security, which many colleagues have mentioned this afternoon. The types of food that we eat, the cost of food and ensuring the supply of food have become hot topics. It is not simply a matter of domestic self-sufficiency. In response to questions asked by the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert), my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has said on a number of occasions, including today, that he wants British agriculture to produce as much as possible, provided that consumers want what is produced and that the way in which our food is grown both sustains our environment and safeguards our landscape.

Food labelling has a part to play in that, so we are pressing the food industry to provide clear and accurate origin information. My predecessor, my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree, met representatives of the food industry, including retailers, to stamp out inaccurate labelling practice. The pig taskforce has started to consider solutions to help halt such practices, including developing a voluntary agreement for the whole pig meat supply chain. In parallel, the Food Standards Agency is carrying out more detailed research into consumer behaviour in relation to origin labelling and the uptake of the origin labelling guidance that it issued last November.

We are also pushing forward in Europe with supporting the European Commission's proposal to tighten up origin labelling and claims such as "British bacon". No options have been ruled in or out of our consideration of what more can be done to improve origin labelling for meat.

Nick Herbert: We are pleased to hear that no options have been ruled out. I hope that the Government will consider a compulsory scheme, should it prove necessary. Will the Minister clarify the status of the negotiations with the supermarkets? As I said earlier, the Secretary of State talked about the matter months ago and I wonder what progress has been made towards a voluntary agreement. We would all prefer a voluntary labelling scheme, if possible.

Jim Fitzpatrick: All I can say at this point is that the matter was raised at the taskforce meeting last week. Progress is being made. Final conclusions have not yet been reached, but we hope that the work stream will be concluded as quickly as possible. Further on in my notes, I noted the hon. Gentleman's suggestion of introducing a domestic scheme if European measures fail. My understanding from advice that I received is that that may not legally be possible. However, the hon. Gentleman said that it is, so we would be happy to receive his legal advice, which we can share with our advisers. Perhaps they can then decide whether we have a case.

The UK needs to become a leader in sustainable food production, developing solutions that reduce the use of natural resources and reduce pollution, as well as having leading and competitive businesses.

The hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs accused us of obstructing British farming. I fully accept that I have been in the Department for less than two weeks but my brief experience of chairing the dairy forum and the pig meat taskforce and of meetings

[*Jim Fitzpatrick*]

inside and outside the Department suggest to me that there is optimism in British farming. Earlier, I said that we accept that there are challenges, difficulties and some issues about which we will disagree, but there is an underlying optimism throughout British agriculture and I believe that we need to continue to engage with and support the industry.

The hon. Gentleman also asked about the increase in imports and the decline in domestic production. The positive messages are that 2008 produced a record cereals harvest and that beef and veal exports were also higher. The UK is currently 73 per cent. self-sufficient in all indigenous food—a higher proportion than at any time since the 1950s. Again, we can exchange statistics. I am not saying that we cannot improve the situation or that we should not assist more, but it is not all doom and gloom. I do not suggest that the hon. Gentleman implied that, but we want to ensure that we convey the positive message that I am getting from British farming as part of the wider debate. Most colleagues have also communicated that message.

The hon. Gentleman raised the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree about her support for a badger cull. Of course, she is fully entitled to her opinion and she has clearly examined the matter inside and outside the Department, and we respect her view. However, we all know that the decision is not simple. The factors that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State discussed earlier are clear. The decision not to cull badgers was based on careful consideration of all the evidence, including the conclusions of the Select Committee's report, and we are still working closely with the industry on that.

Mr. Paice: Not only the Minister's immediate predecessor, but the one before supports a badger cull. Lord Rooker has made it clear that he thinks that the Government's policy is wrong, and he was in the job for several years.

Jim Fitzpatrick: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that information, about which I was not aware. I have not read any of Lord Rooker's comments in recent days.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole (Mr. Cawsey) asked about DEFRA funding farms to exit the milk business. I can only repeat what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said: we have been engaging with farmers, the receiver and banks to try to get the best deal we can. However, I will provide a little more information to my hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon (Mr. Anderson) about Blaydon.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) expressed apologies on behalf of the hon. Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) for his absence, the reason for which we appreciate. I know that Labour and Conservative Front Benchers have communicated our best wishes to him for dealing with the problem at home this afternoon.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome raised a number of issues, most of which, if he will forgive me, were either covered by the Secretary of State or raised by others.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole expressed his concern about the smells and the health risks associated with composting and landfill. The Environment Agency provides a clear steer about the minimum distances between composting and farms and rural housing, although I am happy to explore the issues that he raised and the additional information that he supplied, in my capacity as the sponsoring Minister for the Environment Agency, and will write to him in due course.

My hon. Friend also mentioned the issue of housing, which, as the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire said, was covered extensively in our debate on Monday afternoon, in which there were statistical exchanges. The Government have a commitment to build 10,000 homes over three years, in communities of fewer than 3,000. We were given some credit from comrades—[*Interruption*]*—*from colleagues. Sorry, they were indeed comrades. We were given credit by comrades and colleagues on our Back Benches, but notwithstanding that welcome, there was also criticism from those who said that our commitment was not enough. However, that commitment has been made and we need to ensure that we deliver on it.

Mr. Drew: May I just say, in a comradely manner, that it would be helpful for smaller communities if there was a clear steer on providing affordable housing through community land trusts? I know that the Department for Communities and Local Government takes a lead on that, but DEFRA could be an important vehicle for encouraging that form of housing.

Jim Fitzpatrick: I hear my hon. Friend's point. As he said, DCLG takes a lead on that, but our officials and Ministers obviously have an interest in such matters too.

My hon. Friend the Member for Brigg and Goole also asked whether we should or could include an animal welfare criterion in our public procurement. I can inform him that one of the sub-groups of the pig meat supply chain taskforce, which I mentioned I chaired last week, is looking at precisely that issue and exploring how we can step up the public procurement of products made with higher welfare standards. We agree entirely that the criterion that he outlined should be a consideration.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome said that no Minister had attended the Royal Bath and West show for several years. I can only apologise on my predecessors' behalf, although I am pleased to be attending the royal show on 7 July and the Royal Norfolk show next week. I give as strong as a commitment as I can now to attend the Royal Bath and West show next year, but it may be immediately before the general election or immediately after—I am not quite sure which month it is in. I believe that *purdah* got in the way of an attendance this year; otherwise I understand that a Minister was committed to attend.

The hon. Gentleman talked about his concern at the decline of the dairy sector. However, as we have mentioned previously, the long-term prospects are encouraging. To put that in context, dairy farmer numbers have been reducing at a fairly steady rate in the UK for many years, as they have across the EU. On the other hand, milk production stayed relatively steady from the end of the milk marketing board in the early 1990s until 2003.

Since then, there has been a steady decline, from a little over 14 billion litres a year to somewhere under 13 billion litres a year. The latest quarterly figures show a decline of just over 1 per cent. That is against a backdrop of extreme volatility in prices in the global market, with record prices in 2007-08, followed by a steep decline in 2008-09, which was driven by the global economic downturn and increased supply. However, as I heard yesterday at the dairy forum, UK dairy farms are among the most competitive in Europe and, in the medium term, are well placed to take advantage of continuing deregulation.

My hon. Friend the Member for Blaydon raised a number of issues. I am delighted to hear of the success of the red kites locally, and I acknowledge his invitation to visit one of his local establishments to enjoy the fare. He talked in his speech about the banks and the Dairy Farmers of Britain, as he did when he intervened on our right hon. Friend the Secretary of State. I assure him that all that can be done is being done, and I am sorry that I can add little to what my right hon. Friend said earlier, other than to say that One NorthEast called DEFRA officials this morning. It has worked closely with the National Farmers Union, using a funded project within the English food and farming partnership, to help to put small farms together with local dairies, now that the dairy at Blaydon has closed. That has been quite successful, and the increased work for the small dairies has enabled them to take on 10 ex-Blaydon employees, so there has been some take-up of the unfortunate individuals who lost their jobs through the collapse of Dairy Farmers of Britain.

The right hon. Member for Fylde is not only highly regarded as the Select Committee Chair; more significantly, he now serves as the president of the Shepherd Road allotment society. We acknowledge the challenge that he faces from caterpillars, and wish him success in dealing with it. He mentioned his memories of the 1950s, and I have already mentioned mine. However, I do not remember seeing avocados in Glasgow. I am sure they were probably there, but I have no memory of my mum taking me to see the price of them.

The right hon. Gentleman made some significant points about food security, food production and food neo-colonialism. His warnings were telling, and serve only to reinforce the fundamental importance of this debate to what is happening in the real world outside.

He raised the question of the common agricultural policy and my need to work hard to get up to speed on that subject, as my predecessor did. I can assure him that I have a lot of homework to do before the Agriculture Council next Monday and Tuesday in Luxembourg. I have already spoken today to the outgoing Czech presidency and the incoming Swedish ministerial presidency in advance of those events next week, and I shall be receiving quite a lot of briefing tomorrow and over the weekend.

The hon. Member for Preseli Pembrokeshire (Mr. Crabb) talked about bovine tuberculosis and about Dairy Farmers of Britain. I think that I have covered those points as best I can, but in answer to his question about the different policy of the Welsh Assembly Government, he will know that that is a result of devolution. Policies differ between Cardiff, London and Scotland as different conclusions are arrived at, but, as the Secretary of State said, the matter is under close consideration and will continue to be so.

The hon. Gentleman said that this was only the second debate on these matters in six years, and the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire said that when I get my feet under the table I will be able to study the issues a lot more. I have to say that if every other week is going to begin with a farming debate on the Monday and finish with another on the Thursday, I am not going to have time to get my feet under the table or to do any further study. I am sure, however, that the pace will not be quite as hectic as it has been in the past few weeks.

I hope that I have provided some additional clarity on what the Government are doing, but we cannot and should not do it alone. We will continue to work in a strong partnership with farmers and the representative bodies, and I look forward to helping to continue to build that partnership over the coming months. As I said at the beginning of my speech, I am proud to be the Minister of State at DEFRA with responsibility for food, farms and the environment. Without guaranteeing agreement on anything, I hope to be an effective champion in the Government for farming, but I suspect that that is a judgment that others will have to make.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the matter of food, farming and the environment.

Stourbridge Glass Collection

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—(*Kerry McCarthy.*)

5.49 pm

Lynda Waltho (Stourbridge) (Lab): Stourbridge glass is synonymous with quality, craftsmanship and excellence, and it is one of the greatest names in world glass-making. Since the 16th century, glass workshops and factories in the Stourbridge area have created some of the finest glass ever made, and the industry is a fundamental part of Stourbridge's history and heritage and those of the wider black country.

The Stourbridge glass collection is currently housed at the Broadfield House glass museum, an internationally renowned museum that is ranked in the top five worldwide. Local people are rightly proud of the collection and of Broadfield House itself, as are local councillors and my Dudley parliamentary colleagues, my hon. Friends the Members for Dudley, North (Mr. Austin), for Dudley, South (Ian Pearson) and for Halesowen and Rowley Regis (Sylvia Heal)—and, apparently, as I see him in his place, the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack). I am indebted to them for their support on this issue.

However, the same cannot be said of Dudley council, which, in its wisdom, appears to have identified the museum as a possible candidate for closure in an attempt to balance the books. I hope that the Minister will bear with me on some of the details, which I think will demonstrate the haphazard and confused way in which Dudley council is handling this important issue, as well as, I am afraid, the disdain it appears to show to its ratepayers, local glass enthusiasts and international experts.

In a series of meetings at the museum on 4 and 5 January this year, Dudley council officers, Duncan Lowndes, assistant director of culture, and Sally Orton, head of museums and green spaces, met Broadfield House staff and told them that the museum would close by the end of March 2010; that the only secure job to remain would be that of the curator; and that all other staff would be offered sideways moves into the borough. In addition, they were told that the collections and the research resources would be moved to the Red House Glass Cone, which is a local heritage site. Since then, the councillors and the executive have publicly denied that those meetings ever took place and have not informed staff about their job security—either way—to this day.

On 7 January, a council meeting agreed to a “review of museum services”, which identified £120,000 to be saved in the sector. Sadly, only Broadfield House was mentioned, which has led many to believe that that was nothing more than a cost-cutting exercise by Dudley council. Indeed, only this week, senior Tory Councillor Malcolm Knowles said at the Stourbridge area committee that he

“considered it to have been a grave mistake to publish the amounts to be saved if Broadfield House was closed.”

So much for openness and transparency at Dudley council.

I am very concerned that there was no public consultation prior to the decision and that the friends and staff of Broadfield House have not been involved in any official way. I am further concerned that the council has made

no detailed financial or practical evaluation of its decision. It took the decision on a very short time scale and did not appear even to have considered any sources of external funding.

The information that friends of Broadfield House received from the council has been confusing and evasive at best, and directly misleading at worst. Despite telling staff that Broadfield House would close, various e-mails from councillors have sought to deny that any financial or final decisions have been taken. That was echoed recently by the director of the urban environment, John Millar, at a meeting of the Brierley Hill area committee on 2 April, when he said that the results of a feasibility study would be presented to the council's cabinet in October. He repeatedly denied that any decision on closing Broadfield House had already been made.

All this conflicting information is obviously counter-productive and has left interested parties unsure of where they stand. Indeed, if these meetings took place and various promises have already been given, the fact that the council has taken a decision to close makes any talk of consultation a farce. For the council subsequently to deny that any such meetings had taken place is breathtakingly dishonest. In my experience, that shows the arrogance, myopia and contempt for the public that sums up Dudley council and its approach to anything in the leisure and cultural sector.

Great strength of feeling was demonstrated in the constituency following the council's actions, and the Glass Association handed it a petition with more than 6,000 names opposing the move in April. The proposed closure and move has also attracted opposition from nationwide organisations, including the Glass Association and the Victoria and Albert museum. Local people feel very strongly about any diminution of the Glass museum's size and display area. Indeed, an online poll on the *Stourbridge News* website found that 94.7 per cent. of participants opposed the closure, and there have been pages of letters written by local people to local and national newspapers.

Let me give a few examples. Nick Baker from Amblecote wrote in *Stourbridge News*:

“closure of Broadfield house would be a cultural disaster for the area, a massive insult to the history and people of Stourbridge”.

Mr. Roger Brettell wrote:

“It is sad that the Council appears to have so little regard for its own reputation as custodian of this unique and priceless collection that it begrudges the funding to allow it to remain in its present location... I should be disinclined to support any Councillor who fails to oppose this niggardly and ill-advised proposal”.

V. Perry wrote that she

“read with disgust the news to close Broadfield House”,

and described the idea that the Red House Glass Cone could provide a suitable alternative as “rubbish”. She added:

“I would guess that the decision to close the museum is centred on the development potential of the land which would generate a sizeable lump sum for the council should the land be sold!”

The suggestion that the collection could be moved to the Red House Glass Cone does not appear to be viable without extensive renovation of the current buildings. There is simply not enough space there to house such an important collection. Vast expense would be involved in the creation of a new museum with new display cabinets,

lecture facilities and modern audio-visual devices, along with the costs of wrapping, moving, insurance and the interim storage of these priceless exhibits.

As the council has said that one of the aims of the move is to save £120,000, we can only assume that it would not then be prepared to make funds available for the expansion of the Red House Glass Cone itself. If that is true, the move from Broadfield House would downgrade the museum facility, as the Red House Glass Cone has neither the exhibition space nor adequate lecture space for the collection to be displayed.

There are also fears about the structural integrity of the Red House Glass Cone site. Charles Hajdamach, the former principal museums officer for Dudley, claims that one of the tunnels underneath the cone—there are several—is due to collapse. However, although Janet Hendry of Friends of Broadfield House submitted a question about the structural integrity of the site to the Culture, Media and Sport Committee at a council meeting on 3 June, a council spokesman told *Stourbridge News* yesterday:

“We have not been made aware of any existing issues with the Red House Glass Cone building”.

The site to which the council may move part of the exhibition appears to be falling apart, and the council does not seem to have any structural information about what is going on there.

I understand that a feasibility study is being conducted, but the council has refused to release information on the tender documents submitted by consultants, on the brief given to consultants, and on how much the study will cost. Barbara Beadman of the Friends has received a letter promising her a full copy of the feasibility study brief, but, unsurprisingly, it has not yet arrived in her letter box. The Friends have been refused copies of the tenders, and the chief executive of the council, Mr. John Polychronakis, has said that they are “commercially sensitive”.

Many campaigners fear that the study is a sham intended to pay lip service to the campaigners and that the outcome was decided months ago. Of course, we are used to shams from Dudley council; unfortunately, it has form in that regard. I am sure that I need not remind my hon. Friend the Minister of the debacle of so-called consultations on the closure of the Brierley Hill leisure centre and baths and Cradley high school and leisure centre—recently criticised by the local government ombudsman—or of the botched library review and the current fiasco over yet another proposed closure at Coseley swimming baths in the north of the borough.

As the briefing terms of the feasibility study have not been made public, campaigners also fear that it is only considering how much of the collection can be moved to the Red House Glass Cone site as it is at present. That is a very narrow remit, and will not constitute an improvement. The council’s refusal to release a copy of the tender document and the winning consultancy’s bid is only adding more weight to the argument.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): As the hon. Lady’s next-door neighbour, I do not wish to get involved in a dispute with Dudley council but, as chairman of the all-party arts and heritage group can I say that she is performing a very real service in outlining the problem? It is crucial—

6 pm

Motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 9 (3)).

Motion made, and Question proposed, That this House do now adjourn.—[Mr. Watts.]

Sir Patrick Cormack: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I did not notice the time. I congratulate the hon. Lady on her speech. She is performing a very real service. It is crucial that this internationally famous collection be kept together and displayed, preferably in the historic setting that it already enjoys. I will do anything I can to help her.

Lynda Waltho: I thank the hon. Gentleman, who is indeed a very good neighbour.

Campaigners are becoming increasingly frustrated with the lack of meaningful dialogue with the council. As well as not being consulted initially on the decision, they have offered to assist with the feasibility study and are finding that the council is evasive and unhelpful. The council website has not been updated for some time and communications are at best vague. As a result of the secretive manner of its operations, there is of course a lot of suspicion among interested groups that the intention of the council all along has been to maximise a capital gain from the sale of Broadfield House, possibly to move some of the glass collection to the Red House Glass Cone site and to pack the rest up to be forgotten about deep in the bowels of one of the council’s storage facilities.

At Monday night’s Stourbridge area committee, the council agreed to a special meeting with the Friends of Broadfield House—but not until September, by which time stage 1 of the feasibility study will have been completed. That would appear to be a deliberately obstructive move by the council, which has stated that arrangements have been set in place for engaging all the organisations and groups that have shown their interest in the future of the museum—although it has of course refused to meet them until September, which goes completely against their statement. Furthermore, the Friends of Broadfield House has offered the council £120,000 for a year’s breathing space. It has received no answer to its offer and the council claimed on Monday to know nothing about it, despite the e-mail being sent twice, and the second time to 25 councillors.

The decision to move the glass museum, its assets, collections and archives from Broadfield House strikes me at best as a knee-jerk reaction to cut budgets and at worst as a deliberate attempt to undermine the heritage of my constituency. So far, I have not been convinced that the council has the preservation of the glass museum at the heart of its plans. It would be disastrous for the region’s heritage and for the glass industry if the collection were to be hidden away, not available for us to see and enjoy, split up or reduced in any way. The Friends of Broadfield House, the Glass Association and the Glass Circle would support a move if it were to improve and enhance the Broadfield House museum experience and would be delighted to help facilitate any improvement that would preserve and display the collection. However, there has been no indication from the council that that is in any way likely.

I am concerned that the proposals serve only as a short-term money-saving ploy with no real consideration of the long-term future of the Stourbridge glass collection.

[Lynda Waltho]

I strongly urge the Minister to intervene and to ask Dudley council to reconsider its decision and, importantly, to open up its processes for us all to see and be part of. I would like to invite my hon. Friend the Minister to see the collection with me in the near future to appreciate how unique it is and how bad our situation is at present. Glass-making is a key part of the history of the town that I am proud to represent. It is part of the very fabric of the place and it gives us our distinct character. Its tradition and heritage is on the verge of being destroyed as part of a short-term financial policy. Is not it only right that its townspeople, workers, artists and supporters have a real say in its future?

6.4 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (Barbara Follett): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Lynda Waltho) on securing this debate on an issue about which she, her constituents and other local MPs obviously care so passionately. In common with my hon. Friend and the people of Stourbridge, I, as the Minister with responsibility for museums, am passionate about the role of local museums in communities. They preserve, conserve and make accessible the tangible history of an area, and they allow people to understand, and interact with, their heritage. In this case, that heritage is the glass made in the factories and workshops of the Stourbridge area over the past 400 years.

I know that the Broadfield House museum, about which my hon. Friend has spoken so clearly and passionately, has a magnificent collection of local Stourbridge glass dating from the 17th century to the present day. The museum also has an impressive programme of events and demonstrations, which allow the visitor to see a glass-making studio in action. I completely understand my hon. Friend's desire to preserve such a gem for her community. Thanks to her questions and letters, I am aware of the current situation at the Broadfield House museum, and of her concerns about the future of its contents. I am pleased that we are having this debate, as it gives me the opportunity to respond in detail to the points that she has made.

As my hon. Friend has asked me to intervene, I know she will not be pleased that I must point out that the future of this collection and the funding of the Broadfield House museum is a matter for the local authority concerned, Dudley metropolitan borough council. The delegation of authority and responsibility from central Government to local government is the basis of the relationship between them, and it means that I, as the responsible central Government Minister, cannot intervene in matters that the conventions of that relationship dictate are the concern of a democratically elected council.

Lynda Waltho: I appreciate what the Minister is saying about that relationship, but in a case where a council appears not to be acting in the best interests of the collection or of local people, there must be something that the responsible Minister can do; otherwise such a council will just get away with it. Dudley council has got away with a lot of other decisions. Local decision making is bad, and local people have no confidence in what is going on.

Barbara Follett: I understand my hon. Friend's concerns, but we in central Government have options, and I will describe them to her now. Central Government obviously have in their armoury the nuclear option of complete intervention, but we are loth to deploy it, particularly in situations—such as this one, I have to say—where it appears that the local authority concerned is going through due process. Let me try to make my case.

As my hon. Friend is aware, Dudley council is currently exploring options in respect of the future of the Broadfield House museum and the proposal to move its glass collection to the Red House Glass Cone museum. Dudley council strongly believes that the facilities at the Red House Glass Cone museum and the large number of visitors it attracts—well over double the number that the Broadfield House museum currently attracts—make it better placed to showcase the borough's important glass collection for the community. That is why the council has commissioned a feasibility study to look into this proposal in more depth.

I understand that, as my hon. Friend has outlined so clearly, local feeling does not reflect as much confidence in this decision as the council would like. That is why central Government welcome the feasibility study, and the fact that consultants have been appointed. The first phase of this process—an options appraisal—will be completed by the beginning of August, and I am told that the full report is due to be ready by 26 October.

Lynda Waltho: I understand that my hon. Friend is working from information gathered by people who are not from Stourbridge or who do not understand the local conditions. The Red House Glass Cone site is very small, whereas the Stourbridge glass collection is vast. I am no expert, but I know about putting things in rooms and I can tell her that there is no way that that collection will ever be able to be displayed in the Red House Glass Cone; it is fantastic, but it is not suitable for this collection—and it is falling down.

Barbara Follett: I have taken my hon. Friend's concerns on board, which is why I asked the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council—the MLA—to go to Stourbridge to meet local stakeholders, including her, and to visit the Red House Glass Cone museum. I wanted to establish whether it could house the Stourbridge collection and whether the MLA, the statutory advisor to central Government, thought it was suitable. I shall cover its reactions as I get further into my speech.

As my hon. Friend has stated so clearly, local people do not believe that this proposal is the correct solution. Dudley metropolitan borough council has assured my officials and the MLA that if the Broadfield House museum does close, the money received from the sale of Broadfield House will be used to extend the Red House Glass Cone museum and make it more suitable to hold the collection. The council has also assured my officials that staff will be redeployed, either at the Red House Glass Cone museum or elsewhere, as part of the council's redeployment strategy.

Lynda Waltho: May I seek a further point of clarification? Is my hon. Friend talking about the proceeds of the disposal of the whole Broadfield site, which covers a vast acreage? That sum would probably run into millions, and it would be fantastic to have it. However, we—or

rather, Dudley metropolitan borough council— could well be talking about just £120,000, which would perhaps replace some windows or allow a small extension; £120,000 would go nowhere.

Barbara Follett: What I have been told is that the capital receipts from the sale of Broadfield House would be used. I shall clarify for my hon. Friend exactly what that means in a letter. I take her point that if we are talking about the smaller amount of money that she has mentioned, I do not think that that would go far enough.

The feasibility study will examine the Broadfield House museum closure and the Red House Glass Cone museum proposal in depth. The council assures me that it will not make a decision until it has received the final report, and that no decision has yet been made. Since the future of Broadfield House museum and the Stourbridge glass collection has been brought to my attention, I have asked the Department's lead agency on the museums sector, the MLA, to work with Dudley metropolitan borough council to ensure the best outcome for the council and for the people of Dudley. Dudley Council welcomes the MLA's involvement, and both organisations have been working together to ensure that this feasibility study is robust, has a clear vision and takes into account the views of the local community.

As I have said, the MLA has met with a range of interested parties, including my hon. Friend and the local glass bodies. The MLA believes that the feasibility study will be very thorough, including investigations into the issues that my hon. Friend has raised, such as security, display facilities, accessibility and other on-site facilities, as well as overall cost-effectiveness. The MLA's chief executive recently visited the Red House Glass Cone site and, like my hon. Friend, described the museum as remarkable. He believes that it would be possible to extend the displays and interpretation by including collections from Broadfield.

As my hon. Friend will know, the MLA has developed a real capacity to engage in local issues and to forge good relationships across the sector. Its ground-breaking Renaissance in the Regions programme aims to transform England's local museums by using funding from the Government to raise standards and deliver real results in support of education, learning, community development and economic regeneration. The programme has had investment of £242 million since 2002, and it is beginning to make our museums great centres of life and learning, which people want to visit. I want to ensure that that is the case in Dudley, too.

I assure my hon. Friend that although the Government cannot intervene directly in this matter, I am watching progress very closely. I have met with the MLA's chief executive and spoken to him about it, and I am taking the whole matter very seriously.

Sir Patrick Cormack: May I stress that it is not only the people of Stourbridge but those of the whole region who regard this as an important collection? Will the Minister do all she can to ensure that whatever its

precise location, the collection is kept together and on proper display, as it should be—not closed up for years? If she will give us that assurance, it will be as welcome in my constituency as in that of the hon. Member for Stourbridge (Lynda Waltho).

Barbara Follett: I thank the hon. Gentleman, and I understand his concern. I have made it the central plank of my time as Minister for the arts to ensure that we democratise our arts and our culture. In other words, I want to ensure that we do not keep arts and culture locked away, that we keep collections together, that we make them available by whatever means we have at our disposal—such as making them available digitally—and that we let people get to them and see them as they ought to be seen. As quite a large section of my family worked in the china industry in parts of Staffordshire, I understand the value that people put on such collections. I understand the historical value of holding them together. I assure him that I will do all I can to ensure that they are preserved.

As I have said, I understand the concerns of my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge and of the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) about the preservation of the history and heritage of Stourbridge. I hope, therefore, that Dudley council will not take risks with the collection, which is so precious to the people of Stourbridge and the surrounding county, and that it will not implement any unnecessary or hasty closures, especially of a local museum that is providing an excellent service. I hope, too, that the council will do all it can to work collaboratively with the local community, to listen to it and to resolve this situation.

Lynda Waltho: I am pleased by what my hon. Friend is saying and by her obvious commitment to the collection and to Broadfield House. She speaks about democratisation, but there is a worry that decisions are being made in secret. The Friends of Broadfield House is a collection of business people, artists and supporters, and they are world-renowned experts. Surely it would be sensible for them to be part of the feasibility study now, rather than being just another group to be consulted in October. That is a key point: we need to get the experts involved. I appreciate what my hon. Friend says about the MLA, but we need to get our local experts involved, too.

Barbara Follett: Again, convention constrains me in this case. My hon. Friend and her hon. Friends and colleagues are making the kind of representations that I would expect the people's representatives to make. I would expect Dudley council to hear these representations, because they are the expression of the people's will, and I hope that it pays attention to them. I hope that it makes a considered decision that leads to the best possible outcome for the potential of the museums in the area, that ensures that this treasure of a collection is made as accessible as possible to the local community, and that ensures that it is kept together.

Question put and agreed to.

6.21 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 18 June 2009

[JOHN BERCOW *in the Chair*]

Personal Carbon Trading

[*Relevant documents: Fifth Report from the Environmental Audit Committee, Session 2007-08, HC 565, and the Government's response, Session 2007-08, HC 1125.*]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(*Joan Ruddock.*)

2.30 pm

Mr. Tim Yeo (South Suffolk) (Con): I welcome you, Mr. Bercow, to the Chair this afternoon. This is possibly the last time that you will chair a debate in Westminster Hall if you are called to higher things on Monday. As I have informed you, my vote in the first round is pledged to another hon. Member. However, your performance in the Chair this afternoon might sway a few floating voters to switch in your direction, so this could be a sort of hustings for the Chair.

I also welcome the Minister and the shadow Minister. We look forward to hearing from both of them. I particularly want to thank my three colleagues from the Committee for their participation and support this afternoon. They are three of the most conscientious and hard-working members of the Committee. Between the four of us, we carry quite a heavy load, as a number of Committee members have not been seen for some years. Unfortunately, my request for the Committee to be reduced in size was rejected by the Leader of House last year.

I am delighted to have secured this debate. It is a very important subject and one that needs to be more widely debated. It is a year since we published the report under discussion, and it is seven months since the Government published their response. During that year—even during those seven months—the scientific evidence has shown that the challenge that the world faces from climate change is bigger and more urgent than we previously understood. Despite many commendable initiatives, no country—not even Britain—can claim to be any near being on track for the scale of greenhouse gas emission reductions that are needed. It is a chilling reflection that no country has ever achieved a sustained fall in greenhouse gas emissions except at a time of severe recession or de-industrialisation on the scale that was seen in the former Soviet Union in the early 1990s.

It is equally clear that in the next decade, every developed country in the world must start doing what no country has ever done, which proves just what a dramatic change of pace and scale in our response to climate change is needed. If global emissions do not peak by 2020, the scale of the cuts that would be needed thereafter to keep the rise in average global temperatures anywhere near 2° C would involve a level of cost and a degree of disruption that would be painful and expensive for every section of the community.

So, whatever we are doing now by way of generating low-carbon electricity, constructing more energy-efficient buildings, developing low-emission vehicles and so on, it is nowhere near enough. Investment in renewable

energy, tax breaks for greener cars, and building zero-carbon homes are all needed and, to a greater or lesser extent, are being encouraged through both policy and regulation. However, much more still needs to be done by Government, and by business, which has shown itself to be increasingly forward looking in its response to the challenge and in its ability to see the opportunities and threats for its business models. That is particularly true in the United States where business until very recently has been well ahead of policy makers. However, it is not just a matter for Government and business. Every single citizen as a consumer needs to be directly engaged in the battle against climate change. That is why personal carbon trading deserves far more attention than it is getting, either from the Government or from other people.

Personal carbon trading offers three unique advantages compared with carbon taxes. First, it can guarantee that a specific level of emissions is achieved in a way that carbon taxes cannot. No one can be sure of the elasticity of the response of consumers to carbon taxes. We have seen in many areas remarkably inelastic responses to carbon taxes. Secondly, personal carbon trading can, and should, be progressive and not regressive in its impact on low-income individuals and households—unlike carbon taxes, which are nearly all somewhat regressive. Thirdly, personal carbon trading allows individual discretion about how much effort people make to cut their carbon footprint and in which direction they make that effort. That is a further attractive characteristic that is not possessed so directly by carbon taxes. Of course, there are some downsides to personal carbon trading, and I am sure that we will hear more about those from the Minister later. The Government's response is peppered with them, and I shall deal with them presently.

The scheme is potentially very complicated, and that makes it hard to understand, particularly for people who are not used to the concept of financial trading. There is a danger that unless the scheme is very sensitively introduced and formulated, it could be somewhat arbitrary and even unfair in its impact.

The Committee's report sets out why we believe that personal carbon trading is both an excellent way to raise the profile of climate change and related issues and a powerful incentive for individuals to make low-carbon choices in their daily lives. Against the background of an increasingly urgent and grave threat from climate change, our report concluded that more radical measures are needed if individuals and households are going to contribute meaningfully to the meeting of UK emission reduction targets. Without their contribution, Britain will struggle to reach those targets.

The Committee judged that personal carbon trading has the potential to be more engaging, effective and progressive than most green taxes. I mentioned the point about the impact being progressive rather than regressive, but personal carbon trading also offers a real benefit to individuals and families who earn modest incomes, live in average-size homes, do not have air conditioning or heated swimming pools, and who are prepared to wear a sweater in the winter rather than just turning up the heating. Such people could receive a cash benefit if the system was properly designed.

Personal carbon trading can make a big contribution by helping Britain to cut its emissions. However, I accept that the system is complex and difficult to understand. For that reason, the mere existence of a

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

wider public debate is in itself quite useful, enabling people to talk and think about it more, so that gradually they may come to understand it more clearly and easily. I assume that the principles of carbon trading are understood by everyone present and I think that they will be understood by most people who take the trouble to read the report of this debate, so, I will not weary hon. Members this afternoon with a great detailed account of how personal carbon trading works. We explored that in the evidence we took and in the report itself.

What I want to do instead is depart slightly from the recommendations of the Committee by making a plea for a pilot scheme. We were somewhat cautious in our assessment about the merits of such a scheme. In the year since we published the report, I have concluded that we will never win the argument just on some abstract, intellectual basis. We have to have some practical evidence of how a scheme will work if we are to win more support for it. My proposal is for a pilot that is quite limited in scope. Its results could be analysed and tested for the fairness and effectiveness criteria, which are very important. That is the only way in which we will overcome the objections that are raised when personal carbon trading is advocated. I have to say that, regrettably, the opponents appear to include the authors of the Government's response.

To further minimise resistance and objections, the pilot could be carried out on a virtual basis. It does not even require any cash to change hands—cash trading or transactions do not have to be involved at all. A virtual pilot would have nearly all the merits of an actual pilot. Let us suppose that the scope of the pilot was confined solely to the emissions from the energy consumed in individual households for heating, lighting, cooking, cooling and so on. That would be quite simple to measure, because such energy is almost entirely derived from electricity, gas, oil and coal supplied directly to houses.

Let us further propose that the pilot takes place in a very limited geographical area. I would like to volunteer for this purpose the Babergh district council area in my constituency. There are 83,000 residents in the district, just under 70,000 of whom are voters. I am glad to say that at each of the last six elections, they have returned a Conservative—me. There are just under 35,000 households, so the area is large enough to offer a meaningful reflection of what might happen if the scheme were introduced nationally, but small enough to operate an experiment very cheaply. The results of an experiment of that size could be analysed accurately, and we could gain very important data as a result.

Such an experiment would establish much more clearly than any theoretical argument whether the objections to personal carbon trading are valid. It would also establish whether the advantages are what supporters of personal carbon trading like me claim. I am quite willing to be judged on the evidence. Even in their response, the Government acknowledged that they would welcome more research—they did not show much enthusiasm for commissioning or even encouraging it, but they said that they would welcome the results. I believe that the concept would stand the test and that the experiment would show that the benefits that we

claim would be borne out in practice. If we go down that route, it would be possible to overcome some of the more alarmist objections.

To get the pilot scheme going, I suggest that we measure the actual emissions in the households that form the experimental area. That would give us valuable base data, and total emissions in the area could then be averaged out. Individual allowances would be broadly equal, but some would have to be adjusted: there would be weightings for age, disability and perhaps weightings based on the kind of home in which those individuals live. We could experiment with the details. If the pilot was for a limited period—say three years—year one could have a cap at the existing level of emissions, so there would be no attempt to impose an immediate cut in emissions, and years two and three could have progressive, tapering cuts, so we could achieve a guaranteed reduction in the emissions from the households in the Babergh district.

If the scheme were sponsored by a private sector sponsor—I am sure it is possible to find one—we might find that there is no cost to the central or local taxpayer. The cost of establishing an electronic trading exchange for such a limited number of people would be quite modest, given the low cost of most IT schemes now. Every individual participating in the scheme would know the amount of their allocation before the start of the experiment, and the total for the district would also be known. Each individual, however, even if the district had an allocation that was the equivalent of existing emissions, would have an incentive to start reducing their own footprint straight away to make the cash gain or virtual cash gain that would be available to them. It would therefore engage the interest and attention of a great many people, particularly younger people and those who are keen on using the internet. There could be rewards for people who take part in the experiment. It might be difficult to entice some people into the scheme, but others could be given an incentive, whether financial or otherwise.

Such a pilot scheme would be fair—it would not be threatening to people who found it hard to understand—and interesting for people who want to take part. A further advantage would be that the operation of the scheme could be monitored externally as we go along. The level of awareness of climate change among the participants—even the reluctant ones—could be measured and there could be data on advances during the scheme and afterwards. In the same way, the extent to which the scheme achieves behavioural change could be measured. We could establish whether and how the participants began to cut their own emissions in the period.

Similarly, the financial impact of the scheme could be measured. Would the scheme be progressive in the way that I claim? I believe that it would be, but we could monitor that and show whether and how people made money; who made money; and why they did the things that made them money. It would also, of course, show who were the losers. We could monitor the level of understanding of the scheme. We could test in advance how hard people found it to understand and whether its progressive introduction gave people a better understanding—we could learn whether people comprehended what was happening more clearly as the pilot progressed. As the cap tightened, it would be possible to show whether

the emissions from the district were being reduced. No form or level of carbon tax can guarantee that outcome, as I said.

The merits of such a pilot are considerable. We set out three criteria in our report for overcoming opposition to personal carbon trading. We judged that to overcome that opposition, the public must first be convinced that emissions have to be reduced. I hope the scientific evidence is gradually helping to achieve that aim, but we may be able to do other things to convince people. Secondly, the public must be convinced that individuals must take some responsibility for cutting their emissions. A pilot scheme of the sort that I advocate would remind everyone that they have the opportunity to take that responsibility if they wish to do so, and many people respond well when they are given such an opportunity. Thirdly, we judged that the public have to be convinced that personal carbon trading is fairer and more effective than raising taxes. I believe that the effectiveness of personal carbon trading is clear, because a specific level of emissions cuts could be guaranteed, but its fairness needs to be proved, which is the purpose of the pilot.

The pilot scheme would also allow us to observe movements in price. There have been concerns that the price might spike or slump, which would make the scheme harder to operate and upset the participants. The pilot would allow us to judge whether that will happen. A pilot that involves 83,000 people is big enough to provide convincing data in that regard. There could be other problems. Would the cap need to be increased in the event of an extremely cold winter? There could be a pre-determined formula for that. If the temperatures were substantially below the norm for a certain time of year, additional allowances could be fed into the market. That may sound complex, but with modern technology, it does not need to be. In any case, the purpose of the experiment is to try to iron out such difficulties.

We acknowledge in our report that smart metering is very important and that it can play a big part in helping people to understand how such a scheme would work, and enable individuals and households to track their performance. The pilot would also tell us whether it is possible to engage the interest, understanding and participation of those people in the community who are normally financially excluded—households who do not participate in normal financial mechanisms. I believe that anyone who uses a supermarket loyalty card would have no difficulty grasping how to engage in personal carbon trading, but the proposed experiment would enable us to judge that. I am not suggesting that this is the only way forward. It is one way, but other forms of experiment could be conducted, perhaps even simultaneously in different parts of the country. However, I am certain that simply arguing in the abstract about personal carbon trading is not going to take us very much further.

Let me turn to the Government's response to our report. I am normally very generous in my comments on Government responses, never more so than when we are coming up to an election, because I am a passionate believer in a bipartisan approach to dealing with climate change. However, I was disappointed with this document. It suggested that the minds of the authors—I am sure that the Minister had nothing to do with writing it—and the minds of some of the civil servants, with whom the Committee had some private exchanges later in the

year, are not as open as they should be. That was particularly disappointing, because the former Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Secretary, the right hon. Member for South Shields (David Miliband), who had responsibility for such things before the Department of Energy and Climate Change was created, was quite enthusiastic, at least in his intellectual engagement with the subject. Now caution seems to prevail—caution to the point of hostility and even defeatism—in the face of the arguments.

The Government's response acknowledges that home energy use accounts for a substantial part of Britain's carbon emissions. It is apparent that despite some commendable initiatives, the scope for more energy efficiency, behavioural change and so on to cut emissions remains considerable and largely untapped. It seems likely to me that the potential for big step changes in the level of energy efficiency that households want to achieve will be realised only if we introduce much more radical measures to incentivise it.

The Government's response also claims that public support for personal carbon trading is "limited", but that has been the case with all sorts of desirable changes that have taken place. Ten years ago, public support for banning smoking in public houses would have been limited. That does not mean that it was the wrong thing to do; it was an opportunity for leadership. Going back further, before seat belts in cars were compulsory—I am probably the only person present who is old enough to remember that—support for that measure was decidedly limited in the 1950s, just as support was fairly limited for the breathalyser. All those changes needed leadership from the Government. To run away from an idea because support for it is limited seems an unsatisfactory justification.

The response says that there is "little evidence that people would be likely to trade".

That is hardly surprising, as they have absolutely no opportunity to trade at the moment. How could there be evidence of large numbers of people wanting to trade, as there is no chance to do so and understanding of the issue is limited in the absence of any scheme under way?

The response says that "an effective carbon trading system relies on participants actually taking part in trading allowances".

I am confident that an experiment with only 83,000 people—they would participate and trade—would be large enough to make an active market. The response also mutters about foreign visitors, but that would not be an issue for a pilot scheme along the lines that I have proposed.

The response alleges that personal carbon trading "would effectively be an expensive and complicated form of tax".

I invite the Minister to agree that that statement is simply ridiculous. It is not a tax, because there is no compulsion to pay it. It can be avoided totally, it raises no revenue and it offers the prospect of a cash reward. None of those things could be described as the characteristics of an expensive or complicated form of tax.

The response states: "There is very little evidence to suggest that it could indeed encourage energy saving behaviours."

[Mr. Tim Yeo]

Again, that is a pretty silly allegation. Unlike a tax, it could guarantee energy-saving behaviours. It would remind everyone of the advantages of energy-saving behaviour every time they switched on a light in their home. The response goes on:

“until further evidence exists, it is not possible to determine the extent to which a measure such as personal carbon trading could drive energy saving behaviours.”

A pilot scheme along the lines that I have proposed would gather exactly that evidence.

The response refers to the “significant costs” of a scheme, suggesting that it would cost £2 billion to set up and £2 billion a year to run. Those are figures plucked out of the air, without any reference to the type of scheme that might be introduced. It is a frankly nonsensical objection that does the Government little credit.

The response refers to recommendation 4 of the report and seems to assume that individuals would have a nil allocation of allowances. It is not clear, but that appears to be the assumption at the top of page 6. I have argued strongly for the EU emissions trading scheme to move as fast as possible to 100 per cent. auctioning, but I do not envisage at all a system of personal carbon trading involving any kind of auctioning. Free allocations would be given, just as people receive a free income tax allowance. It would be quite possible for people to live within the scheme without having to buy allowances at all. If they stayed at or below their free allowances, they would not be involved in buying allowances. They would, of course, have something that they could sell if they wanted to, but they would not be forced to go out and make purchases.

The response says:

“A substantial minority of adults in the UK...do not possess any form of bank account”.

That is scraping the bottom of the barrel in terms of objections. The fact that 2 million adults do not have bank accounts did not inhibit the Government from trying to prevent pensioners from continuing to draw their pensions in cash at local post offices. If that vulnerable group of people can be treated in such a way, it seems a pretty poor argument for not introducing personal carbon trading.

The Government’s arguments against a pilot scheme are also particularly weak. The response says at the bottom of page 21:

“Even then, there are risks to testing in public as pilot systems are inevitably unrefined and likely to have faults, which could lead to failure and subsequent public distrust and ridicule.”

That is precisely the purpose of having pilot schemes: to understand how to avoid public distrust and ridicule. It continues:

“Furthermore, a pilot would not be able to test the mandatory and national nature of a scheme, therefore making it unrepresentative of the real world”.

A scheme involving a whole local authority area would be reasonably representative, although nothing can be perfectly representative. It could be mandatory within the area, even on a virtual basis. It is not difficult to get around that particular objection.

I look forward to the Minister’s response. I do not expect that we will hear all the answers this afternoon, but I would like her to show willingness to become more engaged in the debate about personal carbon trading than last year’s written response suggests. Instead of

raising objections at every turn, many of which are rather weak, as I have pointed out, the Government should try a touch of the “Yes we can” approach. Let us look for a constructive aspect to the proposals.

I have accepted that personal carbon trading is complex and poorly understood. It might even be slightly scary for some people. I also accept that achieving the aims of fairness, effectiveness and simplicity may be much harder than I have hitherto believed, but surely there can be no reason not to work towards an experiment and to try out one more weapon in the fight to cut emissions. There can be no reason to oppose a modest little pilot scheme of the sort that I have outlined.

Climate change is a bigger and more urgent threat than we understood even a year or two ago. Even in Britain, where the issues are better understood and accepted than in most other countries, we are not yet doing enough to cut our emissions. It would be a tragedy if closed bureaucratic minds ruled out an innovative and possibly highly effective idea that could raise awareness of climate change, reward poorer people with cash and incentivise every citizen every day to make a low-carbon rather than high-carbon choice, and which could guarantee cuts in greenhouse gas emissions. The effectiveness of the idea at reaching all those goals could be accurately and easily monitored. For that reason, I commend the Committee’s report to the House.

2.58 pm

Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North) (Lab): I echo the comments of my friend the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo). I say “my friend” because the Environmental Audit Committee—at least, the four of us members who are here—worked closely together on the issues and ensured that we secured the debate. I congratulate him on the detail in which he has covered our Committee’s recommendations.

It is good to see you in the Chair, Mr. Bercow. Having attended previous debates in Westminster Hall where a large number of people have wanted to speak, I am always impressed by how you ensure that every hon. Member who wants to contribute does so in a way that takes the debate forward.

As we consider how our Parliament will develop in future—it is a key time for Parliament, as we are in the process of choosing a new Speaker—many of us want the whole concept of Parliament to be expanded further. Select Committees of the House of Commons, in this case the Environmental Audit Committee, exist to scrutinise the work of different Departments in a cross-cutting way. It is incumbent on the Government, if they are to listen to the work of Select Committees, to take seriously the detailed work that we do and give proper regard to our recommendations.

I ask my good friend the Minister to look in detail at the work we have done on personal carbon trading. As we are considering the new role that Parliament should have, she should think about the time that we have spent analysing the issue, week in, week out, in far more detail than any Minister could. In the new spirit of openness, will she consider how she can work with us to take forward our recommendations, which, if not rejected in the Government’s written response, were certainly not given the priority that we think they deserve?

In characteristic style, the Select Committee Chairman has covered the details of the report. This is one of many reports that we have produced this Session, in which we have concentrated on the challenges of global warming and climate change. We have looked at the detailed negotiations in the run-up to the Copenhagen summit and beyond. We are about to produce a report on the international work that must be done on the deforestation of the rain forests. We have also looked in great detail at the European emissions trading scheme and at carbon budgets. We understand that this agenda must be taken forward within the wider context of joined-up policy making, and our reports reflect that. I hope that because of the integrity with which we present this report to the House, the Government will accept our recommendations as part of the larger framework.

This detailed report deals with just the one aspect of personal carbon allowances. We do not see it as the be all and end all in tackling the increase in carbon emissions internationally and globally. However, we do think that it is part of the picture. It is a matter of great dismay that our recommendations have been rejected to the extent that they have been. We see them not as the exclusive answer, but as part of the solution. I expected our Government to take our recommendations in the spirit in which they were made and not to dismiss them almost wholly.

The timing for this debate could not have been better. There has just been a statement in the House on the Government's five-point carbon action plan and the Met Office's UK climate projections for 2009 have been announced. If ever we have had a sense of the priorities for this country, it is now. Apart from MPs and Parliament and the economic recovery from the recession, the one issue that we should all focus on now—as I know the Minister does—is how to deal with climate change.

If citizens across the UK, with whom we need to engage far more, were all familiar with the climate projections, they would expect Parliament to take action now. For our children and grandchildren, those will not be just abstract projections, but something with which they and future generations will have to live. Our recommendations that the Government have rejected might not be the whole answer, but they could be part of it. We must get across to the people of this country the urgency of this issue. We cannot wait for academic answers, but must take action now.

Our recommendations on personal carbon trading for individuals and households tick all the boxes. If we could get that scheme going, it might make the other areas in which the Government want to take action more politically acceptable. For example, they might be able to get greater support for the urgent decisions that must be taken in the Copenhagen negotiations, for home insulation and for changing the behaviour of businesses and others. It is all very well having academic arguments, but we must have arguments that apply to people's lives and to the way in which they go about their daily business. Personal carbon trading is an idea whose time has come.

I listened carefully to the Select Committee Chairman's remarks about the pilot project. We should consider the way in which the Government introduced pilots for education maintenance allowances. There was a sense that something had to be done about keeping 16 to 18-year-olds in college to get their qualifications. There

was not just one pilot in one area with certain guidelines, but many pilots were held in different parts of the country where different ideas could be experimented with and developed. There could be four pilot projects for our recommendations. We have representatives present from Scotland, Yorkshire, East Anglia and, of course, Stoke-on-Trent. We could devise an experimental method to see whether these ideas work over a limited period so that we can move the debate on.

I know that many hon. Members wish to speak. I was going to go through the details of our report, but as time is pressing that might not be the best use of my time. However, I hope that our constituents who are following this debate in detail feel encouraged to read the report and the Government response in full.

Finally, I wish to return to the issue of time. There have been various reports from Government. The Commission on Environmental Markets and Economic Performance report, which looked at how economic performance could be linked to environmental markets and green technologies, was introduced as a solution. It was presented in 2007 with great fanfare and with the support of the commissioners who were involved in writing it. The commission was led by the then Secretaries of State for Trade and Industry and for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the report was very detailed. However, in the two years since, there has been little direct action on the ground, although there is an initiative to look at how green technologies can be developed more quickly.

I am afraid that in two years' time the Select Committee report will be gathering dust and will not have produced the impetus that is needed to meet the global challenges of climate change. I know that the Minister works in a committed team, including the Secretary of State and the newly appointed Under-Secretary. I hope that in the midst of the five-point carbon plan and the run-up to Copenhagen, the Government do not just dismiss this report out of hand. Although this is only one of many reports produced by our influential Select Committee, the Government should work with us to establish a scheme slowly that could later be expanded.

3.9 pm

Colin Challen (Morley and Rothwell) (Lab): Like others, I want to express my best wishes to you for Monday, Mr. Bercow. I certainly hope—I will be quite blunt—that you are successful.

I congratulate our Chairman, the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), on his comprehensive analysis of our report and the Government's response. I will do my best not to repeat any of the points that he made, although they are eminently repeatable. I look forward to 3 June 2010, which is the last possible date for a general election, because his constituents will have had the chance by then to analyse the consequences of his pilot programme. I will be waiting to see whether he wins a seventh endorsement for his stance.

Today is important because we have seen the publication of the climate change projections report, which I have here. It is also 20 days short of the fifth anniversary of the publication of my Domestic Tradable Quotas (Carbon Emissions) Bill, which dealt with personal carbon allowances and tradable energy quotas. I am pleased to be able to acknowledge the presence in the Public

[Colin Challen]

Gallery of David Fleming, who had a great hand in developing those ideas. It has been a long process. When I launched my ten-minute Bill, I thought that it might take the Government five years to take the idea seriously, but here we are, 20 days short of five years, and they are still not taking it seriously. They did for a while, but then the enthusiasm slipped away in a sea of timidity and out of a fear of the possible electoral consequences. The pilot project will therefore be welcome.

I will refer to this later, but I have just put in a Presentation Bill to put climate change health warnings on car advertising, in the same way that we put health warnings on tobacco. The aim is to influence people's behaviour and to promote a better understanding of carbon in people's lives and consumption. Why can advertisers use six or eight-point type to bury details about the amount of carbon that their products emit? Many of them—unless they are particularly proud of their cars' green credentials—provide no explanation. We must start educating people, and that is where the Government need to do a lot more work.

We should look at the projections in today's report to remind ourselves how precarious the situation is. One of the tables, which is taken from the intergovernmental panel on climate change's fourth assessment report of 2008, shows that, on a high-emissions scenario, we will be heading for a 5.5 or 6° C increase. On a medium scenario, it will be 4° C. On a low scenario, it will be just under 3° C. Of course, we want to get to no more than 2° C, which, according to the IPCC, will require far more effort than will be needed to achieve the lowest of its emissions scenarios. That is a tremendous amount of effort, and the evidence from the negotiations, which took place in Bonn a few days ago, and which will continue up to Copenhagen, is that we will not get there—we will not reach the black line on the graph in today's report.

The evidence that the Committee gathered in Washington a few weeks ago suggests that the American targets will be weakened to get a Bill through Congress. In fact, the target for emissions cuts by 2020—the all-important interim target—has come down from 20 to 17 per cent. A lot of people may not realise that that target is based on a 2005 baseline, not the 1990 baseline that our targets are based on. The American targets will include different sectors from ours, but the level of ambition in even the most ambitious Bill that has a chance of success in Congress is well below current European objectives.

The signals from Bonn over the past few days are that the developing world is extremely unhappy about the extra commitment that we say we will make. We must make greater commitments, and they should go well beyond even what our carbon budgets say should happen. We need a successful and sufficient agreement, and the word "sufficient" is more important than the word "successful", which can be a political minefield. If the agreement is sufficient, the EU and the UK will increase their targets according to the Climate Change Committee's recommendations, but that is still a long way off. The science is saying that things are serious, but the political situation is even more dire.

We also have to look at the UK contribution. Most people say—Ministers often say this—that the UK is responsible for 2 per cent. of global emissions, which is

true. Last year, however, the pocket environment guide produced by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—I would recommend it as holiday reading to anybody going on their holidays, although not, of course, by air—showed that emissions related to UK consumption accounted for well above 15 per cent. of the global total. If we think about it, how could we claim to be the fifth or sixth biggest economy in the world with only 2 per cent. of greenhouse gas emissions? That simply does not stack up.

That raises an important question about responsibility. We have to put it to people that their consumption is at the root of the problem—the problem does not start somewhere else. A Chinese coal-fired power station is part of a supply chain. I was thinking about this problem on the way back from last year's climate change camp at Kingsnorth, which I visited with one or two other hon. Members. E.ON wants to build a new power station—originally, it wanted to build it without carbon capture and storage—so it becomes the enemy and the target of a great deal of campaigning. As I went back through the suburbs of east London on the train, however, I thought, "Here's the real target. It's all those kettles that get switched on. It's those big flat-screen TVs." When we campaign against climate change, our focus is on the big power producers, and there is a lot of credit in that approach, but the simple fact is that we tend to forget that it is individuals who demand electricity and the other forms of energy that they need for a comfortable lifestyle.

We have to address those people. If we do not, the power stations will still be built, including many of those in China, which produce the energy needed to make our cheap goods. Those Chinese power stations will continue to be built without CCS and will continue to create a problem. The Chinese are now using this issue as an argument. They say, "Why should we have to take the whole bitter pill when you lot created the problem and your consumption feeds our growth?" That is a powerful argument, and one which we would begin to address if we introduced personal carbon trading.

It has been said that such a scheme is very complex, but I simply do not believe that. If the people who invented supermarket reward cards had had somebody whispering in their ears, "It's a complex scheme. Don't do it," we would not have Nectar cards at Sainsbury or Clubcards at Tesco. The carbon allowances scheme would be relatively simple, and it would be extremely condescending to say that a lot of people could not understand it. Indeed, it would be extremely simple; in some cases, people would not even be terribly conscious of it, because much of the hard work would be done by the utilities' computers.

Let us compare the scheme with what we have now. I hope that nobody would argue that what we have now is simple and something that the public can understand. I would like to do a straw poll in Parliament square to see whether people understand the emissions trading scheme or know how much it saved last year in terms of carbon emissions. I would like to ask them what the renewables obligation and carbon emissions reduction targets are. The Government are creating more and more measures to deal with climate change, and I welcome them in so far as they go, but they are not sufficient and they do not address the real problem of our consumer society

and our pursuit of greater GDP per capita, which is, of course, expressed in terms of growth. There is a serious question to ask about whether the scheme would be more or less complex than all our upstream schemes, which are opaque, remote and mean nothing to the public.

If people knew what these things were—if they read the Committee's reports more often, they probably would—they would know that the National Audit Office has suggested that the third phase of the EU ETS, including carbon trading, may deliver a domestic effort resulting in only a 7 per cent. reduction in carbon emissions. If people thought that they were paying all that extra in their bills just to get 7 per cent., they might be quite nonplussed. We have to be careful when we say that the scheme would be so complex that we could not possibly introduce it.

I have also sat for the past two and a half years on the Green Fiscal Commission, which looks at taxation issues. After two and half years I do not think that we are any closer to a simple way of addressing environmental taxation. That is a problem with taxation approaches: every time someone mentions the environment to a constituent, the next thought to pop into their head is "How much is that going to cost me?" The environment gets a bad name when everything that happens in connection to it is a new tax or a new cost.

We must go to the public and engage with them. We require a scheme that, as the Select Committee Chairman has said, is very progressive—the opposite of income tax and many other taxes. That would simplify our approach enormously. We now need to rest, permanently, the approach that has dominated the Government's thinking when they have gone directly to the public—the voluntary approach. We have a number of quite good educational tools, the most of important of which is the Act On CO₂ website. Last June the Minister was pleased to announce that there had been more than 1 million hits on the site since it was launched in the previous year. I do not know whether that number has doubled. Perhaps the Minister will tell us, on the first anniversary of that announcement, that there have now been 2 million hits. Deeper analysis, however, suggests that only half the people who went to the website did the calculation of their footprint, and only half of those did anything about it. The voluntary approach that leads to 1.2 million hits in a year has led, according to the Government's analysis, to only 250,000 people doing something about it.

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): In defence of the Government I would say that although 1.2 million hits is not nearly enough to transform the country's attitude to carbon footprints, the translation of that figure to 250,000 personal actions and decisions is actually rather good.

Colin Challen: When he makes statements like that I can see that the hon. Gentleman is preparing for Government. Yes, it is good if one person does something that they would not have done before, but those 250,000 might well have been people who were already prepared to do something. Preaching to the converted is not the answer; going well beyond that is the answer. The adult population is 60 million. If 250,000 people do something, out of 60 million, well—doing the maths myself it

comes out at something like a quarter of 1.6 per cent. I may be wrong about that; I am not terribly good on that sort of thing, but it is still extraordinarily low.

That is borne out by polling evidence. The most recent Ipsos MORI monthly tracker of public opinion was probably sent to all MPs electronically a few weeks ago. People were asked,

"What would you say is the most important issue facing Britain today?"

I had to look well down the list to find anything to do with climate change, and that was chosen by about 4 per cent. I can understand why 39 per cent. said it was the economic situation. The next biggest block, at 12 per cent., was race relations and immigration. The people who were interested in environment or pollution and mentioned it as their first concern were 3 per cent. of the public. Even when people were asked another question about what they saw as "other important issues", which gave them a bit of extra choice, the figure citing pollution and environment went up to only 8 per cent. Despite other polls showing that perhaps 70 per cent. or 80 per cent. of the public are aware of and concerned about climate change, usually when people are asked whether they will do something about it themselves only 6 or 7 per cent. respond.

At that rate of progress we shall fail to achieve our objectives. We must get the public more on board if all the other things are to happen. I do not think anyone has yet quite understood the full impact that carbon budgets would have; they would go well beyond any of the things we have tried before, many of which have not been successful. It is a significant issue for us to grapple with. We must present personal carbon allowances as a positive step. They could be described as a free-market measure—a neo-liberal approach. They could also be called a socialist approach. We can make all sorts of things out of them.

The way forward, apart from the pilot project, which is a courageous thing to offer, is to think about other ways to engage people with the carbon story. One suggestion is in a Bill in Congress at the moment. Obama himself has given the idea a sort of endorsement. The idea is 100 per cent. auctioning of carbon allowances for industry; the whole lot is then given to the taxpaying public in carbon rebates. One can imagine that eventually people will be in the pub asking "How much is the carbon cheque going to be this year?" That is quite an innovative approach. We must engage people in the carbon story, not just with a calculator on the web, which is a purely voluntary thing, but by giving them something back. That is what personal carbon allowances would do for people who used all the programmes that we could bring on to maximise renewable energy and energy efficiency. People could easily get below their budget.

From my experience in trying to do that, a bit more planning is needed. If people want to travel, they do not always have to get in the car; they can use public transport. We would have a campaign for better public transport. They could reduce their mileage or the size of their car. Those things make significant differences. People can go on green electricity tariffs. Even without making a great difference to lifestyles it is possible to make huge savings. Personal carbon allowances would encourage such behaviour.

[Colin Challen]

I endorse the calls that have been made for the Government to look again at their response to the report and to take a far more positive attitude. It is time, recognising that the general election will be a watershed of one kind or another, to be really bold and radical, because we have nothing to lose.

3.26 pm

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh, North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Bercow, as it will be in future, whatever form that chairmanship may manifest itself in after Monday. It is also a pleasure to follow my colleagues on the Select Committee, my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Joan Walley) and for Morley and Rothwell (Colin Challen), and the Chairman, the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), who made an excellent opening contribution. I pay tribute to him for his work on the report, as well as for his non-partisan leadership of the Committee over a number of years and his help and leadership in producing several reports—challenging political orthodoxy across the parties and being unafraid to highlight difficult issues. I am sure that my hon. Friend the Minister will recall that the Committee has been very willing to support and to back the Government at times when they have had few friends in connection with moving the climate change agenda and other issues forward.

Most of the detailed comments that I could make on the report have, not surprisingly, been made in earlier speeches, so I restrict myself to a few general points. First, although as most hon. Members will know I am not backward in coming forward to support radical measures to tackle climate change, I started with some reservations about whether personal carbon trading was practical. I could see the theoretical arguments for it, but wondered whether the practical issues that would need to be dealt with outweighed any advantages to be gained. I understand and accept that practical issues would arise, for example, if an attempt were made to develop a scheme that applied to the entire economy, logical though that might be. I also accept that political acceptability is an issue to be dealt with. We must recognise the syndrome in which, if people are asked in general terms whether they favour a measure to tackle climate change, there is overwhelming support, but when it comes to the nitty-gritty and the way in which the policies will apply, support becomes more tenuous. I can see, even now, a slight tension between trying to get an inclusive scheme for a genuine system that cannot be undermined by weaknesses within it, and a public who are understandably cynical and cautious about measures that restrict their freedom in various ways. There is a balance to be struck and we have to accept that.

As I have highlighted, I had reservations about personal carbon trading when I first approached this debate, but I have now very much come around to the idea. Like the Chairman of the Select Committee, I think that we have to take this issue seriously and to try to work through it and to take it forward. A pilot scheme is one way in which the Government could take it forward, and would win a great deal of public support. I say that for several reasons. First, having seen the schemes that have been developed—mainly in theory, but with some practical

examples—I believe that a scheme that concentrates on particular areas of high energy demand, where individuals are very conscious of their choices about energy demand and the types of energy they use with personal travel and so on, could be effective both in getting public support and in making changes in personal behaviour.

My second reason for coming around to the idea that we need to do more work on personal carbon trading and on setting up pilot schemes, is the overall picture about climate change, to which all my colleagues have referred. As every Member present is aware, we now have more evidence of the way in which climate change is accelerating. We are aware of how serious the problem is and of how little time we have to start turning around policy and personal behaviour. Personal carbon trading has the attraction of making individuals face up to the consequences of their actions when deciding whether to do something that will help to reduce climate change, or something that will exacerbate it.

For those reasons, any measure that can extend public and personal awareness, and bring about measures that will reduce greenhouse gas emissions from individuals as well as organisations and society, should be examined. That is why the Government should take forward the proposals for a pilot scheme.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North suggested that we could have pilot schemes in different parts of the country, and that would make a lot of sense. Clearly, we could not have lots of pilots, as they would no longer then be pilots, but different communities in rural and urban areas have different characteristics, and schemes could concentrate on different types of energy use in different areas. This issue should certainly be examined and taken forward, and I hope that the Government will recognise the strength of the arguments that Committee members have put forward today and in the report. I hope also that the Government will reconsider their position and move in the direction that the report suggests.

3.33 pm

Simon Hughes (North Southwark and Bermondsey) (LD): I, too, wish you all the best in the next few interesting days, Mr. Bercow. Yesterday, at an event in my constituency for one of the major secondary schools, I enquired whether the four senior prefects would be interested in coming to see the election of a Speaker, and they were positively excited about the idea, so it is of interest outside too. I hope that it will be the beginning of a good and positive new phase for Parliament.

May I join others in paying tribute to the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo), both for his work in producing the report and more generally? I have not had the opportunity to say that to him formally since I took back responsibility for these matters. Like him, I go back a long way in this place, so I can pay tribute to his interest in these matters over many years. He rightly reflected on the rather long gestation period that these debates have, and that it is 30 months since his Committee came to its view on this matter in its very full report. I join his colleagues from the Committee, particularly the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Joan Walley), in commending the report to the interested public, because it has set out the arguments and a good amount of evidence, thereby launching the debate.

Before the Government produced their response in the autumn, the idea of personal carbon budgets got a bit of traction in the press. This is always a risky route to go down, but I noticed that there was a positive endorsement from Polly Toynbee in her column in *The Guardian*, which was entitled “Carbon credits tick all the boxes”, on 16 August 2008. That piece was written against the backdrop of an awful August climatologically, as we remember. The following month, there was an equally robust response from Richard Starkey of the Tyndall centre entitled, “Personal carbon trading is not as simple as swiping an Oyster card”, in which he argued the DEFRA case. So the intellectual public debate got going, and the Government responded, before the Minister’s stewardship, in October.

I do not know who the individual author of the Government response was, or whether a collection of authors did the drafting on behalf of the civil service, but the document was robust in rejecting the proposition. Colleagues will remember that when the matter came before the Environmental Audit Committee for discussion last spring, my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) was the one member of the Committee who did not go along with the recommendations. Indeed, at the beginning of the proceedings he moved an amendment to the formal minutes stating that

“this Committee declines to read the draft report a second time because it unfairly criticises the concept of green taxation and does not adequately address the problems that would be faced by those who already struggle to manage the competing demands of low incomes and high living costs and limited options for changing their lifestyles and circumstances”.

He came to the debate minded to support personal carbon budgets, but as he listened to the evidence and engaged in the debate, he became increasingly dissuaded about the fairness of the idea and, hence, put down his marker in the debate at the end of the report.

That is enough history. I want to say a word about the context today. Like colleagues such as the hon. Member for Morley and Rothwell (Colin Challen), I have just come from the Chamber, where I heard the statement by the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs introducing the Met Office report and its stark predictions of the effect of climate change on this country. I hope that people who read this debate will also read that statement and the responses to it. Whatever our differences, whether politically or on some of the responses, there is no doubt that we need an effective, robust and comprehensive set of personal and collective responses in the UK and worldwide to what the scientists are increasingly showing to be a crisis of unparalleled proportions in our environment, given the speed at which changes are developing.

I shall not rehearse our earlier exchanges, except to summarise that the Met Office predicts a minimum increase in temperature of 2°, but it could be higher. If that happens, large changes are projected not only for the south of England, but across the country. Not only will there be an impact on the climate but on ecology and biodiversity, as well as on social and other policies. We need to see our response to the issue of what we do about our carbon use against that backdrop.

I absolutely agree with the hon. Member for Morley and Rothwell and with the Chairman of the Committee, the hon. Member for South Suffolk: institutional change alone is not sufficient. There has to be personal responsibility and, to put it simply, we each have to understand the

score. As the Minister said in response to a debate we recently had in this Chamber on the energy industry, that is not yet easy to do. We live in a country where it is extremely difficult for people to understand the impact of what they buy and what they do. There is a huge set of items on the agenda if we wish to make it easier for people to understand the impact of their life choices.

Again, it is appropriate that I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Morley and Rothwell for presenting a Bill today, as it makes another good consumer-orientated proposal: when members of the public make a choice—in this case in relation to vehicles for their own use—it is important that they know what the impact of that vehicle is. We have argued, and the Minister has agreed, that it is important that when, for example, people go shopping on a Saturday to B&Q, Asda and other places near where she and I live down the Old Kent road, they should be able to see what the impact is on the climate of buying a bit of kitchen equipment, a fridge or a television.

This morning, I was in a discussion with my noble Friend Lord Redesdale, who has been talking to people in the construction industry about the need for people to understand the impact that home boilers have on housing carbon emissions. The boiler is probably the most significant single item in someone’s home and is something that most people desperately hope they will never need to replace because they see it as a big issue with big budget implications. People need information in relation to that. We have had formal exchanges with the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker) and his colleagues in the Conservative party and elsewhere about how to get the energy companies to tell people in their bills exactly what their choice means and its implications for their carbon footprint and the costs.

A general point is that we need to do far better to make sure that people understand the implications—not just people like us who may have the time and ability to do that, but people who may have much more stressed lives and who may be less academic than the policy makers. People may have illnesses or be subject to other pressures that mean they do not have the time to look through the 4,000 different tariffs that the Consumers Association has told us exist.

Where does that leave us on personal carbon emission limits and where should that take us in the debate? I shall make one further general point, then say a few things about the response of my party and myself to the proposal. A general point is that we are all now beginning to understand the collective targets that we need to achieve if we are going to respond to the crisis. Those targets are becoming more demanding, but they are only the beginning. They provide the framework, but it is the delivery that is the issue. Yes, the delivery can happen in the workplace and companies have a big role to play, but meeting those targets is absolutely dependent on the energy sector. There is a whole debate to be had about making sure we have the renewable and other energy alternatives and that we deal with carbon capture and storage and all the issues that we have discussed elsewhere. There are also other responsibilities to do with Government legislation and Europe-wide legislation. Of course, the frameworks are important, but that still does not mean there is not a question about whether we should have personal legal responsibilities and legal limits.

[Simon Hughes]

When my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham expressed his concerns last year, he did so—I shall use just one example—because, put simply, he believed that there would be difficult and unfair outcomes, as certain choices would lead the relatively poor and disadvantaged into more difficulty. To provide an analogy, it is a bit like somebody who is given a credit card not being able to manage their finances very well and discovering that, at crucial moments when they need it, there is no credit left—in other words, it is possible that someone might run out of capacity and reach their limit when they most need something. That is particularly a risk to people who are less well off and less equipped to deal with such things. The report recognises that and understands that there are all sorts of social issues, which is why the hon. Member for South Suffolk picked up on the idea in the report that we should proceed with a pilot scheme to test whether such difficult organisational and mechanistic issues can be ironed out.

An addition to the debate on the subject was made in the interval between the publication of the report last May and the period after the Government's response. Having done some pilot work on the subject, the Royal Society for the Encouragement of Arts, Manufactures and Commerce published a report in, I think, February this year that was supportive of the proposal. I have not seen that report and I am unsure of its nature. It appears to be very limited and based on the activities of about 112 individuals who had been working through how such a scheme would work in relation to them. On that basis, they said the scheme was to be commended and that it was worth doing.

If there is to be consensus building, there needs to be a pilot approach. It would not be sufficient for a pilot to be held in one local authority, even if it were a very willing one in a beautiful part of the country. It is necessary to have pilots in several places, and it would be logical to choose places from the four countries of the United Kingdom. We should choose places that are urban as well as rural and that have a mixture of communities. I support that approach.

Having picked up the brief, I have made some inquiries among my colleagues about what they think about the issue. Some of my colleagues are strongly opposed to the idea because of the obvious conflict with liberal principles—for example, it would lead to too much of a Big Brother state and would be too much of an intrusion. The scheme would require people to have, as it were, another set of organisational accountabilities. There is also a danger that those administering the system would be able to track much more carefully what people do with their lives—where people spend their money, what they use it on and so on. There is a big bureaucratic and organisational overlay, which could be a big risk. I understand that issue clearly. Some of my colleagues put it very robustly and say that they are in favour of making sure that there are sticks and carrots, but that they think that should be done through the tax system.

Our party had a big debate on the matter at our conference two years ago and produced a report, which those who are interested can read. It is called “Zero Carbon Britain—Taking a Global Lead.” One of our proposals is to switch from the climate change levy to a carbon tax, which would apply to

“primary fuels as they enter the economy, once our energy efficiency measures have become effective in tackling fuel poverty, using revenues to cut other taxes.”

We have argued—including my colleagues who are against this mechanism—that carbon taxes are a better mechanism and that they are more obvious, visible and transparent. Putting it simply, we could tax the bad things and reduce tax on the good things. We could also do things that the Government have already started to do, such as imposing an incremental vehicle excise duty. For example, there should either be no tax at all or very low tax on cars that are non-polluting and a high tax on cars that are much more polluting.

Some colleagues are robustly opposed to the scheme and some think that it is certainly worth pursuing and we should not let it drop off the agenda. I accept the proposition that the next Parliament is effectively the last parliamentary opportunity we have as a country for getting our house in order on this range of issues. The crisis is so great that, as many of the well-informed advisory groups have said, if we do not get a deal in Copenhagen that is robust enough, and if the Americans, the Chinese, the Indians and others do not put policies in place that will allow us to turn the corner some time during the next decade—people have dates such as 2016 in mind—it will be too late and we will be accused of failing in our obligations. Therefore, I have to decide what is the responsible thing to do, and how to respond. I shall give an uncomplicated summary of my position.

My party has in place policies that I believe will contribute to a reduction in carbon emissions and in the use of fuel, and to an increased chance of combating climate change. We have schemes for making all homes energy-efficient and so on. We have other policies in place that relate to what kind of transport we use, moving from the more harmful to the less harmful. We have made it clear that we must not have coal-burning power stations that do not have full carbon capture and storage, and that we absolutely must expand the renewables sector. All those policies are in place.

I have decided that my party has an obligation to respond formally to the proposition in the report, and that we need to do so quickly, so I have decided that we will have a short period of formal but open consultation, picking up on what has come from the Committee's report and from the Government response, which makes arguments against it. We will complete that process by September, by the time of our conference. We will then be able to formulate a party view in good time for the general election, which we expect afterwards. The plan will allow us to have an internal debate and look at the pilot scheme option. My sense of the way forward is that the pilot scheme option is likely to command the most confidence, as it will allow people to see whether the proposal works.

I am nervous about an over-authoritarian response, and anything that is illiberal in the way in which it intrudes on people's privacy. I do not have a problem with having a tough set of laws and regulations to deal with the global crisis, because sometimes one has to regulate and legislate to change behaviour. I do not believe that everyone will wake up in time and come to understand their obligations. However, we need to respond positively. My response to the hon. Member for South Suffolk and his colleagues is to say that the public are clearly divided on the issue. It is controversial, and it

would involve people living their life in an entirely different way and being environmentally accountable. We should go down this road only if the preconditions that the Committee set out on public understanding are met.

I believe that public understanding of the crisis is growing quickly. They understand increasingly clearly that we all have personal obligations to do things about it, but we must ensure that the public do not think that there will be unfair penalties, or that the rich and well looked-after will be able to manage far better than the poor and disadvantaged. That would not be a good, fair or equitable social outcome. My proposal seems to be a reasonable way forward. I hope that it commends itself to members of the Committee, to the Government and to the public. I will, of course, ensure that we make public our response later this year.

3.53 pm

Gregory Barker (Bexhill and Battle) (Con): I am a Front-Bench spokesman and therefore precluded from nailing my colours to the mast of any candidate for Speaker; nevertheless, I wish you well on Monday, Mr. Bercow.

The speech by the hon. Member for North Southwark and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) was thoughtful and covered all the points, but I find it eye-wateringly extraordinary that, more than a year after the report was published on 26 May 2008, his party still needs another six months or so to come to any sort of balanced conclusion. That is extraordinary, given that we are in the fifth year of a Parliament, but I leave that to one side.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on his excellent speech and on a thorough report. The Government response was long overdue. There is a great deal of detail in the report that informs this important debate, but I may disappoint him by saying that we on the Conservative Benches will find more in common with the Government response than we do with the Environmental Audit Committee's report. However, it is an excellent example of the EAC leading the debate.

I am entirely party-free on this matter, as I am an alumnus of the EAC, having for five years served with great pleasure alongside at least three hon. Members in the Chamber—in fact, for the whole of my first Parliament. I have the greatest respect for the Committee's work. It tests opinion in Parliament and in the country more widely. The EAC is second to none in the role of leading and helping to shape the debate on the challenges of climate change as well as the wider environmental debate. It is absolutely right and welcome that it has done so much important work on the issue.

Of course, the idea was run up the flagpole by the right hon. Member for South Shields (David Miliband) before he went on to become Foreign Secretary. Unfortunately, his utterances on, and enthusiasm for, personal carbon trading proved to be another banana skin on which he slipped, and he rapidly retreated to the Government's much more measured approach to the subject.

I wish to be precise in giving my party's response to the debate. There are several good reasons for thinking that personal carbon trading could contribute to a

solution to the problem of dangerous man-made climate change. We all know that there are no easy solutions, and that the solutions are many and complex. There are certainly no silver bullets, so everything that looks like a potential solution has to be looked at clearly.

I agree with the Committee's statement that "if the Government is to stand the slightest chance of meeting its 2050 target it cannot afford to neglect the domestic and personal sector."

That is absolutely right—it is a given. The Committee then stated:

"Reductions in carbon emissions from business and industry will be meaningless unless accompanied by significant and equal reductions from households and individuals",

and was spot on on that.

Likewise, the Committee stated that "existing initiatives are unlikely to bring about behavioural change on the scale required".

I think that that principle could be extended across the range of Government policies. We are simply not seeing transformation on the scale required. Even if individually many of the Government's schemes and policies are themselves not bad, they simply do not have the reach and breadth that we need, given the urgency of action during the next decade.

I certainly agree with the Committee's conclusion that

"more radical measures must be introduced if emissions reductions from the individual and household sector are ever to make a meaningful contribution to UK targets."

However, I am less sure that its conclusion that personal carbon trading

"might be the kind of measure needed to bring about behavioural change"

is something that we need to embrace now.

In point 6, the Committee acknowledges

"the many difficulties that will have to be overcome in the development and implementation of personal carbon trading, not least work to bring about the public and political acceptance of such a concept; considerable further research is required on many aspects of personal carbon trading."

The fundamental difference is that the Committee believes that by

"designing and implementing a sensitive and moderate scheme, these obstacles could be overcome."

That is where I beg to differ.

There is a danger that such a scheme would ultimately appear to the public to be complicated, intrusive and potentially another arm of the Big Brother state. I could easily rehearse all the familiar arguments about identity cards, but, even greater than that, we would have a huge public debate about process. The debate would not be about the threat from climate change or the urgent need for action. It would be drawn down into a pointless discussion about process, cards, funding, formulae and something that, in itself, is not a solution but just a mechanism for getting to a solution. That could do huge damage to the growing public acceptance of the need for radical action on climate change.

Ultimately, it boils down to this: there is a serious problem. We need much more radical action and we must be much more ambitious in our response to dangerous man-made climate change, but there is a hierarchy of response and action. A number of other

[Gregory Barker]

measures cannot be put in place until the infrastructure to decarbonise our economy is in place, and until the public feel that the Government are showing real leadership and have implemented the measures needed to make it easier, and possible, for people to live a more low-carbon lifestyle and to easily facilitate the changes that they need to make in their lives to live a more low-carbon and sustainable existence. To bring in such a measure now would risk alienating the public opinion that is essential if we are to beat the challenge of dangerous man-made climate change.

Although I believe in political leadership, not followship, on this issue there is a possibility of our alienating the people whom we need onside if we are to be effective in adopting all the manifold solutions that we need to bring to bear on global warming. Only when those other measures are in place and we have retrofitted the vast majority of the housing stock with the energy efficiency measures that it is crying out for can we then start to put pressure on people to change their lifestyles. Only when we have a much more equitable system of taxation, with green taxation taking on a more important role in the overall balance of taxation policy, and only when the Government are making real steps to ensure that the investment flows into the energy supply to ensure that renewables are playing a full part, and that the carbon from the fossil fuels that we do deploy is captured and sequestered, will it be fair to start putting more pressure on to the British public—the consumer.

Ultimately, it is not that we are against the principle of personal carbon trading, but in the face of a real threat—let us be clear that, as we heard today, climate change is posing a growing threat to our nation and to the well-being of the population—we have to do a lot of things first, before we get to the unpalatable measure of the intrusive, Big Brother approach of personal carbon trading. Because of all the detail on our personal and private lives that would have to be assembled centrally and held in a database, worrying and complex questions arise that go way beyond simply dealing with effective solutions to climate change. The hon. Member for North Southwark and Bermondsey rightly mentioned the liberal principles that are at stake. We cannot discard those lightly.

Until we see a far more robust implementation of policies to transform the basis of our economy and to make it easier for people to live low-carbon lives, simply introducing personal carbon trading would be regarded by the electorate—the public—as an abdication of responsibility by the Government, who should be leading on this issue, and it would be seen as a substitute for real Government action on this agenda. There is still so much that we should be doing, at Government, local government and community levels, before trying to pick our way through such a complex and potentially unpopular policy such as personal carbon trading.

The Government response to the report, rightly, does not pooh-pooh the whole scheme. It draws attention to the support that the Government have given to external research—to academia and think-tanks—and says that they are

“committed to keeping in touch with their progress.”

I think that we could be a bit more robust in that regard and a bit more supportive of external research, because

we cannot totally dismiss that, despite our reservations. Perhaps, when all the other things are in place, if we are not successful in decarbonising the economy to the extent that we think possible, ultimately we will have to go down the route of personal carbon trading, but it is not acceptable at the moment. We are not yet in a position where we have the right to impose it on the British public, but we should keep it under review, consider carefully the recommendations of the Environmental Audit Committee, and look with interest at the continuing debate in academia and at the research studies.

My view of pilot schemes is slightly less clear. There could be merits in a pilot scheme, and we could learn more for potential future action. However, the danger is that Government pilots would spark a national debate, which could deflect the focus away from the strong action that we need in other areas, including our infrastructure, energy efficiency, developing renewables and decarbonising our economy. My party published a wider range of measures earlier this year in a paper called “Low Carbon Economy”. That is where the focus has to be. We have still to get the public to focus on the potential of, and opportunities in, decarbonising our economy and on the considerable benefits that would flow to both their quality of life and our economic life if we do that.

I agreed with many things that the hon. Member for Morley and Rothwell (Colin Challen) said. I appreciate that he is a long-term advocate of personal carbon trading. He is right to say that the Government have a slew of different initiatives that are complex and often opaque. That criticism is valid. Individually, a lot of the schemes are perfectly sensible, but the whole creates a rather confusing blizzard of schemes and counter-schemes. However, I do not agree that the answer to climate change is to inhibit economic growth and simply to put a brake on progress. On the contrary, the economic development of clean energy and deploying capital from the private sector to get the billions of pounds of investment that we need from it into sustainable solutions will be a key factor.

Earlier today, I was with the shadow Chancellor of the Exchequer at the London stock exchange for the launch of the new index, the green initiative and opportunities index, which we hope will make the UK the global hub for green financing and investment. There are the things on the opportunity, innovation and enterprise agendas that we should be focusing on and trying to capture the imagination of the British public with, rather than going down the route of hair-shirt restrictions, which are part of the older agenda of environmentalism.

Colin Challen: I am a little perturbed by the hon. Gentleman’s interpretation of my words, some of which I never actually said. I did say that it was possible for people to plan their life better so that they can still maintain their quality of life by having a smaller carbon footprint. It is not about wearing a hair shirt.

Gregory Barker: I am happy to stand corrected, if I misinterpreted what the hon. Gentleman said. I totally agree that, of course, it is possible to have a smaller carbon footprint and still enjoy a high quality of life. On that we are united.

There is a hierarchy of response. We cannot rule out that, one day, we will need personal carbon rationing—trading—but there is still a huge amount for the Government to do. We need far more leadership and ambition. Running pilots would be an unwelcome distraction from the great task, which the next Government will have, of leading on the solutions to dangerous man-made climate change.

4.9 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Joan Ruddock): I join all other hon. Members who have expressed their very best wishes to you, Mr. Bercow, and wish you well in the current contest.

I congratulate the hon. Member for South Suffolk (Mr. Yeo) on his thorough, enthusiastic presentation of the Committee's report. I also congratulate the other Committee members on their contributions to this debate. The hon. Gentleman began by stressing the enormity of the challenge. He knows that I agree with him totally on that point. As other hon. Members have said, we have today launched our latest climate change projections, which show the reality of the changing climate in the UK, and emphasise that we must both reduce our emissions and adapt to the inevitable changes.

Since the Committee's report was published a year ago, we have in the Climate Change Act 2008 increased our 2050 target to an 80 per cent. reduction in greenhouse gas emissions against 1990 levels. We have also set out our proposed carbon budgets, which will take us to a 34 per cent. reduction over the five years from 2018 to 2022, putting us firmly on the trajectory towards 2050. We are also playing a leading role internationally in the preparations for the Copenhagen climate change meeting where we will press for an ambitious global deal. After such a deal, we will further tighten our carbon budgets in line with the new international position.

My hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell (Colin Challen) said that he believes that we are not doing enough, but we believe that we are doing enough, although it is always possible to do much more. We are on the path to make the emissions reductions required of developed countries such as ours. The independent Committee on Climate Change is satisfied with current progress. We all know the sort of measures that must be put in place, or that are in place but need to be increased in some instances. We will publish detailed policies later this summer following our setting of the carbon budgets.

My hon. Friend said that he believes that the UK is responsible not for 2 per cent. of global emissions, but for 15 per cent. That was not the conclusion of the work undertaken by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs. I had that checked because I know the thoroughness with which he reads about these matters. Essentially, our imports produce one third of the increase in our actual emissions, but that does not take us to 15 per cent. of global emissions. It simply increases our 2 per cent. by one third. However, that remains a small proportion of the world's global emissions.

More than 40 per cent. of the emissions from the UK are attributable to individuals through energy use at home, through transport and in other ways. We recognise that policies to tackle such emissions must play a role alongside industry, business and the public sector. As

has been said, in 2007 the Government commissioned a series of studies into personal carbon trading, which considered four broad issues: the technical feasibility of a personal carbon trading scheme and its likely costs; the potential equity and distribution impacts; public acceptability of personal carbon trading; and the efficiency and effectiveness of personal carbon trading compared with other ways of achieving the same emissions reductions. Those studies were published in May last year, and I will recap the main findings.

First, there are no insurmountable technical barriers to the introduction of personal carbon trading, which could use established technologies drawn from current banking systems. Secondly, a personal carbon trading scheme based on banking technology would be likely to be expensive. The hon. Member for South Suffolk said that there would be no compulsion to pay, but everyone enrolled in the scheme—the whole population would have to be involved for the scheme to be fair—would have to pay the costs. Working out the costs is essential to any judgment on whether such a scheme would be affordable. We did not do that ourselves, but engaged consultants, who found that the costs would be between £700 million and £2 billion just to establish the necessary systems, and that there would be annual costs of between £1 billion and £2 billion.

My hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, North and Leith (Mark Lazarowicz) said that he was initially a sceptic but had become a convert. My journey has been exactly the opposite. I was enthusiastic, with the previous Secretary of State, and I hoped that the scheme was a straightforward and direct way of making the necessary carbon reductions. One of the great attractions for me and for all hon. Members who have worked on the Committee is that everyone would receive the same allocation of emissions rights, so fairness is apparent, but we must consider how many allowances people would need to meet their basic requirements.

In general, those with higher incomes use more energy and travel more, so they have higher carbon emissions. Not surprisingly, our study found personal carbon trading to be generally progressive in its distributional impact, and that is what we expected. However, a significant number of low-income households would lose out, and we cannot ignore that. More than 2 million low-income households could be doubly disadvantaged. Not only would they pay the cost of the scheme, which could be around £40 to £80 per household per year, but if they lived in a rural area and had to use their car regularly, for example, they would exceed their free allocation and incur the cost of buying additional allowances. We cannot find a way of overcoming that.

My hon. Friend also said that it would be possible to guarantee the outcome from a personal carbon trading scheme. The only way to guarantee an outcome from such a scheme would be to allow the carbon price to rise without constraint. Clearly, any market mechanism without constraint would be a huge disadvantage to those who are less able to pay.

Mr. Yeo: I fully recognise that applying personal carbon trading to transport is vastly more complicated and vastly less attractive than applying it to the domestic energy sector, which is substantial, so it is worth making reductions in it. Transport can be dealt with more

[Mr. Yeo]

effectively in other ways. I acknowledge that trying to apply it to people who are driving around is almost certainly unworkable.

The Minister knows that we dispute the costs of the scheme. I do not know what brief was given to the consultants who said that it would cost up to £2 billion to set up and another £2 billion a year, but I bet that they did not talk to Tesco about how it runs its card scheme, which involves tens of millions of people.

If the personal free allowance were set at a sufficient level, it should be possible for a substantial proportion of households—this would include a high proportion of low-income households—to come in well below their allowance. Even if there were an annual £40 admin cost, which I dispute, the value of the surplus allowances would in many cases well exceed that.

John Bercow (in the Chair): Order. May I tell the hon. Gentleman carefully and diplomatically that his intervention is learned but lengthy? I am sure that it is coming to an end.

Mr. Yeo: I am grateful to you, Mr. Bercow. Being corrected will not prejudice my decision on Monday.

Some of the objections that the Minister is raising to such a scheme could be dealt with.

Joan Ruddock: The hon. Gentleman tries to second-guess a serious group of studies that the Department undertook. We undertook that work because we genuinely wanted to find out what was possible. He must accept that those are the findings, and that they led us to certain conclusions. I do not believe that his Committee was able to produce other modelling that would suggest otherwise. I will respond later in my speech to the suggestions that he makes: for example, that the scheme should be very much restricted—perhaps restricted to domestic energy use.

Before dealing with public acceptability, perhaps I should acknowledge the comments about the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) that were made by the hon. Member for North Southwark and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes) and the concerns that were expressed by him about those who are less able to pay. Even if the less able to pay are a relatively small group of people, the system, if it is to work, depends on trading, and apart from the least able to pay, there are people in one sector of society—I think that he will acknowledge this, as I do—in constituencies such as ours that not only do not have bank accounts, but have the greatest difficulty because their lives are very complicated and stressed. It would be very difficult for many people to take on that burden in addition to everything else that they are dealing with. That needs to be understood.

We found that public acceptance of personal carbon trading would be a major hurdle. Although the majority of individuals in our study recognised the need to take personal action, people easily perceive personal carbon trading as a form of rationing. Furthermore, they had concerns about imposing what were seen to be limits on activities. There were concerns about the complexity of trading and the extent to which people would engage

with that aspect of the scheme, and there was strong reluctance about the use of price signals to influence individuals' behaviour.

The hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker) advanced strong arguments, along those lines, about the terrific controversy that would arise about the process itself. We take that very seriously. That does not equate to the Government being unprepared to meet the public, head-on if necessary, on issues on which persuasion and behaviour change are required to meet our carbon limits. We are more than prepared to do that, but to do it in the face of concerns that we think would lead to real and major difficulties would be somewhat foolish.

We see the need to question how personal carbon trading might deliver savings beyond those that we are establishing from alternative policies. That is the opposite of what hon. Members have argued. They have argued that, through this method, we could do things that we will not be able to do, or do enough of, through other methods. That is the central question that I now want to address.

Because personal carbon trading schemes target energy users directly, we describe them as downstream trading schemes, as opposed to upstream trading of emissions through fuel suppliers, for example. At the moment, all emissions from electricity usage are already capped through the EU emissions trading scheme, which covers all the major power generators. Therefore, some of the emissions—the electricity emissions—that would be covered by a limited personal carbon trading scheme such as the hon. Member for South Suffolk has proposed are already accounted for further upstream. Any actions to reduce electricity demand do not, therefore, create additional emissions reductions. That sounds counterintuitive, but it is a fact, because if we reduce within the UK, within the EU emissions trading scheme, we allow more scope for more emissions elsewhere.

Colin Challen: I wonder whether my hon. Friend has a fix on the extra amount that everybody has to pay on their energy bills to cover the cost of the ETS and the raft of other upstream schemes. There is a cost to poor people there. How are we addressing that?

Joan Ruddock: My hon. Friend is right. There is a cost, and it is fair to say that as we develop more policies directed at producing more renewable energy, we will have to put more cost on to bills. We have acknowledged that. The fact is, however, that if we do that through upstream schemes, we will do the overall scheme at much lower cost than we believe we could do through personal carbon allowances. That is the case that I make. It is not that personal carbon allowances could not be made to work. I believe that they could. The question is whether that is the more effective way of dealing with carbon limits in the UK and in the EU, or whether the current schemes and the development of the current schemes that we plan for the future are more effective. I believe that the latter is the way forward.

I say clearly for the record that any actions to reduce electricity demand do not therefore create additional emissions reductions, but that is not to say that they are not valuable for other reasons, such as reducing overall abatement costs for the UK and enhancing our security of supply. There is value there, but it does not achieve what my hon. Friend argued it did.

From 2013, aviation will join the EU ETS, so another element of personal carbon emissions will be tackled upstream. It would be feasible to cap heating fuel and road transport fuel upstream as well, at which point all the main sources of carbon emissions from individuals would be subject to upstream caps. Because upstream trading schemes involve relatively few parties, their implementation costs would be relatively small.

Earlier, I gave the costs of the personal carbon trading schemes. With regard to the upstream schemes, we estimate that it would cost about £50 million to cover a few dozen fuel companies, compared with the £1 billion to £2 billion to introduce a trading scheme that would have to involve 50 million participants. So what additional benefit could be gained by the downstream approach? This is important and, I hope, illustrates to hon. Members that we have taken the issue very seriously. My hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell has already argued the case, but essentially the downstream scheme offers greater visibility. People become more conscious of what they are doing and, if they are more conscious and more involved, they are more likely to be willing to adjust. Each person would have an awareness of their annual allocation and would relate that to the carbon content of their heating fuel, a flight or a tank of petrol when they filled up the car. Obviously, that is an important element, but the central question remains: how can most be achieved?

The hypothesis that we tested is that that higher visibility could drive changes in behaviour of sufficient scale to justify the additional complexity and cost. However, based on our assumed costs, we found that personal carbon trading was very unlikely to be a cost-effective way of reducing emissions compared to alternatives. In the central case scenario, the costs outweighed the benefits by a factor of 15. A scheme would need to deliver personal carbon reductions of about 40 per cent. to be cost-effective at a carbon price of £30 per tonne of carbon dioxide.

Let me offer a comparison with one of the new schemes that we are introducing—the carbon reduction commitment, which is coming in next year. That is a cap and trade scheme targeting major organisations in the commercial and public sectors. When we first proposed it, we considered an entry threshold for electricity bills of about £15,000 per annum. That would have covered most organisations other than the smallest SMEs. However, our analysis showed that, for many of the smaller participants, the costs would exceed the benefits. As a consequence, the scheme now has a much higher threshold; it is probably in the order of £500,000 a year in the cost of electricity, but that is necessary to ensure that the scheme is cost-effective.

If a trading scheme is not expected to be cost-effective even for small or medium-sized businesses, it reinforces our conclusion that a similar approach is unlikely to be cost-effective if applied to individuals. I say that with regret, because I set out wanting it to work and for the Government to be able to say that it is the road down which we should go, and I could have supported everything proposed by the Committee. However, I stand by everything that we have said in our response to the Committee's findings. We concluded that although personal carbon trading remains a promising concept, and one to which we may return in future, we could not justify further

work at this stage. Even though my Department is not actively carrying out further research on personal carbon trading, we follow developments elsewhere with interest.

The hon. Member for North Southwark and Bermondsey referred to the RSA report. I must disabuse him of his belief that the report was positive. The RSA set out to be positive, and it expected a good outcome, but its findings mirrored many of our own. It concluded that personal carbon trading posed too many problems to be introduced immediately as a mandatory national programme. However, I believe, as does the RSA, that the main elements of personal carbon trading are relevant in respect of voluntary action, and that we should consider them.

Calculating one's own carbon footprint, trying to reduce it, and being rewarded for making emissions reductions can make a valuable contribution to voluntary efforts to reduce carbon. That is particularly true if adopted at community level. I applaud the efforts of members of carbon reduction action groups to monitor and reduce their carbon emissions. The strength of the growing Transition Towns movement and the success of schemes such as the British Gas green streets competition demonstrate the power of collective action. Although we are not actively pursuing personal carbon trading at this stage, we are far from being complacent about the challenge of reducing emissions from individuals.

One of the Committee's recommendations, which was repeated today, was that the Government should press forward with the introduction of smart meters. We announced last year that we would mandate the roll-out of smart meters to all households, and we are currently consulting on the details. The roll-out will happen over the next 10 years. That may seem a long time, but it is a major infrastructure operation. However, by 2020, every household will have a smart meter. Over that period, we will have raised people's awareness, and people will more actively understand their electricity use and how they use their appliances. Things will all be coming together, and that will allow people to reduce their energy because they understand it—and they will have a smart meter to prove it.

Simon Hughes: Strategy in that direction is welcome. Will the Minister be good enough to look at what has happened in other countries? Another argument suggests that it might be possible to have such a scheme in a shorter time scale—but not necessarily as short as Italy, which I gather did it in three years. However, we could combine a shorter and more effective scheme with the right labour being trained up to deliver it and not being made redundant at the end. I gather it can be done more quickly.

Joan Ruddock: The hon. Gentleman has made that point before. I am an enthusiast; with everything that the Department considers, I say that we should go further and faster. I acknowledge the need to train people, and the fact that there are skills and capacity issues, but that needs a great deal of consultation with the energy companies. Starting next year and moving forward at the best pace we can, we believe that it will be complete by 2020. Clearly, if we can do more and do it more quickly, we would, but we want to get the design right. The technology has been evolving very fast, and smart meters can do much more than they could one or

[Joan Ruddock]

two years ago. We want to get the optimum out of this; to do so, we need to do it in the fastest time consistent with doing it well.

In our heat and energy-saving strategy consultation, we announced the great British Refurb—a programme to complete all basic household insulation measures by 2015, which is six years away. We also proposed offering whole-house refurbishments to 7 million homes by 2020. We will say more about how we intend to deliver all that in a White Paper later this summer and in the final document of our heat and energy saving strategy later this year. As hon. Members know, we are committed to introducing a feed-in tariff for renewable electricity next year, and a renewable heat incentive the following year, both of which will help householders to install low and zero-carbon energy technologies in their homes.

A number of hon. Members referred to our Act on CO₂ calculator. For the record, I shall give the up-to-date figure. Unfortunately, it is not 2 million; I wish it was. Since we started, 1.6 million unique users have generated more than 608,000 footprint profiles. Many of those who did, as well as Ministers and officials, gave feedback on how to develop it further. Those ideas have come to fruition, and version two of the calculator will be launched at the end of this month. It will provide a personalised action plan for the steps needed to reduce our carbon footprint. Other new features will include point-to-point flights, public transport and a comparison tool to help consumers understand how their carbon footprints compare with those of others.

My hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell argued that the results, although welcome, were rather small. In some ways, however, he went against his own argument on how easy it would be to get the population engaged in carbon trading. We know that there is not yet enough real awareness, understanding and participation, so it is difficult to believe that personal carbon trading, starting from where we are, could just take off. However, it is happening with small communities of self-selecting enthusiasts, as has happened with the carbon calculator. However, as with the carbon calculator, we intend to back it up with advertising, particularly on television during popular programmes when it can be afforded. In that way, we hope to keep drawing new audiences and new segments of the population towards the calculator, leading them to a greater awareness of how they can contribute, saving both energy and money.

The hon. Member for North Southwark and Bermondsey spoke of the need for people to understand much more about their energy use and their appliances. I agree with him absolutely. Again, the Government will be working through sustainable products, particularly energy-using products. We are doing a great deal of work in Europe—that is which it needs to be done—to ensure that people can obtain the most energy-efficient products, and that when they buy they can be more confident that those products will be appropriately labelled.

The Government have further plans for advertising on national television, in the press and radio and online for our Act on CO₂ campaign. That advertising will be supported by brand partnerships and other public relations activity. It goes across Government, and is not just restricted to DECC. We required the Energy Saving Trust to open a network of advice centres, and through

them, and its other campaigns, it reached 1.3 million households in England, Wales and Northern Ireland last year.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent, North (Joan Walley) challenged me in a number of ways. She spoke about the need to take seriously the work of the Environmental Audit Committee. She might recall that I was a shadow Environment Minister at the time of the road to the manifesto for the 1997 election. When I was asked what were the three things that we should have in the manifesto, I said that one of them was the EAC, so she should not doubt in any way my commitment in government to ensuring that we take the EAC's work very seriously indeed. We value it and look very carefully and soberly at all its recommendations. I am only sorry to have to disappoint the people who have shown enthusiasm for this topic, but that is not because we do not take the Committee's work very seriously. She asked me to show more willingness—the willingness is there; I just need to be convinced.

My hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Rothwell asked me to be bold and radical because we have nothing to lose. Again, I share those sentiments, but, as good as all our ideas are, we must work through them systematically to translate them into policies that can be implemented. This is a difficult business. I say to the Front-Bench spokesmen that I am glad that we have had such a meaningful exchange. I appreciate the support of the Conservative Front-Bench spokesman, who agreed with much that we have said, and I look forward to the Liberal Democrats' report at the end of the consultation, to which the hon. Member for North Southwark and Bermondsey referred.

We remain open-minded about the possibility of future action and shall follow very carefully the work being done elsewhere. We believe that some of the elements of the report are entirely applicable to voluntary and community action. We are addressing the situation at the highest level, through the EU emissions trading scheme, the new carbon reduction commitment, our climate change levies and agreements, and other upstream ways of tackling carbon emissions and meeting limits.

We are also looking at the problem from the perspective of ordinary people through our Act on CO₂ campaign. We are trying to increase public awareness and encourage a sense of a national mission. Nothing less than that—this was reflected in the sentiments expressed today—will enable us to make the emissions reductions necessary to make the UK more secure and less likely to contribute to global warming. We have to take that commitment to Copenhagen. If we do not get a global deal, the worst consequences of climate change, as revealed in today's report, will come about. I am very grateful for the work done by the Committee. It has not been wasted. It triggered this debate and will keep us on our toes and thinking and listening. I welcome hon. Members' contributions and congratulate the hon. Member for South Suffolk and his Committee on their work.

4.43 pm

Mr. Yeo: With the leave of the House, I should like to respond. I join the hon. Member for Morley and Rothwell (Colin Challen) in paying tribute to David Fleming's work on this subject. It is enormous and inspirational.

I am grateful to my Committee colleagues for their contributions, support and warm words. I welcome the comments of my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker) and the hon. Member for North Southwark and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes). I would have welcomed them a bit more warmly had they been more supportive of what the Committee is advocating, but nevertheless their contributions were constructive and thoughtful, and I look forward to seeing the Liberal Democrat's conclusions after they have mulled this over for another few weeks.

I acknowledge the Minister's personal interest in, and commitment to, this subject. It goes back many years. That is welcomed by the Committee. However, I cannot help regretting the journey that she has made on this particular topic—she has gone in the wrong direction. I have a sneaking suspicion that it was encouraged, if not led, by officials. I am sure that she will not admit that, but it is very difficult for me to believe that anyone could have made such a long journey in the wrong direction without coercion by the civil service.

Joan Ruddock: I am sorry, but the hon. Gentleman must allow me to intervene. I value our civil service—it does a huge amount of work—but my job as a Minister is clear: to examine what it tells me and come to my own conclusions, and I am a scientist, so I have a discipline that allows me to do that. I assure him that I would not have come to the conclusion that I set out in my speech if I did not believe absolutely the case presented to me on a factual basis.

Mr. Yeo: I accept what the Minister says.

I do not share the Minister's confidence—I am sure that it was not complacency—that Britain is doing enough. Time will tell. The Committee on Climate Change will take a view on that before long. I am simply anxious that, if we say, "We're on track", we shall soon be in for an unpleasant shock. I am also not sure that all her arguments against personal carbon trading apply to the much more limited ambitions harboured by the Committee members who spoke today. We are not in favour of immediately rolling out some nationwide, all-embracing scheme. We are suggesting that the concept is worth doing more on than the Minister indicated she is willing to do. I sensed a degree of incompatibility on a couple of occasions. She said that a fixed cap, necessary to achieve a guaranteed level of reduction, ran the risk of price spikes, but, as I understand it, we have a fixed cap in the EU emissions trading scheme, which has the Government's support. In theory, at least, there is the risk of a price spike, although perhaps not a very big risk, in view of the global recession.

The Minister also advanced the now rather familiar argument that because emissions from electricity generation, as a whole, are capped, under the EU ETS it is pointless to incentivise households to make reductions, given that they have been swept up in the overall cap. I seem to remember that argument being used, somewhat

disreputably, I thought, to justify allowing the construction of coal-fired power station at Kingsnorth without a fixed date for the application of carbon capture and storage. It is a poor argument, because it ignores the enormous advantage to every household in the country of investing in energy saving sooner, rather than later. It also ignores the possibility that, in the longer term—post 2020, perhaps—we might face a much more dangerous situation in which carbon prices are vastly higher. Requiring households now, by regulations, to have much lower emissions, and to incentivise them to invest in the necessary equipment, would reap a substantial advantage.

Joan Ruddock: Perhaps I did not make it clear enough that we agree with those advantages. I was simply stressing that the claim that personal carbon trading would achieve more was not correct, because electricity is covered by the EU ETS. I should have made myself clearer. If the hon. Gentleman can run a pilot scheme of the kind that he suggested, funded by the private sector, I would of course look at it.

Mr. Yeo: I welcome that last suggestion, and I shall continue to try to interest a private sector sponsor. I have only just embarked on that process.

In conclusion, we are disappointed at the Government's reluctance to undertake more work immediately. We applaud, as the Committee did several times in public, some even quite unpopular measures being taken to encourage individuals to cut emissions. For example, we have argued consistently for the restoration of the fuel duty escalator and that certain types of very polluting activity should be taxed much more highly.

My fear is that in three or five years' time, the other steps that are rightly being taken—with all party-support in some cases—will need to be greatly strengthened because the science will show that the situation is still not being adequately addressed. The danger is that if Britain is to remain a leader in the world's response to climate change, many of the additional measures that will then be needed will have to be put in place very hurriedly and they are likely to place a heavier burden on the low-income households, which have, quite rightly, been the subject of so much concern in today's debate. I am genuinely anxious that by putting on one side a possible solution—it may not be the right one, but at least let us find out—we may find that we introduce other things that penalise low-income households, which are likely to suffer more than others from the physical effect of climate change.

I am grateful to the Committee for its work, and I am grateful to you, Mr. Bercow, for your indulgence during the course of the afternoon. I shall certainly bear it in mind in the later stages of Monday evening, and I wish you a very happy weekend in the meantime.

Question put and agreed to.

4.50 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 18 June 2009

TREASURY

ECOFIN

The Chancellor of the Exchequer (Mr. Alistair Darling):

The Economic and Financial Affairs Council was held in Luxembourg on 9 June 2009. The following items were discussed:

Economic and financial development

a) Update on current situation

The Council took stock of the current economic and financial situation, based on an update from the Commission and the ECB. Ministers were also informed by the Commission of its intentions regarding budgetary surveillance procedures in the light of the latest fiscal notifications by the member states. The Government believe that continued communication between member states is key to ensuring a co-ordinated response to the crisis.

b) International accounting standards

The Council held an exchange of views with representatives from the International Accounting Standards Board (IASB) regarding international standards used for the valuation of financial instruments. Ministers reiterated calls made at the informal ECOFIN in April for standard setters to work urgently to achieve clarity and consistency in the application of standards used for the valuation of assets in distressed and inactive markets. The Government welcome further actions announced by the IASB on 29 May, which demonstrate its commitment to respond to questions raised by the Commission and member states, and looks forward to the EU advancing this work in the context of the G20 call to improve standards for valuation of financial instruments.

Preparation of the June European Council 18-19 June 2009

a) European supervisory framework

Ministers adopted Council conclusions on financial supervision and regulation to prepare the discussion at European Council. This follows the European Commission's response to the De Larosière report. The Government are content with the final conclusions, which reflect the concerns expressed by the UK. The conclusions incorporate strong safeguards at the Government's request, including the commitment that any new powers granted to existing or proposed bodies would not impinge in any way on member states' fiscal responsibilities.

Following the discussion at European Council, the Commission will present all necessary proposals by early autumn 2009 at the latest, with the aim of having the new European financial supervision system, comprising both macro-prudential and micro-prudential components, fully in place in the course of 2010.

b) Implementation of the European Economic Recovery Plan

The Council endorsed a report to the June European Council reviewing progress made on the European economic recovery plan (EERP). The UK is broadly content with the final document, which is a horizontal view of the structural and fiscal measures taken by member states following from the EERP.

c) Bank reform schemes

Following on from an interim oral report given to ministers at the informal ECOFIN in April, Ministers agreed a report on the effectiveness of support schemes undertaken to ensure financial stability, including reporting of the UK's own asset protection scheme and other measures. The Government believe the report provides a useful insight into the actions taken by member states to support the financial sector. The Council has asked the Economic and Financial Committee to further examine requirements for bank restructuring in return for state support and the pricing of state guarantees, and to report back to the Council in July.

d) International financing of climate change

ECOFIN adopted Council conclusions to inform discussions by heads in June, in preparation of the December Copenhagen conference on climate change. The UK supports the Council conclusions, which demonstrate the EU's commitment to tackling this issue ahead of the finalisation of the EU negotiation regarding finance mechanisms, which is expected in October.

Taxation

a) Good governance in tax

Based on the Commission's 28 April communication, ECOFIN adopted Council conclusions on further work relating to good governance in taxation. The conclusions encourage further work in relation to legislative proposals on the savings taxation directive, the administrative co-operation directive and the recovery directive, and urge the Commission to swiftly present the results of negotiations on an anti-fraud agreement with Liechtenstein. The UK is content with the conclusions, which represent a positive step forward on the three individual directives and on the wider good governance agenda, with its close links to the G20. The incoming Swedish presidency will report to the Council in the autumn on progress made.

Iranian Frozen Assets

The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Ian Pearson):

The Foreign Secretary has previously provided figures for the total frozen assets in the UK under the sanctions against Burma and Zimbabwe. An aggregate figure for frozen assets is given in relation to a sanctions regime in order to ensure that principles of data protection and confidentiality are observed and the amount relating to any one individual or entity is not identifiable.

Total assets frozen in the UK under the sanctions against Iran

The total assets frozen in the UK under the EU and UN sanctions against Iran are approximately £976,110,000. This figure is the total reported frozen assets at the time sanctions were imposed and has been converted to sterling from the currencies in which it was reported using the appropriate exchange rate for the day on which it was reported.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Planning

The Minister for Housing (John Healey): I am today publishing a consultation document entitled “Greater Flexibility for Planning Permissions”, which sets out proposals to provide greater flexibility for local authorities, to give developers more support and scope to keep investment and activity ongoing during the economic downturn. This paper outlines a number of measures which do not require primary legislation. I intend to implement them rapidly, mainly in the autumn.

The consultation paper has three elements:

Extension of the time limits for implementation of existing planning permissions—We propose to give local authorities the discretion to extend the time limits for commencement of major developments. This will allow extension of the typical three-year time limit for a further period, which in most cases would be another three years. We intend this as a temporary measure, which will apply to all permissions for major developments which are extant at the time it comes into force. The measure will therefore be in operation for approximately three years, depending on the length of time which each individual permission has left to run.

Minor material amendments to planning permissions—At present, when a developer wants to make a small, but material, change to a scheme that already has planning permission, it is often necessary to submit a further full planning application, which leads to considerable delay, cost and uncertainty for the applicant and additional work for the local planning authority. The consultation document seeks views on varying conditions to make the process more streamlined and also seeks initial views on more substantive changes which would require primary legislation. This element of the consultation document responds to a recommendation in the Killian Pretty review of planning applications.

Non-material amendments to planning permissions—The final part of the consultation document proposes changes to secondary legislation necessary to bring into effect a measure in the Planning Act 2008 which provides a simple and quick mechanism for making non-material amendments to planning permissions. Developers will not need to make a full planning application, but can instead apply simply to change one particular aspect of the permission.

We also want to encourage the use of Local Development Orders. I can confirm that next week we will commence a provision from the Planning Act 2008 that will allow an LDO to be set up independent of the local development plan, and I am also removing the requirement for local authorities to obtain approval of an LDO from the Secretary of State.

I am also announcing today the availability of small scale start up funding for a first wave of at least 12 LDOs. The Planning Advisory Service is working with the Department considering applications, and I can report that we have now offered support to the first two LDO schemes.

Amendments to the Building Regulations

I am today also publishing a consultation on changes to Part L (Conservation of Fuel and Power) and Part F (Ventilation) to deliver the next step towards zero carbon

buildings—a 25 per cent. improvement on current standards for homes and other buildings from October 2010.

The proposals in the consultation could deliver savings of 3.3 million tonnes of carbon per year in 2020.

The proposed changes mean that homes would have to be built with a suitable combination of better insulation and draught-proofing, better low-energy lighting and more efficient boilers. By requiring higher levels of energy efficiency in new homes residents will benefit from lower fuel bills—up to £100 lower per year than for homes built to the current standard.

In the consultation, we are also seeking views on whether we should require energy efficiency standards for conservatories. We know that conservatories are a relatively cost-effective way of increasing the living space of a home, however, they can significantly increase carbon emissions—a 20m² conservatory with poor energy efficiency standards added to a house built since 2002 and heated to the same temperature as that house, would approximately double its carbon emissions. So we are asking whether we should expect people to spend an estimated additional £400 on a £10,000 new conservatory to improve its energy efficiency.

Later, we will be consulting more fully on how to take forward the ambition from the March 2008 Budget that all new non-domestic buildings should be zero carbon from 2019. In the meantime, as we said in the zero carbon consultation in December 2008, it is important to take early steps to start to further improve the energy performance of non-domestic buildings. So, today’s Part L consultation also sets out proposals for a 25 per cent. improvement on current standards for new non-domestic buildings from October 2010.

And finally, the consultation sets out proposals to tighten the standards for some standard building systems and components, like boilers and windows, which makes a significant difference to carbon emissions from both new buildings and when these items are replaced in existing homes.

The consultation will close on 17 September 2009 and any changes to the regulations are due to be made by March 2010 to come into effect from October 2010.

Copies of the consultation documents will be placed in the Library of the House.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces Recruits and Trainees

The Minister of State, Ministry of Defence (Bill Rammell): Today I welcome publication of the first report by Ofsted on the quality of welfare and duty of care for recruits and trainees in the armed forces. Following up on the work previously undertaken by the Adult Learning Inspectorate, Ofsted has been engaged in inspecting the recruit journey from armed forces recruitment and careers offices through the selection process and into training.

Having implemented a number of policy and process changes designed to improve the training environment and the support provided to individuals and reduce the risk to recruits and trainees, the armed forces are committed to a programme of continuous improvement which is supported by external inspection. This report, the first

by Ofsted, draws on the evidence gathered by inspectors over a 15 month period of visits. It includes judgements on the provision of welfare and duty of care; on the capacity to improve; and on how well the armed forces are undertaking self assessment activity. Self assessment is a relatively new concept for much of the armed forces and, while the majority of units visited are progressing well, there remains more work to be done.

I am pleased that Ofsted concludes the overall effectiveness of the welfare and duty of care provision for recruits and trainees is 'Satisfactory'. The report is largely positive and shows progress on a wide range of issues. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is further room for development in a number of areas in terms of the pace of improvement and the application of consistent practice. We should not be surprised that the pressures of conducting challenging and sustained operations at a level of intensity and commitment we have not experienced for some time are manifest in some of our training establishments. We are not complacent however and remain committed to continuing to improve the way in which our recruits are trained.

The initial training environment is dynamic and we must be sure that the impact of change is fully understood which is why we will continue to place emphasis on self assessment. Ofsted make a number of recommendations which, together with the findings from internal audit work, will feed into the overall continuous improvement programme.

I have today placed copies of the report: "The quality of welfare and duty of care for recruits and trainees in the Armed Forces", in the Library of the House.

External inspection provides the armed forces with the opportunity to consider good practice from outside of the Ministry of Defence and I am grateful to the Chief Inspector Ofsted for this report and the contribution it makes to ensure the care and welfare of recruits and trainees in the armed forces continues to improve.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Diplomatic Missions

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (David Miliband): The majority of diplomatic missions in the United Kingdom pay the national non-domestic rates requested from them. They are obliged to pay only 6 per cent. of the total national non-domestic rates value which represents payment for specific services such as street cleaning, lighting, maintenance and fire services. The total amount outstanding from all diplomatic missions is approximately £634,205. As at 6 May 2009, missions listed below owed over £10,000 in respect of NNDR.

Since a letter about outstanding NNDR bills was sent to missions on 25 March, £154,402 has been repaid. Many missions have cleared their bills and some others have entered into arrangements to pay by instalments.

Country	Amount
Zimbabwe	£79,883.28
Bangladesh	£77,127.64
Côte d'Ivoire	£72,095.74

Country	Amount
Cameroon	£55,200.38
Tunisia	£22,648.39
Ukraine	£22,178.20
Equatorial Guinea	£12,290.37
Iraq	£12,537.13
<i>Total</i>	£353,961.13

Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations (Congestion Charge and Fines)

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (David Miliband): The number of outstanding fines incurred by the diplomatic missions in the United Kingdom for non-payment of the London congestion charge since its introduction in February 2003 until 18 February 2009 was £26,721,464. The table below shows the 53 diplomatic missions with outstanding fines totalling £100,000 or more.

Country	Number of Fines	Total Outstanding (£)
USA	27,368	2,960,760
Russia	20,327	2,269,440
Japan	19,007	2,090,880
Germany	17,370	1,929,490
Nigeria	14,270	1,520,170
Sudan	9,750	1,016,920
India	7,061	801,940
Poland	6,222	699,000
Kenya	6,429	673,990
Ghana	5,664	631,040
Tanzania	5,764	602,320
France	5,397	593,620
Spain	5,098	578,360
Greece	4,931	556,260
Ukraine	4,904	549,840
South Africa	5,053	527,800
Romania	4,659	520,960
Algeria	4,393	466,760
Sierra Leone	4,295	444,380
Bulgaria	3,002	327,940
Kazakhstan	2,710	307,040
Korea	2,611	303,000
Hungary	2,666	297,100
Slovakia	2,556	286,140
Yemen	2,515	279,000
Belarus	2,454	273,720
Zambia	2,526	272,660
Zimbabwe	2,534	259,400
Cameroon	2,348	252,140
Cyprus	2,110	238,780
Ethiopia	2,217	235,320
Namibia	1,944	202,680
Swaziland	1,947	201,860
Mauritius	1,838	200,760
Czech Republic	1,700	187,580
Equatorial Guinea	1,731	186,720
Pakistan	1,490	175,250
Mozambique	1,610	171,180
Lesotho	1,545	163,280
Austria	1,338	151,160
Belgium	1,268	143,360
Egypt	1,442	137,400

<i>Country</i>	<i>Number of Fines</i>	<i>Total Outstanding (£)</i>
Cote d'Ivoire	1,309	134,680
Malawi	1,237	128,780
Vietnam	1,161	125,780
Malta	1,103	122,580
Guinea	1,186	121,180
Botswana	1,076	118,380
Denmark	1,002	115,220
Jamaica	1,017	111,620
Uganda	1,023	110,780
Saudi Arabia	1,029	103,430
DPR Korea	981	101,700

Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations (Unpaid Parking and Traffic Violations)

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (David Miliband): In 2008, there were 4,257 recorded outstanding parking and other minor traffic violation fines incurred by Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations in the United Kingdom. These totalled £448,580. In March this year, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office wrote to all Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations concerned, giving them the opportunity to either pay their outstanding fines or appeal against them if they considered that the fines had been issued incorrectly. As a result of subsequent payments totalling £18,620 and formal appeals lodged, there remains a total of 4,021 (£429,960) unpaid fines for 2008. The table below details those Diplomatic Missions and International Organisations that have outstanding fines totalling £1,000 or more.

<i>Diplomatic Mission/International Organisation</i>	<i>Number of Outstanding Fines (excluding congestion charge)</i>	<i>Amount in £</i>
Kazakhstan	528	£58,400
Sudan	280	£29,680
Afghanistan	253	£27,460
Saudi Arabia	288	£26,960
United Arab Emirates	213	£22,440
China	164	£18,300
Cyprus	163	£17,860
France	154	£16,520
Turkey	125	£13,560
Nigeria	102	£12,880
Pakistan	110	£12,000
Romania	108	£11,290
Russia	85	£8,825
Egypt	75	£8,020
Guinea	66	£6,700
Ukraine	56	£6,260
North Korea	78	£6,080
Albania	55	£5,560
Jordan	53	£5,240
Uzbekistan	49	£4,900
Georgia	47	£4,780
Mozambique	45	£4,500
Malaysia	40	£4,440
Greece	39	£4,360
Iran	35	£3,700
Tunisia	34	£3,500
Zambia	46	£3,380
Bulgaria	26	£2,840

<i>Diplomatic Mission/International Organisation</i>	<i>Number of Outstanding Fines (excluding congestion charge)</i>	<i>Amount in £</i>
Libya	43	£2,760
DR Congo	35	£2,640
Iraq	24	£2,460
Benin	27	£2,460
Algeria	19	£2,100
Côte d' Ivoire	21	£2,300
Kuwait	19	£2,160
Mauritius	18	£2,020
Ghana	18	£1,980
Germany	18	£1,940
Bangladesh	16	£1,920
Kenya	16	£1,760
Liberia	16	£1,620
Lithuania	15	£1,640
Botswana	14	£1,520
Bahrain	14	£1,520
Hungary	14	£1,480
Angola	14	£1,620
Thailand	13	£1,480
Azerbaijan	13	£1,420
Mongolia	13	£1,460
Luxembourg	14	£1,420
Vietnam	13	£1,320
Italy	17	£1,380
Morocco	13	£1,380
Syria	12	£1,280
Mexico	11	£1,220
Equatorial Guinea	7	£1,105
Ethiopia	11	£1,080
Jamaica	10	£1,080
Swaziland	9	£1,000
Spain	8	£1,000
TOTAL	3,842	£404,240

Diplomatic Immunity (Alleged Serious Offences)

The Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs (David Miliband): In 2008, ten serious offences allegedly committed by people entitled to diplomatic immunity were drawn to the attention of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. "Serious Offences" are defined as offences that would, in certain circumstances, carry a penalty of 12 months or more imprisonment. Some 25,000 people are entitled to diplomatic immunity in the United Kingdom.

The table below lists those foreign missions whose diplomats allegedly committed serious offences and the type of offence from 2004-2008.

<i>2004</i>		
<i>Arranging Sham Marriages</i>		
Nigeria		1
<i>Driving under the Influence of Alcohol</i>		
Angola		1
Austria		1
Luxembourg		1
Mozambique		1
Serbia and Montenegro		1
Spain		1

2004

Indecent Assault

Congo 1
Saudi Arabia 1

Indecent Assault on Child

Saudi Arabia 1

Robbery and Assault

Angola 1

2005

Actual Bodily Harm

Jordan 1

Assault (Domestic Violence)

Saudi Arabia 1

Dangerous Driving

Turkey 1

Driving under the Influence of Alcohol

Angola 1
Egypt 1
Ghana 1
Lebanon 1
Peru 1
Russia 1
Saudi Arabia 1

Harassment

Turkey 1

Theft (Shoplifting)

Egypt 1
Equatorial Guinea 1
Zambia 1

Theft and Robbery (of Motor Vehicle, Driving without Insurance)

South Africa 1

2006

Attempted Robbery

South Africa 1

Deception (Going Equipped to Commit)

Nigeria 1

Driving under the Influence of Alcohol

Kazakhstan 2
Belarus 1
Côte d'Ivoire 1
Kuwait 1
Malawi 1
Oman 1
Saudi Arabia 1

2006

South Africa 1

Driving without Insurance

Pakistan 1

Failure to Stop for Police/Driving without Insurance and License

Kazakhstan 1

Robbery

South Africa 1

Theft (Obtaining Property by Deception)

Ghana 1

2007

Dangerous Driving

Russia 1

Domestic Assault/Actual Bodily Harm

South Africa 1

Driving without insurance

Ghana 1

Driving without insurance and driving under the influence of alcohol

Malawi 2

Driving under the influence of alcohol

Belarus 1
Georgia 1
Hungary 1
Israel 1
Italy 1
Other* 1
Kazakhstan 1
Kuwait 1
Moldova 1
Nigeria 1
Peru 1
Saudi Arabia 1
Turkmenistan 1

Misrepresentation (obtaining insurance by deception)

Côte d'Ivoire 1

Robbery and Actual Bodily Harm

Guyana 1

2008

Driving under the influence of alcohol

Cameroon 1
Kyrgyzstan 1
Morocco 1
Mozambique 1
Other* 1
Saudi Arabia 1
Thailand 1
Uganda 1

 2008

Vietnam	1
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Theft (Shoplifting)

Cameroon	1
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*Details have been withheld because the number of diplomatic personnel in the mission(s) concerned is/are so small that disclosure would lead to the identification of the individual concerned. This would breach the data protection rights of that individual, in particular, the first data protection principle, namely, that personal data should be processed fairly. This is because the offences are only alleged to have been committed and have not been proven in a court of law. In these circumstances, section 40 (2) and (3) of the Freedom of Information Act confer an absolute exemption on disclosure of this information.

HEALTH

Pharmacy in England

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Mike O'Brien): Chapter 5 of our pharmacy White Paper, "Pharmacy in England: Building on strengths—delivering the future" addressed the need to raise awareness of the many and varied services and benefits offered by pharmacies and pharmacists.

In the light of further public research, we have prepared a communications programme to support the delivery of key messages to patients, public, the NHS and other stakeholders. Summary copies of the research have today been placed in the Library of the House, are available to hon. Members from the Vote Office and can be found at:

www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_083815

This programme represents the first step in improving awareness and understanding of the roles of pharmacy in providing services. This is an important but necessary prelude to expanding the range of clinical services we want to see available as outlined in the White Paper.

We have identified key target audiences for this programme with a particular focus on people with long-term conditions and those affected by health inequalities. The next phase will turn this information into a campaign plan. We will work with key pharmacy stakeholders to develop this campaign plan. It will be supported by further research this summer among the pharmacist profession to identify their preparedness and ability to deliver the range and quality of services that patients and public should expect in future.

We consulted on a number of structural and legislative changes affecting community pharmacy last autumn. Our proposals for reforming the current primary legislation are contained in the Health Bill published in January and now before the Commons.

As part of this work, I am today announcing the formation of a regulatory advisory group to help implement these changes, subject to parliamentary approval of our provisions in the Bill.

I have asked Mr Paul Burns to lead and chair this group. Mr Burns is leaving his current post of Chief Officer of the NHS Litigation Authority Appeal Unit at

the end of this month. He has an unrivalled wealth of experience of NHS pharmacy legislation. He will be inviting key organisations and stakeholders to join him in formulating the detailed regulations needed to bring our reform proposals to reality.

The terms of reference for this important work are:

"Subject to parliamentary approval of proposals in the Health Bill 2009, to consider and advise on, and to help the Department devise, regulations to implement a duty on NHS primary care trusts to develop and to publish pharmaceutical needs assessments and on subsequent regulations required to use such assessments as the basis for determining the provision of NHS pharmaceutical services".

We expect the group to complete its programme by spring 2011.

Pending this longer term reform, I have considered whether or not further changes are needed to the current arrangements for pharmacies prepared to provide NHS services for at least 100 hours per week. We also consulted on this last autumn. I fully recognise the strength of feeling this issue has generated. While reforms now may have potential benefits, I am not persuaded, after full consideration, that there should be further changes to the current arrangements for what will be a relatively short interim period before new permanent arrangements are in place.

In the absence of firm evidence that such pharmacies have had serious adverse impacts on the provision of NHS services locally, and that some of the earlier problems reported to us are settling down, I have concluded that these current arrangements should continue pending our longer-term strategic vision for NHS services to be commissioned against local needs. I consider this is the right path to follow.

Once the new arrangements are in place, applications, including those offering extended hours, will be determined against those assessments. Existing pharmacies currently opening at least 100 hours per week who want to reduce their hours will in due course be able to apply to the PCT for determinations based against those assessments. Otherwise, they will have to maintain their commitment to open for at least 100 hours per week.

This Government remain determined to transform the delivery of pharmaceutical services. By developing community pharmacists' clinical role and expanding the range of services they offer, we want to ensure that people have a wider choice of, and greater access to modern, effective, frontline health care. I believe we are on course to achieve that.

JUSTICE

Civil Court Fees

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Bridget Prentice): I am today announcing the outcome of the recent consultation on Civil Court Fees.

The consultation paper published on 10 December 2008 proposed a package of fee increases designed to raise an additional £38 million a year in fee income. The consultation closed on 4 March 2009. Fifty-two responses were received from law professionals, local authorities, the judiciary, individuals and other stakeholder bodies.

After careful consideration of these, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor has decided to proceed with the increases, subject to a number of adjustments to reflect particular points raised by respondents.

These changes to the charging regime in the civil courts are to be introduced in order to target taxpayers' money more effectively while continuing to help those in financial difficulty.

They are being introduced so that fees reflect the true cost of the work done by the courts—currently subsidised by the taxpayer and fee-payers in other types of cases.

This is in the best interests of people on low incomes and of taxpayers. Those who cannot afford to pay a court fee deserve the taxpayer's help. But court fees need to reflect the true cost of court proceedings. Together with a system that waives or reduces fees for those who cannot afford them, that is the right balance to ensure fair access to justice, fairness to the taxpayer and proper funding of courts' running costs now and in the future.

There are changes to 30 types of civil court fee, out of the 200-plus fees in operation. Most of the changes relate to applications to enforce judgments that have already been made in debt claims between private parties, and which are recoverable from defaulters who can but will not pay their debts.

For example, the fee for sending a bailiff to collect a debt or seize the debtor's goods to pay it rises to £100 (currently there are two fees of £35 and £55). The creditor pays the fee but it is then automatically added to the debt.

Fees are waived automatically for people on means-tested benefits, such as income support or on low incomes, for example; £13,000 for a single person with no children and £29,720 for a couple with four children.

People who do not meet either of those criteria can still apply to the court for a full or partial fee waiver based on an assessment of their disposable income, that is, taking account of rent and other key household expenditure.

The scheme granted £23 million in full or part waivers in over 160,000 civil or family court cases in the year to October 2008 alone.

The civil and family courts are principally concerned with resolving private disputes between individuals or companies. These are not criminal cases. The Government do not believe that it is right for the taxpayer at large to continue to provide a general untargeted subsidy for resolution of these disputes in courts.

However, there currently remains a large general subsidy from the taxpayer in some areas of court business, from which all court users in those areas benefit regardless of their ability to pay. For example, magistrates court civil fees currently cover only 55 per cent. of the cost of doing the work. The changes made will mean that fees in this area of business will in future reflect the full cost.

At the moment, fees for enforcement processes do not reflect the full cost of those processes. This means that they are effectively subsidised by the fees paid in cases where enforcement is not required. This is unfair on the creditors and debtors in those cases. It is therefore right, particularly in the current economic climate, that enforcement fees should be set to reflect the true cost.

While we are keen to ensure that those who can but will not pay are pursued effectively through the courts, we are keen to help people with debt problems to avoid court in the first place, especially in the current economic climate.

The legal process provides ample opportunity, both before and during court proceedings, for debtors to come to payment agreements with those to whom they owe money. The Government have introduced a number of initiatives to encourage and facilitate this, and in particular to ensure that debtors receive timely information about the availability of free debt and legal advice. These include:

- a new requirement, introduced this April, that any business wanting to take an individual debtor to court must first write to them, including details about how to find free debt advice;
- all county courts now display posters giving details of free advice providers;
- an advice desk in each of the 154 courts that account for the majority of possession claims;
- HM Courts Service's online possession claim system now includes details for all defendants on where they can find local financial advice;
- a Housing Arrears Pre-Action Scheme, currently at pilot stage, involves courts inviting tenants with rent arrears to meet with local advice providers at the court before a claim is issued;
- the judiciary issued guidance in November 2008 on ensuring that lenders demonstrate they have taken all the steps expected to resolve mortgage arrears before they take the matter to court.

If taken to court, defendants can complete an admission form and make a proposal for payment; if the claimant refuses to accept the proposal, the court will then step in and make an assessment for repayment based on the debtor's income and expenditure. If ultimately enforcement action is required, it is right that debtors who can, but will not, pay face the full cost of their decision to let things get that far.

Equally, creditors should be discouraged from taking enforcement measures against vulnerable debtors who genuinely cannot afford to pay. Charging the true full cost for enforcement processes—for example, warrants or charging orders—will encourage creditors to consider more carefully whether they are throwing good money after bad. These fee changes are therefore a further measure to help those in financial difficulties by discouraging inappropriate or premature enforcement process against them.

In the light of the responses to consultation, my right hon. Friend has decided to make a number of changes to the proposals on which we consulted. The details of all these are set out in the two explanatory memoranda accompanying the statutory instruments. There are two main changes:

First, the Lord Chancellor has decided not to align the fee payable for a detailed assessment of costs in a legally aided case with the banded fees payable in private cases. Respondents argued that this was inappropriate because legal aid assessments were simpler and significantly less time-consuming for the courts than other assessments.

Secondly, we have listened to concerns expressed about the proposal to replace the three existing fees payable in general civil proceedings in magistrates courts by a single up-front fee. Responses suggested that a significant proportion of these cases never required a contested hearing, and should not have to pay a fee that

reflected the costs incurred by those that did. We are therefore introducing a two-stage structure, with a single application fee equal to the existing three fees, and a second fee payable only once there is a contested hearing.

Three statutory instruments containing the new civil, family and magistrates court fees were laid before Parliament today and will come into effect on 13 July 2009. A report summarising the responses to the consultation paper in more detail is also being published today.

TRANSPORT

Transport Council

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr. Sadiq Khan): I attended the second Transport Council of the Czech presidency, in Luxembourg on 11 June.

The Council adopted a decision, which the UK supported, authorising the Commission to open negotiations with Georgia on a comprehensive air transport agreement.

Under AOB, the Commission presented its recent proposal for a directive on aviation security charges, which aims to ensure transparency, non-discrimination and consultation of airlines when fixing the level of security charges and to ensure that charges are cost-related. I called for the directive to match the airport charges directive as closely as possible. I also emphasised that there should be no restriction on member states ability to impose more stringent measures swiftly when the situation demands it, and that the proposal should take into account the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

The Council reached a political agreement on a proposal for a regulation concerning a European rail network for competitive freight. This draft regulation seeks to improve the efficiency and competitiveness of international rail freight in Europe. I joined several other Ministers in expressing the view that the text put to the Council struck the right balance in terms of passenger transport and the designation of rail corridors. Some minor changes were made to address remaining concerns of some member states and the political agreement was reached.

Under AOB, the Commission reported on the current position regarding liberalisation of rail transport in the EU. The UK supported the Commission in its call for all member states to ensure that the provisions on liberalisation set out in the first railway package are properly and comprehensively transposed.

There was a progress report and policy debate on a proposal for a regulation on the rights of passengers in bus and coach transport. The proposal aims to make bus and coach travel more attractive and accessible to all passengers, including disabled people and people with reduced mobility, and to create a level playing field across Europe, both between operators and different modes of transport. In the debate, Ministers were invited to comment on options for the scope of the draft regulation, I stressed that the proposed exemption for urban, suburban and regional transport operated under public service contracts that provide a comparable level of passenger rights was discriminatory in respect of those member states, such as the UK, whose markets have moved to open competition beyond public service contracts, and that such a condition should not be attached to the exemption. On that basis I joined a large number of Ministers in calling for its scope to be limited to long distance and international journeys.

There was a progress report on a proposed amendment to Regulation (EC) 1321/2004 on the establishment of structures for the management of the European satellite radio-navigation programmes. The amendment, which the UK supports, will bring the regulation into line with recent changes to the finance, governance and procurement procedures for Galileo. Work on it will continue under the Swedish presidency.

There was also a progress report on the proposal for a directive laying down the framework for the deployment of Intelligent Transport Systems in the EU. The Swedish presidency will now take forward negotiations in the working group.

The Council adopted conclusions, which the UK supported, on transport trans-European networks (TEN-T). The conclusions follow a Commission Green Paper, which took stock of TEN-T policy in the light of recent EU enlargement and the need to address the challenges posed by climate change.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 18 June 2009

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Demos

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what (a) private meetings and (b) public engagements Ministers in his Department have attended at which representatives from the think-tank Demos were present in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement. [279506]

Dan Norris: No DEFRA Ministers have had private meetings with representatives of Demos in the past 12 months. The Department does not keep a central record of everyone who may attend a public engagement attended by DEFRA Ministers.

Departmental Procurement

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much expenditure his Department incurred in respect of (a) Creative Cooking (London) Ltd., (b) Leith's, (c) Alliance Française de Londres Ltd., (d) Tinklertastic and (e) Canine Behaviour Centre in 2007-08; and for what purpose in each case. [278991]

Dan Norris: The core-Department's financial system records the following expenditure in 2009-08 for the organisations listed:

Organisation	Purpose	Value (£)
Alliance Française de Londres Ltd.	Language Tuition	882
Canine Behaviour Centre	Skills Training	217.50
Creative Cooking (London) Ltd.	Catering Services	1535.73
Leith's	Conference and Events Services	9913.33
Tinklertastic	Communications and Marketing Services	10,490.00

Fisheries

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will meet a delegation of inshore fishermen and fish merchants to discuss ways to enable fishing to continue when fish merchants are unable to report landing details within the required time. [280656]

Huw Irranca-Davies: The provisions to which the hon. Member refers form part of a proposal from the European Commission for a new control regulation which was published last November. The original proposal was for sales notes to be submitted electronically by all

buyers within two hours of sale. We have sought stakeholders' views on this and all other aspects of the proposal. In a revised proposal, recently published by the Commission after discussions with member states, the time limit for the submission of sales notes has been increased to six hours and an exemption has been provided from the need to submit sales notes electronically for businesses with an annual financial turnover in fisheries products of less than 200,000 euros. This revised proposal will be subject to further negotiation with member states and will not be adopted before October at the earliest. I would point out that failure by a buyer to comply with requirements relating to the submission of sales notes would not result in vessels being required to stop fishing.

Flood Control

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of people who have made up a flood kit; and what steps he is taking to encourage people to make up kits. [280481]

Huw Irranca-Davies: The Environment Agency has made no estimate of the number of people who have made up flood kits; however, their 'Preparing for a flood' guide encourages people to produce flood kits. This is available on the Environment Agency's website or from its Floodline call centre. Since March 2008, a copy has been sent to everyone that registers for the Environment Agency's free flood warning service.

Since December 2007, the Environment Agency has distributed over 260,000 'Preparing for a flood' guides.

Olympic Games 2012

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many full-time equivalent members of staff in (a) his Department and (b) its associated public bodies are working on projects relating to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games; how many of them are working on (i) project management, (ii) legacy planning, (iii) project oversight and (iv) financial oversight; and what plans he has for future staffing levels in each case. [279821]

Dan Norris: The Department is currently applying 1.5 full-time equivalent members of staff to work on project management and on legacy planning for London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. This input is expected to rise over the coming years. Staff at the Environment Agency and Natural England are also involved in work related to the Games.

Tigers

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps his Department has taken to seek to ensure compliance with the decision taken at the last Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species conference in respect of the closing down of tiger farms. [280155]

Huw Irranca-Davies: At the 14th Conference of Parties to the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES), Decision 14.69 was adopted calling

on CITES Parties with intensive, commercial-scale tiger breeding operations (i) to implement measures to restrict their captive populations to a level supportive only to conserving wild tigers, and (ii) not to breed tigers for trade in their parts and derivatives.

While Decision 14.69 does not set any deadlines, the 57th CITES Standing Committee meeting in July 2008 called for relevant Parties to submit progress reports for review by the Committee at its 58th meeting in July 2009. My Department subsequently participated in a working group established to provide guidance on Decision 14.69. CITES Notification 2008/059, issued in October 2008, clarified aspects of the Decision and requested that relevant Parties submit reports on progress by 28 February 2009. The subject will next be discussed at the 58th meeting of the CITES Standing Committee, of which the UK is a member, representing the European region.

Water Charges

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will publish a summary of representations he has received from members of the public on water rates in the last five years. [281239]

Huw Irranca-Davies: My Department has received a range of representations on water charges in the last five years, however, a substantive summary of these representations could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Water Companies: Carbon Emissions

Tim Farron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment Ofwat has made of the performance of water companies in reducing carbon dioxide emissions. [280792]

Huw Irranca-Davies: Ofwat published details of the water companies greenhouse gas emissions in its report 'Service and delivery—performance of water companies in England and Wales 2007-08'.

A copy of the report has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Electoral Registration

8. **Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what steps the Electoral Commission is taking to increase levels of electoral registration in constituencies in which such levels are disproportionately low. [280578]

Mr. Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that, following its first annual assessment of electoral registration officers' performance, the Commission will meet with the EROs from the 56 local authorities who did not meet one or more of the standards relating to the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers, to agree plans for improvement.

The Commission further informs me that these plans will set out specific actions to be taken to improve performance at the 2009 annual canvass, covering such areas as house-to-house inquiries, ensuring appropriate project management, and staff training.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Members: Pensions

Mr. Laws: To ask the Leader of the House if she will estimate the effect on future expenditure from the public purse of amending the parliamentary contributory pensions scheme to (a) cap the Exchequer contribution at (i) 20 per cent. and (ii) 15 per cent. of payroll, (b) move to a career average salary scheme, (c) raise the pension age and time in line with the increase in the age of entitlement to the basic state pension, (d) change accrual rate from 1/40th to 1/50th and (e) raise the employee contribution by 1 per cent.; and if she will make a statement. [280167]

Barbara Keeley: When the Prime Minister asked the Review Body on Senior Salaries (SSRB) to conduct a review of the parliamentary pension arrangements, he asked it to consider the full range of options for reducing the Exchequer contribution. The SSRB launched its consultation on 8 June, inviting evidence from interested parties by 31 July. The Government are considering its evidence and will make an announcement in due course.

TRANSPORT

Biofuels

Mrs. Villiers: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport with reference to the answer to the hon. Member for Lewes of 22 May 2008, *Official Report*, column 426W, on biofuels, whether he has had discussions with (a) the European Commission and (b) his counterparts in other EU member states on (i) the sustainability criteria for biofuels in (A) the renewable energy directive and (B) the fuel quality directive and (ii) the volume of biofuels required to meet (1) the renewable energy directive target and (2) the greenhouse gas savings of the fuel quality directive. [280072]

Mr. Khan: The Department for Transport is exploring, in conjunction with UK stakeholders, a range of options for the treatment of biofuels with differing carbon savings, under both directives. We will also be setting out the projected volume of biofuel required to meet these directives, following consultation, in a National Action Plan by June 2010. As part of these processes my officials are in regular dialogue with the European Commission and other member states.

Bus Services: Concessions

Stephen Hammond: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what estimate he has made of changes in levels of usage of bus services since the introduction of concessionary fares schemes in (a) 2002 and (b) 2008. [279707]

Mr. Khan [*holding answer 16 June 2009*]: Table A is based on figures published today by the Department for Transport in Bus and Light Rail Statistics: Q1 2009, shows the current estimates for bus journeys in England for each financial year since 2000-01.

Over the period covered by the table there were three major changes in the concessionary fares scheme:

June 2001: Statutory minimum bus concessionary fares were introduced in England. Local authorities had to offer a concession of at least half the single fare to women aged 60 and over, men aged 65 and over.

April 2006: Free concessionary bus travel within the local authority was introduced in England for disabled passengers and those aged 60 or over. Some authorities continued to fund travel into other areas or on other modes of transport in their area at their discretion.

April 2008: Free off-peak local bus travel for older and eligible disabled people was extended nationally in England.

Table A: Bus journeys—England, 2000-01 to 2008-09

	Local bus journeys (million)	Year-on-year percentage change
2000-01	3,842	
2001-02	3,881	1.0
2002-03	3,964	2.1
2003-04	4,087	3.1
2004-05	4,140	1.3
2005-06	4,196	1.3
2006-07	4,470	6.5
2007-08	4,530	1.3
2008-09 ¹	4,674	3.2

¹ Provisional.

Source:

Bus and Light Rail Statistics: Q1 2009

Carbon Sequestration: Finance

Stephen Hammond: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport from which of his Department's budgets the £60 million reallocated to carbon capture and storage in the Budget 2009 Red Book will be drawn. [278932]

Mr. Khan: The Department for Transport's contribution to the cost of carbon capture and storage will be funded from accumulated underspends, across our programmes as a whole, from prior years.

Channel Tunnel Railway Line

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what recent assessment he has made of the effect of track access charges applicable to the track through the Channel Tunnel on the potential for growth in international rail freight; and if he will make a statement. [279347]

Chris Mole [*holding answer 12 June 2009*]: No recent assessment of the impact of track access charges on the potential growth of international freight through the Channel Tunnel has been made.

Diesel Fuel: EU Action

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport whether a mechanism exists for EU member states to seek a temporary derogation from the EU sulphur specification for diesel fuel; and if he will make a statement. [280156]

Mr. Khan: EU requirements on the quality of petrol and diesel are defined in the Fuel Quality Directive 98/70/EC as amended. Article 7 of this directive permits member states to apply for a derogation from these requirements for up to 6 months in the event that a sudden change to the supply of crude oil or petroleum products makes it difficult for refineries to comply.

We understand this derogation to be intended to accommodate major, unexpected disruptions to oil supplies only. The directive does not contain any other derogations which could be applied in respect of the supply of sulphur free diesel in the UK.

Integrated Transport

Gordon Banks: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what plans he has for the development of an integrated transport system. [281129]

Mr. Khan: The Government are committed to promoting an integrated transport system through measures such as improved interchange, better passenger information and smarter ticketing.

Members: Correspondence

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport when he plans to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for West Worcestershire of 30 April 2009, transferred from the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, reference: 134438/SW on ecodiesel. [281101]

Mr. Khan: I replied to the hon. Member for West Worcestershire in my letter dated 12 June 2009.

Olympic Games 2012

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how many full-time equivalent members of staff in (a) his Department and (b) its associated public bodies are working on projects relating to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games; how many of them are working on (i) project management, (ii) legacy planning, (iii) project oversight and (iv) financial oversight; and what plans he has for future staffing levels in each case. [279818]

Mr. Khan: The Department for Transport has 9.25 full-time equivalent members of staff whose work relates wholly to the London 2012 Olympic Games and Paralympic Games. Many other members of staff in the Department and its agencies are also contributing to delivery of the Government's objectives for the 2012 Games.

Roads: East of England

Nadine Dorries: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport (1) how much funding his Department allocated for the construction of highways in (a) Mid Bedfordshire constituency and (b) the East of England in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [280097]

(2) how much funding his Department allocated for the creation of additional lanes on highways in (a) Mid Bedfordshire constituency and (b) the East of England region in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [280098]

Mr. Khan: The following tables highlight how much funding the Department for Transport has allocated for the construction of highways and the creation of additional lanes on highways in (a) Mid Bedfordshire constituency and (b) the East of England Region in each year since 1997:

Table 1: Mid Bedfordshire

	£ million	
	Highways agency schemes	Local major road schemes (including maintenance)
1997-2001	0.0	0.255
2001-02	0.0	1.400
2002-03	0.0	3.930
2003-04	1.0	1.665
2004-05	5.1	0.175
2005-06	12.2	0.0
2006-07	25.3	8.825
2007-08	21.5	7.505
2008-09	41.2	2.547

Table 2: East of England (including Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Norfolk, Suffolk and Thurrock)

	£ million	
	Highways agency schemes	Local major road schemes (including maintenance)
1997-2001	40.7	2.602
2001-02	47.63	13.930
2002-03	153.3	13.267
2003-04	72.5	13.953
2004-05	48.5	35.908
2005-06	122.6	31.026
2006-07	180.8	32.170
2007-08	161.7	9.655
2008-09	166.5	9.376

Transport: East of England

Nadine Dorries: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport (1) how much funding his Department has allocated for the construction of bus lanes in (a) Mid Bedfordshire constituency and (b) the East of England in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [280095]

(2) how much funding his Department has allocated for the construction of bicycle paths in (a) Mid Bedfordshire constituency and (b) the East of England in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement; [280149]

(3) how much funding his Department has allocated for the construction of footpaths in (a) Mid Bedfordshire constituency and (b) the East of England in each year since 1997; and if he will make a statement. [280150]

Mr. Khan: The Department for Transport allocates integrated transport block and highways maintenance funding to local transport authorities for capital investment in transport. Funding provided by the Department to local authorities is not generally ring-fenced and local authorities have discretion to spend their allocations in line with their priorities, which may include bicycle paths, bus lanes and footpaths. Allocations provided to Bedfordshire and the Eastern Region since 1997 are shown in the table.

	Bedfordshire	£ million Eastern region
2008-09	9.286	157.771
2007-08	7.751	159.476
2006-07	9.573	157.826
2005-06	9.351	156.899
2004-05	8.001	156.586
2003-04	7.364	141.735
2002-03	6.591	140.193
2001-02	7.147	137.774
2000-01	4.017	56.608
1999-2000	4.602	52.125
1998-99	3.070	32.150
1997-98	3.692	41.203

Note:

Since 2000 the allocations comprise integrated transport block grant and highways maintenance. Prior to 2000 the allocations are in the form of gross approved spending.

Revenue expenditure on transport is generally supported through the Department for Communities and Local Government's Formula Grant.

The Department also provided specific funding for:

1. In 2008-09, the Department made available £117,000 to Bedfordshire and Luton borough for their Cycling Demonstration Town. In the same year, the East of England region was also allocated £548,000. This was made up of capital and revenue funding.

2. The cycling programme—'Links to Schools'—set up in the East of England received capital funding from the Department. The amounts are stated in the table:

	£
2008-09	195,000
For Bedfordshire, Luton borough	(120,000)
2007-08	76,136
For Bedfordshire	(0)
2006-07	276,531
For Bedfordshire	(0)
2005-06	235,000
For Bedfordshire	(0)

Transport: Finance

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport (1) how much his Department has spent on transport in (a) South Tyneside, (b) Tyne and Wear, (c) the North East and (d) England in each year since 1997; [279275]

(2) how much capital expenditure on roads there was in (a) the North East and (b) England in each year since 1997. [279325]

Mr. Khan: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer given on 28 January 2009, *Official Report*, columns 535-6W.

In addition, I also refer my hon. Friend to the reply given to the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr. Stuart) on 28 January 2009, *Official Report*, columns 534-536W. This provided tables showing the available data on regional expenditure on new construction/improvement and structural maintenance on motorways

and trunk roads, as well as regional expenditure on new improvement for highways, lighting, road safety and structural maintenance on local roads for 1999-2000 to 2006-07. The data do not enable new road construction to be identified as a separate category.

The Department has provided the following support for public transport major schemes in the north-east.

Tyne and Wear

- Stephenson Link (£6.444 million)
- Four Lane Ends Interchange (£7.625 million)
- Centrelink and Gateshead Interchange (£17.442 million)
- NewcastleGateshead Quaylink (£4.74 million)
- Eldon Square Bus Station (£10.970 million)

Rest of north-east

- Durham Park and Ride (£9.163 million)

Tyne and Wear Metro

The Department has provided the following sums to support the operation of the Tyne and Wear Metro. It is not possible to split this expenditure between South Tyneside and the other Tyne and Wear local authority areas.

	£ million		
	<i>Revenue support</i>	<i>Capital support</i>	<i>Total subsidy</i>
1996-97	8.795	—	8.795
1997-98	8.619	—	8.619
1998-99	8.630	—	8.630
1999-2000	9.428	—	9.428
2000-01	9.787	—	9.787
2001-02	9.884	—	9.884
2002-03	11.831	—	11.831
2003-04	13.407	—	13.407
2004-05	15.952	—	15.952
2005-06	13.713	4.180	17.893
2006-07	18.057	4.305	22.362
2007-08	20.779	4.391	25.170
2008-09	19.943	7.131	27.074

Up to and including 2004-05, grant was provided solely as revenue support although Nexus were able to use this for capital spending on the Metro. Since then the annual subsidy has included a separately identifiable amount for capital spend.

Additionally the Department has provided the following specific funding for the Tyne and Wear Metro:

<i>Purpose</i>	<i>Year</i>	<i>Amount (£ million)</i>
Extension of the Metro to Sunderland	1999-2000 to 2003-04	37.465
Metrocar refurbishment	2000-01	0.46
Four Lane Ends Bus/Metro Interchange	2002-03 to 2004-05	7.625
CCTV provision	2000-01	7.2
Development costs for Metro Reinforcement	2008-09	3.155

For total transport expenditure in England, table 1.15 of Transport Statistics Great Britain 2008 provides central and local Government expenditure:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/tsgb/2008edition/sectiononemodalcomparisons.pdf>

The Treasury provides a breakdown of regional spend by service in Public Expenditure Statistical Analyses. The latest figures for public expenditure on transport are given in table 9.9 and 9.10:

[http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/10\(1\).pdf](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/10(1).pdf)

Before 1 April 2008, funding for the statutory minimum bus concession was provided exclusively through the Formula Grant system, which is administered by the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG). The Department for Transport therefore provided no separate funding for concessionary bus travel from 2001, when the statutory minimum was first introduced, until 2008.

The Department provided funding in 2007-08 for the cost of producing and issuing the new England-wide bus passes to all those eligible.

In 2008-09 and 2009-10 special grant funding is being provided by DFT to meet the additional cost of the new, England-wide concession.

Concessionary fares funding

	£ million		
	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
South Tyneside	0	0	0
Tyne and Wear	0.94	5.38	5.50
North East	2.14	10.31	10.56
England	30.48	212	217

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

International Assistance

Dr. Kumar: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what his Department's latest assessment is of progress in relation to the achievement of the millennium development goals. [280602]

Mr. Michael Foster: The UN conducts the official assessment of progress towards the millennium development goals (MDGs). Their latest report relating to 2008 found that the global collective effort is yielding results and that progress is being made globally towards achieving many of the MDGs even in some of the more challenging regions. A number of targets are expected to be reached by their target dates in 2015. The report is available at:

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/mdg-factsheets/mdg-report-2008.pdf>

The Department for International Development (DFID) also conducts an annual assessment of progress towards key MDG targets at a country level based on international data. The latest assessment was published in its 2008 autumn performance report (copies of which are also in the parliamentary Library):

<http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/aut-perf-report-08.pdf>

Sri Lanka: Internally Displaced Persons

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment he has made of the humanitarian needs of people in Tamil areas and camps for internally displaced persons in Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement. [280303]

Mr. Michael Foster: Since October 2008, more than 284,000 internally displaced people (IDPs) have been registered in Government controlled IDP camps. Freedom of movement is denied in the camps except for some vulnerable groups and the elderly. The remaining IDPs are under military guard. Protection in the camps is a matter of concern. The Department for International Development (DFID) is particularly concerned for the war wounded, malnourished and those separated from their families—including unaccompanied children. The camps are overcrowded and have poor water and sanitation facilities. Hospitals, such as those in Vavuniya and Mannar, are also overcrowded, having more patients than they can effectively treat.

Access for humanitarian agencies has improved this week, however it remains inconsistent. Continued poor access has impeded agencies ability to improve the conditions in the camps which remain of concern.

The UK Government continue to press the Government of Sri Lanka to allow full and unrestricted humanitarian access to all IDPs, to treat IDPs in accordance with accepted international standards and guidelines; and for the their rapid and safe return from the camps to their homes.

Sri Lanka: Overseas Aid

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate he has made of the proportion of humanitarian aid to the Tamil people in Sri Lanka from (a) his Department, (b) the EU and (c) the UN which was delivered (i) via Sri Lankan Government agencies, (ii) via non-governmental organisations and (iii) directly in the latest period for which information is available; and if he will make a statement. [280306]

Mr. Michael Foster: The information is as follows:

(a) Since September 2008, the Department for International Development (DFID) has allocated £12.5 million of humanitarian assistance to Sri Lanka. Of this, £2.8 million has been provided to UN agencies, £1.5 million to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), £1.235 million to the International Organisation for Migration and £1.050 million to NGOs for a wide range of life saving humanitarian activities. Approximately £6.0 million remains to respond rapidly to further needs on the ground and for early recovery when the displaced population are able to return home. No funding has been provided to Sri Lankan Government agencies.

(b) The European Commission Humanitarian Office (ECHO) has pledged US\$3,952 million for UN organisations, the ICRC and NGOs for 2009.

(c) The UN Consolidated Humanitarian Action Plan (CHAP) 2009 for Sri Lanka includes both UN and non-governmental organisations. As of 5 June the CHAP was funded to 40 per cent. at US\$61,594,766. An additional \$28,143,620 has been pledged to UN and NGO activities outside the CHAP.

DFID funding through the EU mechanism or to the UN should be allocated directly to implementing partners (UN agencies, NGOs and the ICRC).

Zimbabwe: Overseas Aid

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment he has made of the merits of renewing direct aid provision to Zimbabwe. [280078]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The UK Government are committed to supporting the people of Zimbabwe in the transition to stabilisation and recovery and has been at the forefront of efforts by the international community to support the needs of the Inclusive Government.

Our assistance is aligned to Government priorities but is not currently channelled through its financial systems. We have made it clear, in all our discussions with Ministers and officials from the Inclusive Government, that credible progress and demonstration of a commitment to reform will attract increasing support from donors and other international partners, potentially including direct aid provision. We look forward to working together towards establishing a longer-term development partnership which will address the deeper roots of Zimbabwe's problems.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Business: Ethics

Mr. McCartney: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has for further development of his Department's toolkit for business and human rights for use by UK missions overseas. [279654]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) has developed a series of toolkits to guide our posts in their human rights work overseas. The toolkit on business and human rights is the latest in this series and aims to provide guidance for UK diplomatic missions on how to promote good conduct by British companies operating overseas and to provide specific guidance on the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development National Contact Point procedure. The toolkit is still being developed with the help of other Government Departments and external stakeholders. When finalised, it will be disseminated to posts and made available as a resource on the FCO's internal web pages.

Democratic Republic of Congo: Peacekeeping Operations

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his Department's latest assessment is of whether the full military and police components mandated for MONUC will be put in place. [279375]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The additional infantry, engineers, special forces and police mandated for the UN Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) by the UN Security Council in Resolution 1843 have been identified. The UN Secretariat and troop contributing countries are making advanced preparations for their deployment, which they hope will take place in the next few months. Several member states have expressed interest in providing the 200 military trainers mandated, but at present the concept for their use is still being developed

by the UN Secretariat. However, the UN Secretariat has had few offers so far for additional aircraft and intelligence equipment.

Departmental Opinion Polls

Mr. Holloway: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on which subjects his Department has (a) commissioned and (b) conducted opinion polling in each of the last two years; which such polls canvassed opinion from Departmental employees; and what estimate he has made of his Department's expenditure on such polling. [280717]

Chris Bryant: The following central departmental surveys have been commissioned and conducted since June 2007:

- Survey of Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) stakeholders (2008)
- Staff engagement survey (2007 and 2008)
- Survey measuring awareness of FCO among the public (2008)
- Survey of partners across Government (2009)

All these surveys have been commissioned by FCO and conducted by external, independent research organisations.

The staff engagement surveys in 2007 and 2008 canvassed opinion from departmental employees.

The total cost of the five surveys listed above is £198,000.

The FCO is a global organisation consisting of a number of directorates in the UK and over 200 overseas posts. Some directorates and overseas posts conduct independent surveys on specific issues. Information about such surveys is not held centrally. To collate information on surveys conducted across the whole of the FCO would involve collecting information from all directorates and all overseas posts, which would incur disproportionate costs.

Eritrea: Christianity

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Eritrean government on the imprisonment of Christians in that country. [279604]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Our embassy in Asmara is aware of reports of the detention without charge by the Eritrean Government of members of minority religious groups along with journalists, leading political figures and members of civil society along with returned asylum seekers. This contravenes international human rights agreements to which Eritrea is a party and is unacceptable. Eritrea should allow all its citizens to worship as they wish, as set out in Article 18 of the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The UK raises human rights issues including religious freedom with the Eritrean Government both in Asmara and with the Eritrean ambassador to London on a regular basis. My noble Friend, the Minister for Africa, Asia and the UN, Lord Malloch-Brown, raised human rights with the Eritrean ambassador at the end of last year.

A huge obstacle to achieving any progress on human rights in Eritrea is that the Eritrean police and security services are not willing to engage with our embassy on human rights abuses. This makes following up reports of any abuses, including imprisonments, very difficult.

The EU has also tried to discuss human rights as part of the Article 8 Political Dialogue with Eritrea. Unfortunately, since initial discussions earlier this year the Government of Eritrea has twice refused to have human rights included on the Article 8 Dialogue agenda for discussion.

We will continue to raise human rights, including the detention without charge of minority religious groups, with the Eritrean authorities.

Eritrea: Human Rights

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has made to the Eritrean government on allegations of human rights abuses in that country. [279603]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The UK raises human rights issues with the Eritrean Government both in Asmara and with the Eritrean ambassador to London on a regular basis, highlighting the amount of public and parliamentary interest we receive. My noble Friend, the Minister for Africa, Asia and the UN, Lord Malloch-Brown, raised human rights with the Eritrean ambassador at the end of last year.

We also discuss human rights as part of the EU via the Article 8 Political Dialogue, EU Heads of Mission producing a human rights report at the end of January to discuss with the Government of Eritrea. Unfortunately, since initial discussions earlier this year the Government of Eritrea has twice refused to have human rights included on the Article 8 Dialogue agenda for discussion.

We will continue to press to get human rights discussions back on the Article 8 Dialogue agenda.

EU Institutions: Manpower

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the Answer of 2 April 2009, *Official Report*, column 1312W, on EC institutions: manpower, what steps he has taken to increase the number of Civil Service fast streamers working in European Union institutions. [280326]

Angela E. Smith: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are continuing to engage with the EU institutions as they introduce reforms to recruitment competitions, seek to increase their outreach activities, and develop their staffing policy. Government Departments are currently discussing whether a revised version of the European Fast Stream should be reintroduced for 2010 and what form it would take. DEFRA are leading on an initiative to increase EU professionalism across the civil service, including increasing the number of UK nationals applying for and passing the EU's recruitment competitions.

Gabon: Politics and Government

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the political situation in Gabon following the death of Omar Bongo. [279374]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Following the death of President Bongo, the Gabonese constitutional court has appointed the leader of the senate, Rose Francine Rogombé, as the

acting head of state. This is in accordance with the constitution of Gabon. In line with the constitution, she will now have 45 days to organise elections in which she is ineligible to stand. The situation in Gabon is currently calm.

Hezbollah

Dr. Ladyman: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what criteria will be used in deciding which members of Hezbollah's political wing officials should meet. [277218]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Our objective with Hezbollah is to urge them to reject violence and play a constructive, democratic and peaceful role in Lebanese politics, in line with UN Security Council Resolutions. We believe that occasional and carefully considered contacts with Hezbollah's politicians, including its MPs, will best advance this objective. The distinction is between those members of Hezbollah who are legitimately involved in Lebanese politics and those who are involved in violence and support terrorism.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what contacts the Government has had with Hezbollah's political wing since its recent change of policy on contacts with that organisation. [277374]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: On 9 January 2009 our ambassador in Beirut attended a meeting of British parliamentarians with the Lebanese Foreign Affairs Committee. Representatives of all members of the National Unity Government were present, including one MP from Hezbollah's political wing, Ali Amar. During this meeting the ambassador urged all sides to show restraint during the crisis in Gaza, and on the importance of all sides respecting the terms of UN Security Council Resolution 1701. In the course of normal diplomatic business, staff at our embassy in Beirut have also met Hezbollah politicians on a number of occasions.

We continue to believe that occasional and carefully considered contacts with Hezbollah's politicians, including its MPs, will best advance our objective of urging Hezbollah to reject violence and play a constructive, democratic and peaceful role in Lebanese politics, in line with UN Security Council Resolutions.

Iraq: Reconstruction

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 3 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 512W, on departmental public expenditure, for what reasons his Department has determined that it is more cost-effective to manage major contracts in Iraq in London. [279808]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: It is more cost effective to manage the major contracts from London as support costs for the responsible officers are significantly lower than for officers based in Iraq.

Nepal: Diplomatic Service

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what channels of communication his Department has with British nationals in Nepal. [280278]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Our embassies and high commissions use a number of channels to communicate with British nationals. These include travel advice, wardens networks, LOCATE—an on-line registering facility, the internet and local media.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans are in place for the safety of British nationals in Nepal in the case of an emergency. [280345]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: All our embassies and high commissions are required to hold a Post Emergency Plan and, where deemed necessary, a Civil Contingency Plan. Our embassy in Kathmandu holds both. These plans are designed to help our Diplomatic Missions respond to any crisis they may face, including dealing with consular emergencies, civil unrest or in some cases evacuating British nationals. All plans are reviewed regularly and tested at least annually. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Consular Crisis Group oversees the review process of these plans, and will assist our embassy in Kathmandu to test its emergency response plans by running a semi-live exercise later this year.

North Korea: Nuclear Weapons

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what meetings he has had with his (a) Chinese and (b) Russian counterpart to discuss the nuclear threat from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea in the last two years. [279103]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: China and Russia have both been key players in the Six Party Talks on Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) denuclearisation, and the UK has maintained close dialogue with both Governments at ministerial, ambassadorial and working levels. My right hon. Friend, the Foreign Secretary discussed DPRK with Russian colleagues at the last meeting of G8 Foreign Ministers, and with Chinese colleagues at the UK-China Summit in February 2009.

Royal Visits: Expenditure

Mr. Crausby: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department has paid towards the cost of visits abroad by members of the Royal Family in each of the last 10 years. [279856]

Chris Bryant: The information to provide a comprehensive answer is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost. Figures held by Protocol Directorate with estimates from overseas posts since 2005 show that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has spent in the region of:

	£
2005-06	424,056
2006-07	351,389
2007-08	602,248
2008-09	358,178

The costs include accommodation, staffing, communications, office costs, interpreting, press and public affairs and official hospitality. Travel costs to the countries of destination are funded by the grant in aid held by the Department for Transport.

Saed Jamal Abu-Hijleh

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received on the death of the mother of Saed Jamal Abu-Hijleh in Nablus in 2002. [278879]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have not received any recent representation on the death of the mother of Saed Jamal Abu-Hijleh. However, the UK has long condemned all attacks on innocent civilians and will continue to do so.

Sri Lanka: Armed Conflict

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the government of Sri Lanka on the treatment of those who provided medical and financial assistance to the Tamil people during the recent conflict in that country. [280204]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We are aware of reports of the ongoing detention of individuals who provided medical assistance during the recent conflict in Sri Lanka. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has made representations on their behalf to Sri Lankan Foreign Minister Bogollagama, most recently when they met in London on 5 June 2009.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of civilians killed (a) by the Sri Lankan army and (b) by the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam in the recent conflict in Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement. [280289]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: During the recent conflict in Sri Lanka there have been many conflicting reports of the number of civilians killed by both sides, particularly in the final weeks of the fighting. As the conflict took place without independent monitoring and with severe restrictions on the media, it is very difficult to estimate the number of casualties or who were responsible. As such, we fully endorse the EU's call for an independent inquiry into the recent conflict in Sri Lanka. This would play an important part in the post-conflict reconciliation process.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of alleged war crimes during the recent conflict in Sri Lanka; what steps he is taking in collaboration with his international counterparts to establish the veracity of such reports; and if he will make a statement. [280392]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: As my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has made clear, we fully endorse the EU's calls for an independent inquiry into allegations of violations of international law in the recent conflict in

Sri Lanka. It could play an important role in the post-conflict reconciliation process. As such, we welcome the joint statement by UN Secretary General Ban Ki-Moon and President Rajapakse of Sri Lanka underlining the importance of an accountability process for addressing possible violations of international humanitarian and human rights law. We will continue to press for progress on this with international partners, above all the EU and UN.

Sri Lanka: Internally Displaced Persons

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of Sri Lanka on the registration of those held in internally displaced persons camps in Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement. [280203]

Mr. Michael Foster: I have been asked to reply.

The Prime Minister, the Foreign Secretary, the High Commissioner in Colombo and I have all urged the Government of Sri Lanka, at the highest levels, to ensure that internally displaced persons (IDPs) be treated in accordance with accepted international standards and guidelines.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of Tamil civilians in internally displaced persons camps in Sri Lanka; and if he will make a statement. [280290]

Mr. Michael Foster: I have been asked to reply.

According to the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR), around 284,000 civilians fled the fighting in the Vanni, between September 2008 and May 2009. Roughly 263,000 are being accommodated in 22 emergency shelter sites in Vavuniya. A further 11,000 people are being accommodated in 11 emergency shelter sites in Jaffna, 6,700 people in two sites in Trincomalee and some 400 people in two sites in Mannar.

Mr. Dismore: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the government of Sri Lanka on the freedom of the press (a) in Sri Lanka and (b) to visit and report on (i) Tamil areas and (ii) camps for internally displaced persons; and if he will make a statement. [280307]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have regularly called on the Sri Lankan Government to take decisive action to guarantee press freedom in Sri Lanka, following a number of attacks and intimidation of the media. We have also called on them to allow access to the camps set up for internally displaced people.

The UK raised our concerns about media freedom in Sri Lanka at the UN Human Rights Council Session in March 2009. My right hon. friend the Foreign Secretary's most recent statement on Sri Lanka was on 19 May 2009, *Official Report*, column 73WS.

Sri Lanka: International Assistance

Mr. Keith Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Sri Lankan government on its recent decision to turn away the Vanni Mercy Mission ship MV Captain Ali; and if he will make a statement. [280598]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have had no discussions with the Government of Sri Lanka about the ship, MV Captain Ali, since it left Sri Lankan waters. Our clear position throughout has been that assistance should be delivered through the correct humanitarian channels and with the necessary clearances.

We remain greatly concerned at the humanitarian situation facing the 280,000 civilians displaced by the recent fighting in Sri Lanka and have committed a total of £12.5 million of humanitarian assistance since September 2008, channelled through UN and independent humanitarian agencies.

We continue to press for full and unhindered access to the UN and other humanitarian organisations on the ground.

West Bank

Mr. Sharma: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what support his Department is providing to Lieutenant General Keith Dayton in training Palestinian security forces in the West Bank. [278640]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Government provide, at a cost of £2.3 million a year from the Conflict Prevention Pool, a civil-military team to assist the work of General Dayton, the US Security Co-ordinator (USSC). The British Support Team (BST) to the USSC is based in Ramallah, led by a serving British Army Brigadier with a staff of 11 personnel. The BST acts as the USSC's direct link with the Palestinian Authority in supporting the development of the Palestinian National Security Force. In addition, the UK provides direct personnel support to General Dayton's headquarters in Jerusalem in the form of two serving military staff officers and a retired police officer.

Zimbabwe: Politics and Government

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the effectiveness and stability of the power-sharing government in Zimbabwe. [279786]

Mr. Ivan Lewis [*holding answer 15 June 2009*]: Through its Global Political Agreement (GPA), the Inclusive Government (IG) has committed itself to a package of reforms that will restore security and welfare to Zimbabwe's people, and promote respect for human rights and the rule of law. It has made an effective start to this work: a credible short term economic recovery plan (STERP) has been published and is beginning to be acted upon, and the payment of public workers has seen some civic organs functioning again. However several vital aspects of the GPA remain to be implemented; the continued harassment of human rights defenders, arbitrary arrests and intimidation, increased farm invasions and lack of

press freedom all remain a concern. Without major progress in these areas the IG will not have kept its promises to the Zimbabwean people, and the international community will be unable fully to re-engage with Zimbabwe.

Tensions and differences of attitude to reform and its pace remain; not surprising when the IG brings together erstwhile political foes. We will continue to look actively for ways of supporting the IG in its efforts to achieve reforms, offering assistance which promotes and strengthens positive change. We are in regular contact with the Government to discuss how this can best be achieved and maintain close dialogue on this with our EU and international partners.

TREASURY

Banks: Finance

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will publish a summary of representations received by his Department on the management of UK Financial Investments' controlling interest in banks in the last two years. [280279]

Ian Pearson: Treasury Ministers receive advice and input on a wide range of issues, from a variety of individuals and organisations in the public and private sectors, as part of the process of policy development and analysis. As was the case with previous Administrations, it is not the Government's practice to provide details of advice given to the Treasury.

Banks: Tax Avoidance

Mr. Meacher: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 21 April 2009, *Official Report*, column 637W, on banks: tax avoidance, to which sentences of the statement by the Chancellor of the Exchequer of 16 March 2009, *Official Report*, column 654, on G20 Finance Ministers' meeting, the answer refers. [280693]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: The Chancellor of the Exchequer has stated on 16 March that he had

"asked Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs to publish shortly a draft code of practice on taxation for the banking sector, so that banks comply with not just the letter but the spirit of the law".

The code will be issued shortly.

Business: Government Assistance

John Barrett: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether any consortiums have requested loans from his Department's Infrastructure Finance Unit. [280094]

Ian Pearson: The Manchester Waste Authority, through DEFRA, requested a loan for their project. The Treasury's Infrastructure Finance Unit (TIFU) provided £120 million, which contributed to the project reaching financial close on 8 April.

Financial Ombudsman Service

Annette Brooke: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent representations he has received on the time taken by the Financial Ombudsman Service to deal with complaints; what monitoring takes place of the time taken by the Financial Ombudsman Service to respond to complaints; and if he will make a statement. [280917]

Mr. Timms: The Government have received representations regarding the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS) following a sudden and unprecedented influx of cases about payment protection insurance and credit card charges, which has meant that waiting times at the FOS are currently longer than the FOS and its users would like.

The Financial Services Authority (FSA) approves the budget of the FOS and has a duty to ensure that the FOS is at all times capable of exercising its functions. The FSA has approved an increase in the FOS' budget enabling them to implement a range of initiatives to deal with this influx and the FOS are confident that the FOS will be able to work through these challenges effectively in the months ahead.

Financial Services: Carbon Emissions

Gregory Barker: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what steps he is taking to ensure that the UK's international financial services sector is globally competitive in carbon trading. [280331]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: The Government are committed to ensuring that the UK's international financial services industry remains an essential and important part of the global economy. The UK is globally competitive in carbon trading, hosting over 50 per cent. of volume of the global carbon market. In line with broader commitments to fair, stable and efficient financial markets, the Government have recently introduced legislation to improve the efficiency and accessibility of UK carbon auctions, as set out in Budget 2009. The Government also have a business advice office to support and promote UK private sector involvement in the international carbon market.

Financial Services: EU Action

Adam Price: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer where the headquarters of the (a) European Systemic Risk Board and (b) European System of Financial Supervisors will be. [280234]

Ian Pearson: The Chancellor will be discussing strengthening EU regulatory and supervisory arrangements with European colleagues over the coming months.

Landfill Tax

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 10 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 910W, on taxation: construction, if he will take into account the environmental impact of sourcing of the construction materials that become landfill waste in determining levels of landfill tax; and if he will make a statement. [280201]

Mr. Timms: In addition to the lower rate of landfill tax for inert waste, the Government introduced aggregates levy in 2002 with the primary objective of internalising the environmental costs of quarrying on commercially exploited rock, sand and gravel. The levy encourages the use of recycled aggregates and alternative materials. The levy has been a significant factor in reducing sales of virgin aggregates in England by around 18 million

tonnes between 2001 and 2005, with an estimated increase in the use of recycled aggregate of nearly six million tonnes.

Members: Correspondence

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when the Chief Secretary to the Treasury plans to reply to the email from the hon. Member for West Worcestershire of 15 April 2009, on funding for services for people with learning disabilities. [281133]

Mr. Byrne: Receipt of the correspondence could not be traced. The hon. Member's office has been asked for a copy which will be responded to as soon as possible after receipt.

Public Expenditure

Mr. Laws: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when allocations of capital spending for Government departments from 2011 onwards will be made; and if he will make a statement. [280334]

Mr. Byrne: Allocations of capital spending for Government Departments from 2011 onwards will be made in the normal way at the next spending review.

Revenue and Customs: Closures

Bob Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the likely effect of HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) planned office closures on average times taken by HMRC to reply to correspondence from members of the public. [280672]

Mr. Timms: HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is consolidating staff and work in fewer locations in the interests of greater efficiency. The offices to be closed are those that are surplus to business requirements, and their closure should therefore have no adverse effect on the times taken to deal with correspondence. The streamlining of processes and introduction of new working methods, including improvements to IT systems, should lead to longer term improvements in HMRC's service to customers.

Revenue and Customs: Manpower

Bob Spink: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many (a) directors, (b) senior managers, (c) specialist and delivery managers and (d) executive support and administration staff there were in each HM Revenue and Customs office in each of the last five years. [280313]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is not available, as HM Revenue and Customs hold information on the grade of officer and not their role.

Taxation: Alcoholic Drinks

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will make an estimate of the amount of advertising expenditure deducted from profits before tax by businesses producing alcoholic drinks in 2008-09. [280655]

Mr. Timms: No estimates are available, as tax returns do not separately identify the amount of expenditure deducted from profits by businesses.

OLYMPICS

Olympic Games 2012: Finance

Bob Spink: To ask the Minister for the Olympics what her most recent estimate is of the cost of hosting the London 2012 Olympics archery event at Lord's Cricket Ground. [278867]

Tessa Jowell: The London Organising Committee of the Olympic Games and Paralympic Games (LOCOG) has responsibility for staging the Olympic and Paralympic Games at existing venues. The direct costs associated with staging the events at existing venues come from LOCOG's revenues which are primarily derived from commercial sponsorship, broadcast rights, ticket sales and merchandising/licensing—not from the public purse.

There will be attributable costs to the public purse, for example in respect of the security and transport functions associated with the venue. However these costs have not yet been identified separately for individual venues, but they will form part of the overall security and transport budgets.

Olympic Games 2012: Haringey

Lynne Featherstone: To ask the Minister for the Olympics what discussions her Office has had with Haringey borough to enable it to (a) participate fully in and (b) receive a legacy from the London 2012 Olympic Games; and if she will make a statement. [257280]

Tessa Jowell: I met with the Leader of Haringey council and other council officials on 6 February 2008 to discuss Haringey's plans to engage with and benefit from the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games.

The Chairman of the Olympic Delivery Authority (ODA) met local councillors and business representatives on 8 January 2009 in Haringey to talk about both the employment and training opportunities across the park, and to plan events to support businesses in Haringey. Haringey is a member of the north London sub-regional partnership and the ODA hope to hold an event with this partnership before the end of 2009.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Correspondence

Alistair Burt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of letters to his Department from hon. Members' Parliamentary offices were answered within 30 days of the date of receipt in each quarter from January 2008 to March 2009. [280469]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Department aims to respond to queries from Members of Parliament and Peers within 20 working days. Performance is detailed in the Department's annual reports and is also reported to Parliament each year by written statement.

Information relating to performance within 30 days could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Electricity

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what estimate he has made of the percentage of electricity used by his Department which was derived from renewable sources in (a) 2006-07 and (b) 2007-08. [280953]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The percentage of electricity derived from renewable sources is as follows:

2006-07—100 per cent.

2007-08—100 per cent.

Departmental Energy

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much (a) electricity and (b) gas was used (i) on his Department's estate and (ii) by his Department's agency in each year from 2004-05 to 2008-09. [280519]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The electricity and gas used by the Department and The Royal Parks on its office estate is detailed in the following table.

	Electricity Kwh	Gas Kwh
<i>Department for Culture, Media and Sport</i>		
1999-2000	n/a	n/a
2000-01	n/a	n/a
2001-02	n/a	n/a
2002-03	n/a	n/a
2003-04	4,368,192	3,275,860
2004-05	4,186,267	2,643,861
2005-06	4,438,625	2,488,443
2006-07	4,320,106	2,631,318
2007-08	3,647,784	2,135,379
2008-09	3,091,873	1,344,409
<i>The Royal Parks</i>		
1999-2000	n/a	n/a
2000-01	n/a	n/a
2001-02	n/a	n/a
2002-03	n/a	n/a
2003-04	n/a	n/a
2004-05	4,141,338	1,275,682
2005-06	3,346,056	1,402,580
2006-07	3,220,032	1,505,334
2007-08	2,995,048	1,490,492
2008-09	n/a	n/a

n/a = Not available.

Data is not available prior to April 2004 and since April 2008 The Royal Parks have not recorded data on kwh consumed.

Departmental Training

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what training courses have been attended by special advisers in his Department in the last 12 months; and at what cost. [279403]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Special advisers receive training as appropriate to enable them to fulfil their duties and responsibilities as set out in the “Model Contract for Special Advisers”.

In the past 12 months one special adviser attended a Health and Safety course held within the Department at a cost of £60.80 plus VAT per person.

Hillsborough Disaster

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what progress his Department has made in identifying files and documents it holds relating to the Hillsborough disaster that can be released.

[279539]

Mr. Bradshaw: My Department, in partnership with other Departments, is currently developing a Government wide approach in close liaison with local agencies in South Yorkshire and beyond.

Sports: Greater Manchester

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much Lottery funding was awarded to sport-related groups in (a) Tameside and (b) Stockport in each of the last five years.

[279766]

Mr. Simon: The tables show the value of lottery awards made in each of the last five years to organisations that are providing community sport opportunities in the Tameside and Stockport metropolitan boroughs.

<i>Tameside</i>	
<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Total value of awards (£)</i>
2004-05	2,956,226
2005-06	1,417,902
2006-07	700,351
2007-08	894,669

<i>Tameside</i>	
<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Total value of awards (£)</i>
2008-09	798,137

<i>Stockport</i>	
<i>Financial year</i>	<i>Total value of awards (£)</i>
2004-05	2,333,633
2005-06	368,986
2006-07	168,884
2007-08	708,891
2008-09	245,173

WORK AND PENSIONS

Christmas Bonus

Mr. Steen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reasons Mr. John Coombe of Brixham did not receive a £10 Christmas bonus payment and subsequent additional £60 bonus payment under the Real Help for Pensioners Christmas bonus payment scheme; and if she will make a statement.

[278463]

Angela Eagle [*holding answer 8 June 2009*]: The acting chief executive of the Pensions, Disability and Carers Service has responded to the hon. Member separately on 3 June 2009 with the information requested relating to his constituent Mr. John Coombe of Brixham.

Departmental Manpower

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many (a) directors, (b) senior managers, (c) specialist and delivery managers and (d) executive support and administration staff there were in each Pensions Service office in each of the last five years.

[279288]

Angela Eagle: The information available detailing the numbers of staff deployed overall in the former Pension Service at the end of each of the last five financial years is in the table.

	<i>As at March each year</i>				
	<i>2005¹</i>	<i>2006¹</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2009</i>
Band A/AA	1,577	1,169	1,014	830	791
Band B/AO	8,816	7,425	6,765	5,790	5,557
Band C/EO	4,650	4,070	3,750	3,090	2,776
Band D/HEO	923	780	683	568	425
Band E/SEO	271	237	309	288	245
Band F/UG7	108	97	106	98	88
Band G/UG6	52	46	53	73	49
SCS	23	21	22	24	18
Total	² 16,419	² 13,846	² 12,701	² 10,762	9,949

¹ March 2005 and 2006 inc. Pensions Client Group.

² Difference of one due to roundings.

Notes:

1. Bands A/AA through to Band B/AO—administration staff of which 6,268 (99 per cent.) are deployed on benefit delivery with a just 80 (1 per cent.) deployed in Central Services (Administration).

2. Band C/EO through to Band D/HEO—junior management of which 2,639 (82 per cent.) are deployed on benefit delivery and 562 (18 per cent.) deployed in Central Services (Executive Support).

3. Band E/SEO through to Band G/G6—middle management of which 171 (45 per cent.) are deployed on benefit delivery and 211 (55 per cent.) deployed in Central Services (Specialist and Delivery Managers).

4. SCS—all Directors and senior management of which four (22 per cent.) are deployed on benefit delivery and 14 (78 per cent.) in Central Services (Directors).

Source:

DWP Corporate Workforce Planning and DWP Data view as at 31 March 2009

Background information

Grading and staffing numbers in Pension Service offices over the last five years have fluctuated according to business needs. Historic data is not available to the level of detail asked for, but the summary table shows the numbers employed in each grade at the end of the last five financial years. Additionally, the number of, and location of, Pension Service offices has also changed.

In April 2008 the merger of the Pension Service and Disability and Carer Service took place and Pensions, Disability and Carers Service was formed. There are currently 9,949 staff exclusively deployed on former Pension Service business.

Fuel Poverty

Mr. Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people receiving fuel assistance as a result of being disabled or long-term ill-health are also eligible for fuel assistance due to their age. [279105]

Angela Eagle [*holding answer 11 June 2009*]: The information requested is not available.

Pension Credit

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what her policy is on issuing reminders to people who are due to become eligible for pension credit; and if she will make a statement. [278011]

Angela Eagle [*holding answer 12 June 2009*]: The Government are committed to ensuring pensioners receive the support they are entitled to. The Pension, Disability and Carers Service (PDCS) contacts all pensioner households to tell them about pension credit, to ensure everyone who is likely to be entitled to pension credit knows what they need to do to take up their entitlement.

A person approaching state pension age will receive a booklet (BR33) telling them how to claim state pension and other benefits and services they are entitled to, including pension credit.

In addition to this, PDCS undertakes regular pension credit campaign activity through multiple channels in order to ensure additional focus on those pensioners that may be eligible.

It is not policy to issue reminders to people about possible entitlement except as part of the targeted campaigns described above.

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what proportion of those eligible for pension credit have not claimed pension credit in each of the last five years. [278137]

Angela Eagle: The latest estimates of the take-up rates, value of unclaimed benefit and the number of those entitled to but not receiving means-tested benefits in Great Britain, covering income support, pension credit, housing benefit, council tax benefit and jobseeker's allowance (income based) are published in the report "Income Related Benefits Estimates of Take-Up in 2006-07".

Pension Credit: Greater Manchester

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many pensioners in (a) Tameside and (b) Stockport received pension credit in each year since its inception. [279761]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is in the following table.

Households in receipt and individual beneficiaries of pension credit in Tameside and Stockport November 2003 to November 2008

<i>As at November each year</i>	<i>Tameside</i>		<i>Stockport</i>	
	<i>Household recipients</i>	<i>Individual beneficiaries</i>	<i>Household recipients</i>	<i>Individual beneficiaries</i>
2003	9,860	11,740	9,390	11,040
2004	11,740	14,130	11,790	14,050
2005	11,900	14,340	12,060	14,360
2006	11,930	14,390	12,040	14,380
2007	11,870	14,380	12,100	14,480
2008	11,890	14,460	12,030	14,420

Notes:

1. Caseload figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Household recipients are those people who claim pension credit either for themselves only or on behalf of a household.
3. The number of individual beneficiaries includes both claimants and their partners, some of whom may be under 60 years of age.

Source:

DWP Information Directorate Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study 100 per cent. data

Pension Protection Fund

Chris Huhne: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether the Government plans to stand behind the Pension Protection Fund in circumstances in which its assets and contributions are not sufficient to meet claims made on it. [278389]

Angela Eagle: There is no need for the Government to guarantee the Pension Protection Fund. The PPF is designed to work over the long term. With around £3 billion in assets, and a monthly compensation bill of around £4 million, the PPF is able to fund compensation for a long time to come.

Winter Fuel Payments: Overseas Residence

Steve Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if she will estimate the number of British pensioners living abroad who are in receipt of the basic state pension but do not qualify for the winter fuel payment; and if she will make a statement. [279734]

Angela Eagle: The information requested is not available.

PRIME MINISTER**BBC External Services**

Mr. Hands: To ask the Prime Minister whether he plans to reply to the e-petition which closed on 9 April 2009, relating to the BBC World Service, on the Downing Street website. [278153]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the reply issued on the No. 10 website:

<http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page19451>

A copy of this webpage has been placed in the Library of the House.

British Constitution

Mr. Dai Davies: To ask the Prime Minister whom he consulted on his proposals for constitutional reform announced on 10 June 2009; what public consultation he plans to hold on the proposals; and if he will make a statement. [280178]

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Prime Minister what steps the National Council for Democratic Renewal plans to take to consult (a) organisations and (b) individuals in the course of its work. [280210]

The Prime Minister: Public consultation will be a key part of the proposals for constitutional reform, and the Government will set out their plans for taking this forward shortly.

Cabinet: Southampton

Mr. Hoban: To ask the Prime Minister what the cost was of holding the meeting of the Cabinet in Southampton on 23 February 2009. [274176]

The Prime Minister: The visit of the Cabinet to Southampton on 23 February 2009 was one of several ministerial visits across the region; there was a public engagement event with around 140 local people and a formal Cabinet meeting. The cost of the public engagement event and the Cabinet meeting was approximately £103,802, excluding VAT. This figure includes the cost of hiring the venue, catering, associated security and delegate management. There are no separate figures for the Cabinet meeting. In addition, Departments and agencies will have incurred costs in terms of travel, staff time and other support. The cost of any security provided by the police is a matter for the relevant police force.

Council for Constitutional Renewal

Mr. Dai Davies: To ask the Prime Minister when he expects the Council for Constitutional Renewal to be established; how many members of the Council there will be; by what criteria its membership will be decided; what payment will be provided to Council members for their participation in the Council; what secretariat will be provided for the Council, and with what budget; whether all its deliberations will be held in public; and whether the Council will be a public authority for the purposes of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. [278370]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the statement I made to the House on 10 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 795-99. As with all Cabinet Committees, the Democratic Renewal Council will be supported by the Cabinet Office, and individual Departments where relevant.

Democratic Renewal Council and Domestic Policy Council

Mr. Dai Davies: To ask the Prime Minister by what means the proceedings of the (a) Democratic Renewal Council and (b) Domestic Policy Council will be reported to the House; and what estimate has been made of the administrative cost of each body in the next 12 months. [279467]

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Prime Minister whether he has requested the National Council for Democratic Renewal to report recommendations to him within a specified period. [280212]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Members to the statement I made to the House on 10 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 795-799.

Departmental Responsibilities

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what the official duties and responsibilities are of the First Secretary of State; what change there has been in those duties from those formerly accorded to the Secretary of State for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform; and what arrangements he has made for a Minister to answer questions in the House on the discharge of any new duties. [280189]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the Machinery of Government and Ministerial Appointments press notices issued by my Office. Copies are available in the Library of the House and are also available on the No. 10 website at:

<http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page19525>

and

<http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page19564>.

Departmental Training

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Prime Minister what training courses have been attended by special advisers in his Office in the last 12 months; and at what cost. [279393]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave the hon. Member for Southend, West (Mr. Amess) on 6 May 2009, *Official Report*, column 182W.

Enterprise Champion

Norman Baker: To ask the Prime Minister what the official duties and responsibilities of the Enterprise Champion are; and which Minister will answer questions in the House on their discharge. [280190]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the press notice issued by my Office on Friday 5 June 2009. A copy is available on the No. 10 website:

<http://www.number10.gov.uk/Page19515>.

Iraq Conflict

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to consult (a) the leaders of opposition parties represented in the House and (b)

the Chair of the Public Administration Select Committee before announcing (i) the terms of reference and (ii) the composition of an inquiry into the Iraq war; and if he will make a statement. [280091]

Simon Hughes: To ask the Prime Minister what the terms of reference of the planned inquiry into the Iraq war will be; and if he will make a statement. [280142]

Adam Price: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he plans to have with members of other political parties represented in the House on the terms of reference of the forthcoming inquiry into the war in Iraq. [280248]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Members to the statement I made to the House on 15 June 2009, *Official Report*, columns 21-24.

Israel: EC External Relations

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Prime Minister what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on the agenda for the EU-Israel Association Council meeting on 15 June 2009; and if he will make a statement. [279752]

The Prime Minister: I have regular meetings and discussions with ministerial colleagues and others on a wide range of subjects.

Andrew Gwynne: To ask the Prime Minister (1) what recent discussions he has had with the President of the European Commission on upgrading EU-Israel relations; [279753]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with his European counterparts on upgrading EU-Israel relations. [279754]

The Prime Minister: I have regular discussions with the president of the European Commission and others on the issue of the middle east and related issues.

National Council for Democratic Renewal

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Prime Minister whether the recommendations of the National Council for Democratic Renewal will be published. [280208]

The Prime Minister: The Democratic Renewal Council will operate in accordance with normal procedures for Cabinet Committees. Proposals from the Committee will be subject to public engagement and consultation where relevant.

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Prime Minister what the budget is of the National Council for Democratic Renewal for 2009-10. [280211]

The Prime Minister: As with all Cabinet Committees, the Democratic Renewal Council will be supported by the Cabinet Office, and individual Departments where relevant.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Prime Minister who the members of the National Council for Democratic Renewal are. [280236]

Mrs. Laing: To ask the Prime Minister who the members are of the National Council for Democratic Renewal. [280209]

The Prime Minister: A list of members of all Cabinet Committees will be published shortly.

Parliamentary Private Secretaries

Mr. Maude: To ask the Prime Minister which hon. Members act as Parliamentary Private Secretaries to Ministers in each department. [272010]

The Prime Minister: Following the recent reshuffle a list of parliamentary private secretaries will be published in the usual manner.

Senior Salaries Review Body

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Prime Minister if he will make it his policy to extend the remit of the Review Body on Senior Salaries to enable it to advise public bodies other than those specified in its existing terms of reference. [277531]

The Prime Minister: The Review Body on Senior Salaries (SSRB) provides independent advice on the remuneration of holders of judicial office; senior civil servants; senior officers of the armed forces, very senior NHS managers and other such public appointments as may from time to time be specified by the Prime Minister. Full details of the Review Body's remit can be found on the SSRB website:

<http://www.ome.uk.com/review.cfm?body=4>.

Appropriate pay setting mechanisms are already in place to cover public bodies other than those specified in this remit. In general, approval for the pay of chief executives of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs) is the responsibility of the parent department, in consultation with HM Treasury. In making their decision, departments take account of appropriate market comparators and public sector pay policy. The pay of other executives is normally included in an NDPB's pay remit, which is normally approved by the parent department.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Antisocial Behaviour Orders: Young People

Annette Brooke: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many antisocial behaviour orders given to children aged 10 to 17-years-old have had reporting restrictions imposed through the discretion of the court under section 39 of the Children and Young Persons Act 1933 in each of the last 10 years. [280633]

Mr. Alan Campbell: The information requested is not available centrally.

Antisocial behaviour orders are civil orders and therefore not automatically subject to reporting restrictions. ASBOs are designed to protect local communities and their effectiveness will depend on local people knowing about them. However, courts retain the power to impose reporting restrictions if they believe it appropriate to do so.

DNA: Databases

Jenny Willott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what applications to use data from the national DNA database for research purposes have been submitted to his Department since 15 January 2008; and if he will make a statement; [271101]

(2) what applications to his Department to use data from the national DNA database for research purposes have been refused since 13 June 2008; and if he will make a statement. [271102]

Mr. Alan Campbell: Two research applications have been submitted to the National DNA Database (NDNAD) Strategy Board since 15 January 2008. One application was from the European Network of Forensic Science Institutes (ENFSI). The ENFSI group has been awarded EC funding to improve the efficiency of DNA data exchange throughout Europe. In order to do this, it is necessary to build a computer simulation model to determine the current efficiency of DNA databases and to carry out a predictive analysis of the effect of not increasing the number of European core loci (i.e. the number of elements of DNA which are common to different countries' profiling systems). This application is still being considered.

The second research application was from a specialist working group set up by the Forensic Science Regulator to verify the outputs of familial search algorithms. "Familial searching" is the term used to describe the process of searching the NDNAD for profiles which are similar but not identical to a DNA profile left at a crime scene. Such searches are approved only in serious cases and can provide police with a lead on the identity of an offender by providing matches with possible family members. This application has been approved.

No research applications have been refused since 13 June 2008.

Entry Clearances

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the target time is for the processing of an application to the UK Border Agency for a sponsor licence; and what the (a) average and (b) maximum time taken to process an application for such a licence was in the latest period for which figures are available. [278275]

Mr. Woolas: The target time for processing a sponsor licence application from 1 April 2009 is 20 working days. The average time taken to process an application is currently 34 days for applications received on or after 1 April 2009. This is due primarily to high volumes of applications in particular areas, each of which must be subject a rigorous set of checks.

The maximum time taken to process an application was 274 days which was due to delays in receiving information from the sponsor organisation and difficulties trying to arrange and conduct a pre-licensing visit.

David Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 1 June 2009, *Official Report*, columns 168-69W, on immigration: EU nationals, what steps he is taking to ensure that EEA residence cards are issued no later than six months after the date on which the application and documents are received. [280432]

Mr. Woolas: The Secretary of State has increased the resources committed to European Casework. Improvements have also been made to the training and mentoring packages for caseworkers completing European applications, all of which has led to improved results.

Mr. Gerrard: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has established a timetable for the processing of applications for residence permits for (a) EEA nationals and (b) family members of EEA nationals. [280470]

Mr. Woolas: The agency is committed to completing all EEA applications types within six months of date of receipt by the end of November 2009.

Immigration Controls

Pete Wishart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications under the highly-skilled migrants programme have been refused because applicants' savings fell below the required level in each year that the scheme has operated. [272236]

Mr. Woolas: The information is not available in the format requested because it is not centrally recorded.

Immigration Controls: Overseas Students

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many academic institutions have successfully registered as sponsors with the UK Border Agency under Tier 4 of the points-based immigration system; and how many such institutions made applications to register which were rejected. [271294]

Mr. Woolas [*holding answer 27 April 2009*]: There are at present just less than 1,600 educational establishments on the register of sponsors under tier 4 of the points-based system.

Over 500 applications for sponsorship have been unsuccessful, including those applications rejected, refused and withdrawn, of which around 30 were from organisations identifying themselves as universities or educational establishments.

Figures provided have been rounded to the nearest five.

The figures quoted are not provided under National Statistics protocols and have been derived from local management information and are therefore provisional and subject to change.

Immigration: Gurkhas

John Barrett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will make a statement on the progress of reviewing the right to live in the UK of Gurkhas who retired before 1997. [243126]

Mr. Woolas [*holding answer 15 December 2008*]: I refer the hon. Member to the announcement made by my right hon. Friend the former Home Secretary (Jacqui Smith) on 21 May 2009. Former members of the Brigade of Gurkhas discharged before 1 July 1997 and who have served a minimum of four years are now eligible to apply for settlement in the UK.

Members: Correspondence

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) when he plans to reply to the letter to his predecessor of 29 April 2009 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Cindy Douglas. [280434]

(2) when he plans to reply to the letter to his predecessor of 27 April 2009 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mr. M Ghosi; [280436]

(3) when he plans to reply to the letter to his predecessor of 23 April 2009 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton with regard to Mrs. Fazeelat Akhtar. [280438]

Alan Johnson: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 16 June 2009.

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when the Minister of State for Borders and Immigration plans to reply to the letter from the hon. Member for West Worcestershire of 28 April 2009, reference: M10251/9, on asylum and immigration policy. [281132]

Mr. Woolas: A response was sent on 14 May 2009. A copy of that response was sent today.

Personal Records: Data Protection

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Epping Forest of 1 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 174W, on personal records: data protection, for how long automatic number plate recognition (ANPR)

data are retained; and under what circumstances ANPR data are deleted from the National ANPR Data Centre. [279619]

Alan Johnson: ACPO (Association of Chief Police Officers) guidance states that ANPR data may be retained for an initial 90 days after collection for viewing by authorised persons for post crime interrogation and investigation. Data more than 90 days old may then be retained for up to two years if the operational need remains. However these data are partitioned from general viewing, access is only permitted for major and serious investigations and requires authorisation in each case by a senior officer. This is in line with responsibilities under the Data Protection Act (1984 and 1998).

The National ANPR Data Centre is currently under development and test. Once in live operational use, ANPR data will be deleted as required by police forces in discharging their responsibilities under the Act. Data not required to be retained for operational purposes will be deleted automatically after a prescribed period, and this period will be determined through agreement between the Association of Chief Police Officers, the National Policing Improvement Agency and the Information Commissioner's Office.

Police: Finance

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much gross revenue council tax police precepts raised in each year, after capping, in each police authority in England and Wales in each year since 1997-98. [279852]

Mr. Hanson: The information requested is set out in the following table.

The figures for 2009-10 for Surrey Police Authority are before capping. Any capping action is subject to approval of a draft order currently before the House.

Gross revenue council tax police precepts

£ million

Force	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Avon and Somerset	25.6	27.2	30.6	34.4	37.4	43.4	58.6	66.3	70.3	74.4	80.4	85.3	89.7
Bedfordshire	9.5	10.2	11.3	12.5	13.3	15.0	18.0	20.9	22.1	23.4	24.7	27.5	28.7
Cambridgeshire	11.7	11.2	12.3	14.9	16.5	23.1	28.0	32.6	34.6	36.7	39.4	42.0	44.5
Cheshire	17.1	18.3	19.4	21.2	22.6	25.9	31.3	35.0	37.0	39.4	42.6	50.3	52.5
Cleveland	8.6	7.6	9.9	10.4	11.2	15.5	19.5	22.4	23.8	25.1	26.5	29.3	30.8
Cumbria	9.2	11.6	12.6	13.7	14.9	16.6	21.8	25.7	26.8	28.3	29.9	31.7	33.2
Derbyshire	15.1	17.0	19.8	21.6	23.2	28.5	34.9	38.7	40.9	43.1	45.6	48.0	52.5
Devon and Cornwall	26.3	25.8	28.9	32.2	34.2	41.2	58.2	65.8	70.1	74.2	78.6	85.7	90.4
Dorset	16.6	18.6	20.7	22.7	24.9	28.1	33.8	37.9	40.5	42.8	45.4	47.9	50.5
Durham	8.9	8.3	8.7	9.1	9.9	11.4	14.1	16.4	17.4	18.4	25.1	26.7	27.8
Dyfed-Powys	8.2	10.2	12.6	14.9	16.1	17.5	22.4	26.1	28.0	29.9	31.8	33.9	35.7
Essex	29.3	34.1	36.1	40.2	42.5	46.8	56.5	60.8	64.8	69.1	73.2	77.6	81.9
Gloucestershire	10.0	11.4	13.8	15.8	16.8	19.4	29.6	33.0	34.6	36.7	38.9	41.1	42.7
Greater Manchester	40.2	42.0	45.0	47.1	48.9	52.2	69.8	75.5	81.1	85.8	90.8	98.8	106.8
Gwent	8.7	9.7	10.7	13.7	15.4	17.7	22.4	26.4	28.5	30.1	32.0	33.7	35.2
Hampshire	31.8	31.1	33.6	34.7	37.5	48.2	62.8	70.9	75.0	79.3	84.0	91.6	96.7
Hertfordshire	17.6	20.2	22.0	28.1	30.2	33.9	41.4	47.7	50.3	53.4	56.6	60.2	63.4
Humberside	13.4	13.6	14.3	15.9	22.7	25.5	30.7	35.9	37.8	39.9	42.2	44.3	46.2
Kent	28.7	27.2	29.8	31.9	34.8	42.8	55.9	63.0	67.0	70.9	75.2	79.7	84.3

Gross revenue council tax police precepts

£ million

Force	1997-98	1998-99	1999-2000	2000-01	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
Lancashire	22.9	23.1	25.2	27.6	30.2	33.1	39.6	45.9	49.4	52.3	58.6	63.4	66.3
Leicestershire	14.5	17.1	18.1	19.4	21.8	27.9	31.0	35.9	38.2	40.5	42.9	49.9	51.8
Lincolnshire	13.4	15.5	16.3	17.5	18.7	19.9	22.3	24.3	26.2	28.0	29.7	38.1	40.3
Merseyside	27.0	29.1	31.4	33.2	35.3	39.3	42.3	46.2	48.9	51.5	54.1	56.7	59.3
Metropolitan	181.8	222.3	241.3	248.2	324.6	361.4	443.7	521.3	560.5	607.42	649.0	665.0	662.0
Norfolk	13.0	14.0	17.0	19.3	22.6	27.4	33.7	39.0	41.3	44.0	47.4	52.0	54.5
North Wales	11.2	13.6	15.7	18.8	20.0	23.6	31.3	38.0	42.4	45.0	48.5	51.2	54.0
North Yorkshire	13.0	12.8	14.0	15.4	17.2	24.6	43.6	49.0	50.6	52.2	54.2	57.1	59.0
Northamptonshire	13.4	13.4	15.1	16.0	17.0	22.0	27.7	32.2	33.7	36.0	38.2	40.9	43.1
Northumbria	21.3	19.4	20.3	21.2	22.9	24.1	26.6	28.1	29.6	30.5	31.9	33.8	35.1
Nottinghamshire	14.9	16.4	18.7	20.0	21.7	26.5	34.4	38.1	40.4	42.6	45.0	47.6	50.3
South Wales	19.5	22.4	26.2	32.5	34.8	36.7	42.7	48.4	52.9	56.5	59.9	63.6	67.0
South Yorkshire	18.9	19.3	20.2	21.2	22.6	26.9	34.4	38.0	40.0	42.3	44.7	47.0	48.8
Staffordshire	17.7	23.6	25.8	27.5	31.5	34.0	43.1	47.5	50.3	53.4	56.4	58.8	61.4
Suffolk	11.3	11.7	12.6	13.9	15.5	19.1	25.7	28.7	30.2	32.0	34.1	37.5	39.4
Surrey	15.0	22.5	25.7	36.9	38.9	45.4	63.8	69.8	73.8	78.7	83.2	92.0	96.8
Sussex	29.1	29.0	30.6	32.2	34.6	41.1	57.9	63.4	67.1	71.0	75.6	79.9	83.7
Thames Valley	40.0	39.5	44.5	47.9	51.7	59.2	86.1	98.6	104.2	110.8	117.82	123.9	130.0
Warwickshire	9.2	11.0	12.8	14.0	15.7	19.0	22.1	24.1	25.5	27.0	28.6	32.6	34.0
West Mercia	19.7	21.1	23.4	29.8	32.0	43.0	49.7	57.9	60.7	64.3	68.0	71.7	75.5
West Midlands	39.6	36.6	38.4	41.3	43.3	47.2	54.5	61.3	64.6	68.0	71.6	74.9	77.9
West Yorkshire	31.8	31.8	33.5	36.2	37.9	47.8	56.1	64.7	69.0	73.2	77.8	82.3	85.5
Wiltshire	11.8	13.6	15.1	16.8	18.7	20.7	25.2	27.9	29.6	31.6	33.6	35.6	37.7

Sources:

English Police Authorises - Communities and Local Government
Welsh Police Authorises - Welsh Assembly Government

Reparation by Offenders

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the use of mechanisms for restorative justice. [280265]

Claire Ward: I have been asked to reply.

Following the final report of the evaluation of the crime reduction programme restorative justice pilots, our assessment of the effectiveness of restorative justice for adults is that it can deliver high levels of victim satisfaction and can be a positive service for victims if delivered appropriately and sensitively. It may also help to reduce reoffending.

Security Guards: Licensing

Mr. Todd: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will bring forward proposals to require directly-employed security guards to be licensed. [280164]

Mr. Alan Campbell: The Security Industry Authority (SIA) recently conducted a review of whether in-house security guards should be licensed.

The SIA concluded that there was no clearly defined or substantiated risk to public protection that would justify extending the licensing requirement to include in-house security guards. Ministers agreed with this conclusion and asked the SIA to review the matter again in the future. The SIA intend to conduct the review in 2012-13, but will do so earlier if evidence of criminality is identified.

The review was published on the SIA website in May 2009 at:

<http://www.the-sia.org.uk/home/licensing/in-house.htm>

UK Border Agency: Public Consultation

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much the UK Border Agency and its predecessors spent on consultants in each of the last five years. [279542]

Mr. Woolas: The amounts spent by the UK Border Agency and its predecessors on consultancy are shown in the following table. Information is not available on the spend for 2004-05 except at disproportionate cost.

UKBA five-year consultancy spend

	Breakdown of consultancy costs for UKBA	FY 2004-05 ¹	FY 2005-06	FY 2006-07	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09
72504	Administrative Consultancy—Implementation	6,413,345	3,238,876	1,408,508	1,008,667	167,699
72501	Consultancy—Management	7,695,527	1,420,733	3,277,637	3,765,022	5,392,701
72502	Consultancy—IT	5,494,501	5,292	29,337	517,530	1,894,993
72503	Consultancy—Accommodation	14,070,757	293,090	490,469	295,559	121,275
72534	Consultancy—Advice	—	—	—	104,879	478,384
72558	Programme Consultancy—Advice	—	—	—	889,502	3,901,646
72560	Consultancies—Management	—	1,774,537	3,080,246	15,517,051	15,051,823

£

UKBA five-year consultancy spend

Breakdown of consultancy costs for UKBA		FY 2004-05 ¹	FY 2005-06	FY 2006-07	FY 2007-08	FY 2008-09
72561	Consultancies—IT	—	5,615,396	4,705,034	5,544,364	2,054,586
72562	Consultancies—Accommodation	—	12,414,256	6,603,016	3,715,016	1,253,129
72555	Consultancies—Other (programme costs)	58	29,356,401	24,271,119	3,460,274	2,269,130
Adjusted for +1.3m against “0148 UKBA Inter”)				1.3m		
Total		33,674,188	54,118,580	43,865,365	34,817,865	33,885,366

¹ The 2004-05 data represent the first year of a new financial database and thus do not represent a full year's consultancy cost

Waste Management: Prosecutions

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many prosecutions have been sought under section 33 of the Environmental Protection Act 1990 in each local authority area in the South West in each of the last five years; and how many such prosecutions were successful. [280257]

Claire Ward: I have been asked to reply.

The number of defendants who were proceeded against at magistrates courts and found guilty at all courts for offences under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 sec. 33, in England and Wales, 2003 to 2007 (latest available) is shown in the table.

It is not possible to identify data at local authority area level, as the data are not collected at this level of detail. Police force area data for the South West region have been provided in lieu.

These data are on the principal offence basis. The figures given in the table on court proceedings relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offence for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences, the offence selected is the one for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

Court proceedings data for 2008 will be available in the autumn of 2009.

Prosecution figures are only for cases taken through the court system and do not reflect the full range of enforcement actions available to local authorities.

In 2007-08 local authorities took a wide range of additional enforcement actions against fly-tippers, including warning letters, statutory notices, formal cautions and injunctions.

Number of defendants who were proceeded against at magistrates courts and found guilty at all courts for offences under the Environmental Protection Act 1990 sec.33, in the South West area, by police force area 2003 to 2007^{1,2,3,4}

Offence code: 9115, 9116, 9137

Police force area (PFA)/ region	Proceeded against					Found guilty				
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
Avon and Somerset PFA	3	1	5	4	11	3	1	2	3	9
Devon and Cornwall PPA	16	25	22	16	30	11	20	21	10	25
Dorset PFA	1	0	6	9	3	2	1	3	3	3
Gloucestershire PFA	2	0	4	3	5	2	0	4	2	4
Wiltshire PFA	3	8	5	3	7	5	7	4	2	6
South West Region	25	34	42	35	56	23	29	34	20	47

¹ The figures given in the table on court proceedings relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

² Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts, and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

³ Includes the following statutes and corresponding offence descriptions:

9115—Environmental Protection Act 1990 sec.33(8).

Depositing, causing the deposition or permitting the deposition, treating, keeping or disposing of controlled (but not special) waste in or on land without a licence.

9116—Environmental Protection Act 1990 sec.33(9).

Depositing, causing the deposition or permitting the deposition of controlled special waste in or on land without a licence.

9137—Environmental Protection Act 1990 sec.33(6).

Contravening conditions of a waste management licence.

⁴ The found guilty column may exceed those proceeded against, as it may be the case that the proceedings in the magistrates court took place in the preceding year and they were found guilty at the Crown court in the following year.

Source:

OCJR—E and A: Office for Criminal Justice Reform—Evidence and Analysis Unit, Ministry of Justice

Wildlife: Crime

Tim Farron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the total revenue from fines

for offences related to wildlife crime was in each of the last 10 years. [280361]

Claire Ward: I have been asked to reply.

The total revenue from fines for any particular offence is not collected by the courts.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Carbon Emissions: Standards

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what timetable he has set for completion of his Department's consultation on the term carbon neutral; how many responses to that consultation have been received to date; and if he will make a statement. [278274]

Joan Ruddock: The consultation closed on 21 May 2009. There were 59 responses; they are currently being considered in detail. A summary of the responses, and an explanation of our intended next steps, will be published later this year.

DEFENCE

Air Force: Military Aircraft

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many RAF aircraft are in service; and what the (a) target and (b) actual number of each type of RAF aircraft fit for purpose is. [279949]

Mr. Quentin Davies: Information on the numbers of aircraft in service and fit for purpose (FFP) are given in the following table. Target figures are not used for all aircraft types and are included only where appropriate. The figures shown are a snapshot of the position on 31 May 2009.

<i>Aircraft type</i>	<i>In service fleet</i>	<i>Target FFP</i>	<i>Actual FFP</i>
BAe 146	2	1	1
BAe 125	6	3	3
C-17	6	5	3
Dominie	9	—	7
Harrier	74	—	46
Hawk T1	129	—	88
Hawk T2	8	—	6
Hercules CI30K	14	7	7

<i>Aircraft type</i>	<i>In service fleet</i>	<i>Target FFP</i>	<i>Actual FFP</i>
Hercules CI30J	24	15	14
Nimrod MR2	11	8	6
Nimrod R1	3	1	1
Sea King (SARF)	25	17	10
Sentinel	5	4	3
Sentry	7	5	4
Tornado F3	62	—	28
Tornado GR4	138	—	89
Tristar	9	6	4
Tucano	95	—	55
Typhoon	56	—	37
VC10	16	12	9
Vigilant	64	—	64
Viking	82	—	82

'In service' has been taken to mean the effective fleet, which covers all aircraft barring those which are redundant, declared as surplus or awaiting disposal. Serviceable aircraft available to the front line commands for operational and training purposes are termed fit for purpose (FFP). Aircraft which are undergoing major servicing or routine maintenance are within the depth fleet and are therefore not relevant to this question.

Additionally, in the process of answering this question an error in the Tristar 'in-service' fleet number has been identified in the written answer I provided to you on 23 April 2009, *Official Report*, column 812W. The answer I provided stated that there were eight Tristars 'in-service' but the correct answer should have stated there were nine. This error occurred as one aircraft has been undergoing a major cockpit upgrade and was mistakenly not included in the 'in-service' fleet number.

Armed Forces: Housing

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many and what percentage of forces' accommodation units are in each condition grade in each region in England. [279938]

Mr. Kevan Jones: The following table is the best available breakdown of service families accommodation by location based on the Department's housing regions, and is correct as at 25 March 2009. This updates information given in my answer of 30 March 2009, *Official Report*, column 884W, and my written ministerial statement of 17 March 2009, *Official Report*, columns 43-44WS, and reflects further verification and analysis work including that carried out with the National Audit Office.

<i>Housing region</i>	<i>S1fC</i>		<i>S2fC</i>		<i>S3fC</i>		<i>S4fC</i>		<i>Not assessed</i>	<i>Total</i>
	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>No.</i>	<i>%</i>		
East	1,930	40.55	2,599	54.61	213	4.47	17	0.36	1,618	6,377
London	1,179	20.65	3,613	63.31	800	14.02	115	2.01	1,728	7,435
North	2,092	52.55	1,750	43.96	112	2.81	27	0.68	1,400	5,381
South East	2,797	35.47	4,631	58.73	345	4.37	112	1.42	1,737	9,622
Southwest	2,255	27.04	5,664	67.92	344	4.13	76	0.91	1,953	10,292
West (inc Wales)	1,338	45.34	1,518	51.44	89	3.02	6	0.20	9,10	3,861
PFI Properties/Hirings	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,005	2,005
Total	11,591	34.47	19,775	58.82	1,903	5.66	353	1.05	11,351	44,973

Data for the condition of service families accommodation will be updated on a quarterly basis beginning from July 2009, and the information will be placed in the Library of the House.

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what quantities of (a) intermediate and (b) low level radioactive waste are held at the Atomic Weapons Establishment. [280423]

Mr. Quentin Davies: The quantity of intermediate level radioactive waste currently held at the Atomic Weapons Establishment is 4,095 cu m. The quantity of low level radioactive waste currently held there is 680 cu m.

Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the estimated hourly flying time cost is of (a) the Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft and (b) each air-to-air service provider. [280061]

Mr. Quentin Davies: After full system delivery of the Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft the average hourly flying time cost for military usage is estimated to be £20,000. This rate includes all costs associated with provision of military capability (including Defensive Aids Suite), aircraft support, training and associated infrastructure. No equivalent cost is currently available from a commercial air-to-air service provider.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on what date he expects the Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft to enter service. [280063]

Mr. Quentin Davies: The Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft (FSTA) introduction to service is planned to begin in 2011, with the full service being available by 2016.

Joint Strike Fighter Aircraft

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Joint Strike Fighter aircraft his Department plans to purchase in the next five years. [279936]

Mr. Quentin Davies: The procurement process for the Joint Strike Fighter remains at a very early stage. We have not taken the final investment decision and at this stage cannot, therefore, confirm overall numbers or the in-service date. The first investment decision was announced by the Secretary of State on 18 March 2009, *Official Report*, column 53WS. The decision enables the UK to conduct, alongside the US, a joint Initial Operational Test and Evaluation programme and entails the acquisition of three aircraft, provision of training equipment and support during the trials and a further two years contributions to the Production, Sustainment and Follow-on Development Memorandum of Understanding signed in 2006. Subject to successful testing, we plan to buy further production aircraft incrementally to build up to Initial and then Full Operating Capability.

Low Flying: Complaints

Sir Menzies Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many complaints about low-flying military aircraft have been received by each military establishment in the UK in each of the last five years. [280418]

Mr. Kevan Jones: This information is not held in the format requested. The Air Staff, Low Flying Complaints and Enquiries Unit, (CEU) is the organisation responsible for recording complaints about aircraft operating in the UK Military Low Flying system. Complaints may be received direct from the public, or via military units, but records are not maintained of which unit has passed on a particular complaint to the Complaints and Enquiries Unit. Complaints about aircraft operating within the Military Air Traffic Zone surrounding an airbase are normally dealt with by the operating unit directly, and are not included in the centrally recorded figures.

The figures provided in the following table are the total of low flying complaints received at the CEU in each of the last five years.

<i>Date</i>	<i>Complaints recorded</i>
1 June 2004 to 31 May 2005	4,461
1 June 2005 to 31 May 2006	4,536
1 June 2006 to 31 May 2007	4,707
1 June 2007 to 31 May 2008	3,774
1 June 2008 to 31 May 2009	3,472

Military Aircraft

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the hourly cost of air-to-air refuelling of an RAF VC10 is. [280062]

Mr. Quentin Davies: The full-cost hourly rate of operating a VC10 tanker in the air for financial year 2009-10 is calculated to be £29,235. This figure incorporates a variety of costs to enable an aircraft to operate such as personnel costs, servicing of the aircraft and fuelling of the aircraft. It does not include the costs of the fuel payload VC10's carry to refuel other aircraft.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the out-of-service dates are for the (a) VC10 and (b) TriStar fleets. [280064]

Mr. Quentin Davies: Under current planning assumptions, the next VC10 will go out-of-service in June 2010 with the last of the fleet going out-of-service in September 2014. This progressive rundown is designed to ensure the smooth and efficient transition of air refuelling capability to the replacement Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft.

The out-of-service dates of the TriStar KCl and C2 aircraft have been extended by one year to 2016 in order to allow the replacement capability, Future Strategic Tanker Aircraft, to be fitted with the most up to date protective measures for flying into operational areas. The out-of-service dates of both the VC10 and TriStar are kept under constant review as part of the Department's internal planning process.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what contractual support arrangements there are for the (a) RAF VC10 and (b) TriStar fleets; and what the cost was in each case in each of the last two years. [280065]

Mr. Quentin Davies: Maintenance of the RAF VC10 fleet is provided by BAE Systems under a partnering agreement called JAVELIN (joint approach to VC10 engineering and logistics integration). Logistic support for the Conway engines used on the VC10 is provided by Rolls-Royce plc and engine repairs are undertaken by Vector Aerospace.

The RAF TriStar fleet is supported by the TriStar integrated operational support contract (TRIOS) with Marshall of Cambridge (Aerospace) Ltd. TRIOS excludes the RB211 engines which are contractually supported by Rolls-Royce plc, the auxiliary power units which are contractually supported by Euravia and the air-to-air refuelling equipment which is supported under the VC10 JAVELIN contract.

The cost of these contractual support arrangements is contained in the following table:

Financial year	Aircraft	
	VC10	TriStar
2007-08	77	21
2008-09	70	24

Note:

Costs have been rounded to the nearest million.

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many equipment failure reports there were in respect of (a) TriStar and (b) VC10 aircraft in each year since 2003. [280068]

Mr. Quentin Davies: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

A Serious Fault Signal (SFS) is the reporting method used to notify the discovery of a fault that may have immediate and serious implications to an aircraft fleet, or range of equipment. The figures provided in the following table are the number of SFS reports received which are directly attributed to the TriStar and VC10.

	TriStar	VC10
2003	1	0
2004	3	4
2005	0	2
2006	0	2
2007	2	1
2008	2	4
2009 ²	1	4

¹ Records for 2003 are not held centrally.

² Up until 1 June, the last full month for which data is available.

Navy: Military Aircraft

Mr. Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the merits of transferring control of the Fleet Air Arm to the Royal Air Force. [280188]

Bill Rammell [holding answer 16 June 2009]: No such assessment has been made.

Nuclear Weapons

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many activities requiring the permission of the Defence Nuclear Weapons Regulator have been authorised at Royal Naval Armament Depot Coulport since July 2007. [280424]

Mr. Quentin Davies: There has been no change to the scope of nuclear activities at the Royal Naval Armament Depot Coulport since July 2007. No additional permissions have, therefore, been required from the Defence Nuclear Safety Regulator, which includes the Nuclear Weapons Regulator.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Departmental Reorganisation

Lorely Burt: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what the cost of establishing the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills was. [278950]

Mr. McFadden: The cost of setting up the Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills in June 2007 was met within the existing departmental budgets of the former Department for Education and Skills (now Department for Children, Schools and Families) and the former Department for Trade and Industry.

Higher Education: Student Numbers

Mr. Willetts: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many (a) applicants and (b) accepted applicants to full-time undergraduate courses in England there were in each year between 1979 and 1997; and how many such applicants were domiciled in (i) England, (ii) Wales, (iii) Scotland and (iv) Northern Ireland. [278342]

Mr. Lammy: Information for the years 1994 to 1997 is given in the first and second tables. The figures cover students who apply to full-time undergraduate courses via UCAS. UCAS does not cover applications to part-time undergraduate or postgraduate courses, or students who apply directly to institutions. Prior to the formation of UCAS in 1994, figures were published separately for the two admission systems, the Universities Central Council on Admissions (UCCA) and the Polytechnic and College Admission Service (PCAS). The data for accepted applicants for these years are shown in the third and fourth tables. Comparable data for applicants are not available.

Applicants to full-time undergraduate courses in England via UCAS 1994-97

Year of entry	UK domiciled students				Grand total
	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	
1994	296,950	13,908	6,827	8,727	326,412
1995	287,977	12,903	7,236	8,801	316,917
1996	282,018	12,459	6,768	7,524	308,769
1997	305,374	13,432	7,680	8,205	334,691

Source:
UCAS

Accepted applicants to full-time undergraduate courses in England via UCAS
1994-97

	UK domiciled applicants				Grand total
	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	
1994	198,065	6,215	1,638	1,989	207,907
1995	208,439	6,199	1,848	2,110	218,596
1996	208,873	6,026	1,851	2,248	218,998
1997	239,550	6,869	2,610	2,506	251,535

Notes on UCAS applicant data.:

The applicant figures cover applicants submitting one or more applications to an English institution (in 1994/95 each applicant could submit up to eight applications; this was reduced to six from 1995/96, and to five from 2008/09). Students in this table applying to English institutions may also have applied to institutions in one or more of the other home countries, and some may have been accepted to institutions in those countries.

Source:

UCAS

Accepted applicants to full-time undergraduate courses in England via UCCA
1979 to 1993

	UK domiciled students				Total
	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	
1979	57,749	2,149	671	671	61,240
1980	58,998	2,184	698	722	62,602
1981 ¹	—	—	—	—	—
1982 ¹	—	—	—	—	—
1983	52,398	2,028	627	656	55,709
1984 ¹	—	—	—	—	—
1985	53,369	2,043	741	683	56,836
1986 ¹	—	—	—	—	—
1987 ¹	—	—	—	—	—
1988	56,088	2,390	791	865	60,134
1989	60,502	2,395	777	795	64,469
1990	70,625	2,636	903	912	75,076
1991	76,679	2,678	853	816	81,026
1992	85,069	3,023	952	904	89,948
1993	93,427	3,109	909	924	98,369

¹ Published information on acceptances to English HEIs only is not available for every year.

Source:

UCCA annual published reports

Accepted applicants to full-time undergraduate courses in England via PCAS
1986 to 1993

	UK domiciled students					Total
	England	Wales	Scotland	Northern Ireland	UK unknown	
1986	32,454	1,454	232	529	20	34,689
1987	31,572	1,521	253	677	103	34,126
1988	35,664	1,546	267	675	26	38,178
1989	53,301	2,193	359	1,140	6	56,999
1990	69,653	2,659	440	1,278	7	74,037
1991	85,461	2,897	547	1,292	25	90,222
1992	110,434	3,303	1,148	1,372	0	116,257
1993	112,492	3,101	1,102	1,102	0	117,797

Source:

PCAS annual published reports

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Council Tax

Mr. Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his Department's policy is on who should be responsible for making council tax payments for private sector rented properties. [280909]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: The Government policy on who is liable for council tax is set out in section 6 of the Local Government Finance Act 1992. We have no plans to change this.

Mr. Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what guidance is provided to local councils on the level of council tax that should be paid on second homes. [280914]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: Communities and Local Government has not issued any guidance to local councils on the level of council tax that should be paid on second homes. The administration of council tax is the responsibility of individual local authorities and it is they who set the levels of council tax, including any discounts or exemptions.

Council Tax: Overpayments

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will bring forward legislative proposals for local authorities to be required to pay interest to council taxpayers in respect of overpayments of council tax. [280742]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst on 12 February 2009, *Official Report*, 2214-15W.

Departmental Press: Subscriptions

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to which (a) magazines, (b) journals and (c) newspapers his Department subscribes; and what the cost of such subscriptions has been in each of the last three years. [280767]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Eco-Towns: Internet

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer of 9 February 2009, *Official Report*, column 1690W, on eco-towns: internet, (1) how many (a) unique visitors and (b) page impressions have been received by the ecotownsyoursay.direct.gov.uk website to date; [280652]

(2) what the cost to his Department of the ecotownsyoursay.direct.gov.uk website has been to date. [280722]

John Healey: The full cost to the Department of the website

www.direct.gov.uk/ecotownsyoursay

for the financial year 2008-09 will be published shortly after the Department's annual report on the Department's website.

Between 4 November 2008 when the

www.direct.gov.uk/ecotownsyoursay

website was set up and 31 March 2009 it had received 33,220 unique visitors and 164,727 page impressions. Annual statistics on visits will be made available.

Local Government: Political Activities

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what timetable has been set for changing the political restrictions on council group political assistants. [280018]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Any decision will be made as part of our continuing oversight of the framework for ensuring there is clarity about political roles in local government.

Non-domestic Rates

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what recent research his Department has (a) evaluated and (b) commissioned on the effect of a universal business rate on local economies. [280740]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: No such research has been commissioned or evaluated by Communities and Local Government.

Non-Domestic Rates

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps his Department takes in respect of the performance of local authorities with national non-domestic rates collection rates below the national average. [280016]

Ms Rosie Winterton: The collection of council tax and business rates is a matter for local authorities. The 2007-08 in-year collection rate for non-domestic rates in England was 98.8 per cent.

Olympic Games 2012

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many full-time equivalent members of staff in (a) his Department and (b) its associated public bodies are working on projects relating to the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games; how many of them are working on (i) project management, (ii) legacy planning, (iii) project oversight and (iv) financial oversight; and what plans he has for future staffing levels in each case. [279819]

Mr. Malik: For Communities and Local Government as at 1 July there will be approximately nine full-time equivalent staff working on different aspects of the Olympic programme within the central department. Within this figure around three full-time equivalents work on project and legacy management; three on project oversight; and one on financial oversight. The remainder, two full-time equivalents, work on administration and specialist risk management. There are no immediate plans for a change in the staffing levels but this will be kept under review.

Within the Homes and Communities Agency and the London Thames Gateway Development Corporation, work on London 2012 Olympic issues is carried out as they arise in the course of normal business.

Written Questions: Government Responses

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when he plans to answer question 280051, tabled on 10 June 2009, on the Home Owner Mortgage Protection Scheme. [281287]

John Healey: I have replied to the hon. Member's question.

HEALTH

Benzodiazepines

Jim Dobbin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency has evaluated on the safety of use of benzodiazepine tranquillisers in clinical practice; and whether it plans to (a) update product information for prescribers and patients and (b) take other steps in response to the findings of such research. [280202]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Medicines and Healthcare product Regulatory Agency (MHRA) continuously monitors the safety of all medicines in routine clinical practice in the United Kingdom, and where necessary, takes suitable action to safeguard public health.

The MHRA uses a variety of methods of collecting information on medicines safety in clinical use. Health care professionals and patients are encouraged to report suspected adverse drug reactions via the Yellow Card Scheme, including the occurrence of dependence and addiction. Pharmaceutical companies are legally obliged to report such cases to the MHRA. These data are carefully and regularly screened to identify possible new drug safety signals.

No new safety signals have been identified recently in relation to benzodiazepines which would require the further regulatory action individually or as a class. As new data become available the MHRA keeps the need for regulatory action under review.

The current product information for health care professionals and patients accurately reflects the information known about the risks associated with benzodiazepine use and includes extensive warnings. Patient information leaflets are now being user tested to ensure that the advice is clear and accessible for patients.

Carers: Telephone Services

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the hours of operation are of the Carers Direct Hotline. [280626]

Phil Hope: The Carers Direct helpline is available from 8 am to 9 pm, Monday to Friday, and 11 am to 4 pm at weekends.

Healthy Start Scheme

Jeff Ennis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the relationship is between his Department's Healthy Start scheme and its Change4Life initiative. [280136]

Gillian Merron: Healthy Start is a United Kingdom-wide statutory scheme providing a nutritional safety net and encouragement for breastfeeding and healthy eating to pregnant women and families with young children getting one of a range of state benefits or tax credits. The Department manages delivery of the scheme on behalf of all four UK Governments, ensuring that nutritional messages given through the scheme, and any branding used, are acceptable to all of them.

Change4Life is an England-based communications campaign that encourages all families in England to eat healthily and engage in regular physical activity, so reducing levels of obesity. We ensure that both Healthy Start and Change4Life are delivered in a coherent way so that the impact of nutritional messages common to both can be maximised.

Heart Diseases: Health Services

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 21 May 2009, *Official Report*, column 1596W, on heart disease (1) how many finished consultant episodes for congenital heart disease in those aged 16 years old there were in each primary care trust area in 2007-08; [279998]

(2) how many of those consultant episodes involved a consultant whose specialism was paediatric cardiology there were in each NHS hospital trust. [279999]

Ann Keen: The following tables and notes show how many finished consultant episodes for congenital heart disease in those aged 16-years-old there were in primary care trust areas (where data has been submitted) in 2007-08. They also show, for grown-ups with congenital heart disease, how many consultant episodes involved a consultant whose specialism was paediatric cardiology in each national health service hospital trust.

Count of finished consultant episodes for congenital heart disease for those aged 16 only, by primary care trust (PCT) of treatment, 2007-08. Activity in English NHS hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector*

PCT code	PCT name	Total episodes
5D7	Newcastle PCT	*
5J9	Darlington PCT	*
5K7	Camden PCT	31
5L1	Southampton City PCT	*
5LA	Kensington and Chelsea PCT	26
5LD	Lambeth PCT	*
5LE	Southwark PCT	7
5M1	South Birmingham PCT	*
5MX	Heart of Birmingham Teaching PCT	7
5N1	Leeds PCT	8
5N4	Sheffield PCT	*
5N6	Derbyshire County PCT	*
5N9	Lincolnshire Teaching PCT	*
5NL	Liverpool PCT	10
5NT	Manchester PCT	*
5NV	North Yorkshire and York PCT	*
5P2	Bedfordshire PCT	*
5P8	Hastings and Rother PCT	*
5PC	Leicester City PCT	10
5PW	North East Essex PCT	*
5QE	Oxfordshire PCT	*
5QJ	Bristol PCT	*
5QQ	Devon PCT	*
	Total	130

Count of finished consultant episodes for congenital heart disease for those aged 16 and over by paediatric cardiology specialty and hospital provider, 2007-08. Activity in English NHS Hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector*

Hospital provider code	Hospital provider name	Total episodes
RA7	United Bristol Healthcare NHS Trust	56
RBS	Royal Liverpool Children's NHS Trust	15
RHM	Southampton University Hospitals NHS Trust	*
RJ1	Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust	61
RP4	Great Ormond Street Hospital For Children NHS Trust	264
RQ3	Birmingham Children's Hospital NHS Foundation Trust	13
RR8	Leeds Teaching Hospitals NHS Trust	76
RT3	Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Trust	14
RTH	Oxford Radcliffe Hospitals NHS Trust	*
RWE	University Hospitals Of Leicester NHS Trust	84
	Total	593

Notes:

Consultant main specialty This defines the specialty under which the consultant responsible for the care of the patient at that time is registered. Care is needed when analysing Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) data by specialty, or by groups of specialties (such as "acute"). Trusts have different ways of managing specialties and attributing codes so it is better to analyse by specific diagnoses, operations or other patient or service information. *Ungrossed data* Figures have not been adjusted for shortfalls in data (i.e. the data are ungressed). Finished Consultant Episode (FCE) A finished consultant episode (FCE) is defined as a continuous period of admitted patient care under one consultant within one health care provider. FCEs are counted against the year in which they end. The figures do not represent the number of different patients, as a person may have more than one episode of care within the same stay in hospital or in different stays in the same year. *Primary diagnosis* The primary diagnosis is the first of up to 20 (14 from 2002-03 to 2006-07 and seven prior to 2002-03) diagnosis fields in the HES data set and provides the main reason why the patient was admitted to hospital. *The following ICD-10 codes have been used: Q20—Congenital malformations of cardiac chambers and connections Q21—Congenital malformations of cardiac septa Q22—Congenital malformations of pulmonary and tricuspid valves Q23—Congenital malformations of aortic and mitral valves Q24—Other congenital malformations of heart. *Data quality* HES are compiled from data sent by more than 300 NHS trusts and primary care trusts (PCTs) in England. Data is also received from a number of independent sector organisations for activity commissioned by the English NHS. The NHS Information Centre for health and social care liaises closely with these organisations to encourage submission of complete and valid data and seeks to minimise inaccuracies and the effect of missing and invalid data via HES processes. While this brings about improvement over time, some shortcomings remain. *Small numbers* To protect patient confidentiality, figures between 1 and 5 have been suppressed and replaced with "*" (an asterisk). Where it was possible to identify numbers from the total due to a single suppressed number in a row or column, an additional number (the next smallest) has been suppressed. *PCT/SHA data quality* PCT and SHA data was added to historic data years in the HES database using 2002-03 boundaries, as a one-off exercise in 2004. The quality of the data on PCT of treatment and SHA of treatment is poor in 1996-97, 1997-98 and 1998-99, with over a third of all finished episodes having missing values in these years. Data quality of PCT of general practitioner (GP) practice and SHA of GP practice in 1997-98 and 1998-99 is also poor, with a high proportion missing values where practices changed or ceased to exist. There is less change in completeness of the residence-based fields over time, where the majority of unknown values are due to missing postcodes on birth episodes. Users of time series analysis including these years need to be aware of these issues in their interpretation of the data. *Hospital providers* A provider code is a unique code that identifies an organisation acting as a health care provider (e.g. NHS trust or PCT). Hospital providers can also include Treatment Centres (TC). Treatment Centres (also known as Diagnostic Centres) provide elective (planned) surgery for a range of conditions, mainly for day surgery or short-term hospital stay patients. Some Treatment Centres are attached to hospital trusts and HES enables data for these to be separately identified from the rest of the health care provider's data. It does this by adding TC to the trust code; if there is more than one per Trust T1, T2, T3 etc. are suggested unless already in use by the trust. Activity performed in the remainder of the trust is identified by the health care provider code being followed by an 'X'. Hospital providers beginning with an 'N' indicates an independent sector health care provider. *Source:* Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), The NHS Information Centre for health and social care.

Hillsborough Stadium: Disclosure of Information

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress his Department has made in identifying files and documents it holds relating to the Hillsborough disaster that can be released. [279538]

Phil Hope: The Department, in partnership with other Departments, is currently developing a Government-wide approach in close liaison with local agencies in South Yorkshire and beyond.

Influenza

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has issued on the provision to local authorities of influenza pandemic preparedness plans produced by (a) primary care trusts, (b) hospital trusts, (c) health protection units and (d) local resilience forums; and what guidance has been issued on co-operation between health authorities and local authorities on (i) overview and (ii) scrutiny of such plans. [280039]

Gillian Merron: All departmental guidance, whether produced primarily for the health or social care sector, emphasises the need for multi-agency planning and response.

Local Resilience Forums (LRFs) and Influenza Planning Committees (IPCs) are multi-agency groups, with representatives from primary care trusts (PCTs), local authorities (human resources, emergency planners, adult and children's social care leads, coroners), acute hospital trusts, health protection units, independent and third sector providers, and the police. Multi-agency Local Strategic Partnerships (LSPs), chaired by a chief executive, may also approve final pandemic flu plans.

PCTs have lead responsibility for pandemic planning and response locally. It is the role of the PCT to consult with their partner local authority and to share plans. Some local authority social care departments have a joint pandemic flu plan with their local PCT.

The Department has produced guidance for PCTs stating the duty on national health service organisations to consult local overview and scrutiny committees if they are considering substantial variations in local health services, however, it is for individual local authorities to present such plans to relevant overview and scrutiny committees.

The Department has also produced comprehensive guidance for social care commissioners and providers and these also emphasise the importance of joint working. Copies of the guidance, which consists of nine modules (eight of which have been published) have been placed in the Library.

Intensive Care

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the likely effects of an influenza pandemic on demand for intensive care beds; and whether he has made an estimate of the number of such beds likely to be required for the purposes of treating influenza patients during such a pandemic. [278490]

Gillian Merron: The number of critical care beds required in a flu pandemic will depend upon a range of factors such as the clinical attack rate, the most 'at risk' population and the number of flu victims requiring intensive care. An estimate has, therefore, not been made.

In the "Managing Demand and Capacity in Health Care Organisations (Surge)" guidance, we have advised that, within their local flu contingency plans, acute hospitals will aim to double the number of critical care beds available (i.e. increase them by 100 per cent.), but that this will have an impact on the level of care that will be provided. Meeting the immediate demand could be achieved by reallocating staff from non-emergency areas of care in order to support the delivery of critical care to meet this increased demand, should it become necessary.

A copy of the current "Managing Demand and Capacity (Surge)" guidance has been placed in the Library.

Knee Replacements

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time for knee replacement operations was in (a) Halton, Cheshire and (b) England in each year since 2001. [279535]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Median time waited (days) for knee replacement operations¹ for Halton and St. Helens Primary Care Trust (PCT) of residence (2006-07, 2007-08), Halton PCT (2001-02 to 2005-06) and England are shown in the following table.

¹ The main procedure is the first recorded procedure or intervention in the Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) data set and is usually the most resource intensive procedure or intervention performed during the episode.

		<i>Median time waited (days)</i>	
	<i>Primary Care Trust of residence</i>	<i>Regional</i>	<i>National (England)</i>
2007-08	Halton and St Helens Primary Care Trust	96	114
2006-07	Halton and St Helens Primary Care Trust	148	156
2005-06	Halton Primary Care Trust	193	169
2004-05	Halton Primary Care Trust	252	203
2003-04	Halton Primary Care Trust	262	253
2002-03	Halton Primary Care Trust	309	281
2001-02	Halton Primary Care Trust	380	277

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), The NHS Information Centre for health and social care

Learning Disability: Employment Services

Angela Watkinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department provides support to organisations which offer assistance to individuals with learning difficulties in securing jobs. [280415]

Phil Hope: "Valuing Employment Now—Real Jobs for People with Learning Disabilities"—a new cross-government strategy to radically improve employment opportunities for people with learning disabilities in England, will be published very shortly.

Mental Health Services

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to assess the adequacy of provision of mental health services for people of each (a) age group, (b) sex and (c) race. [280902]

Phil Hope: The responsibility for service provision by the national health service, including mental health care, and for ensuring that this meets the healthcare needs of local communities rests with each primary care trust. To support them in this, we are running through the national mental health development units programmes of work promoting race equality, age equality and gender equality.

The National Service Framework for mental health (NSF) draws to an end in 2009. The Government and key stakeholders are seeking a new, equally powerful approach to help strategic health authorities deliver their regional visions and to build on the achievements of the NSF through the New Horizons programme.

We will publish an equalities impact assessment of the New Horizons consultation document when this is published later this summer. The equality impact assessment is intended to ensure that New Horizons address the inequalities that different groups in society experience, both in accessing services and in levels of mental health, and will inform the national direction of travel from 2010.

NHS

Mr. Lansley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS organisations he has visited in the last three months. [278494]

Phil Hope: Visits to national health service organisations by the Secretary of State for Health between 1 March 2009 to 31 May 2009 are shown in the following table.

<i>NHS organisation</i>	<i>Date</i>
<i>March</i>	
Queen Victoria Hospital, London	3 March 2009
Kings College Hospital, London	10 March 2009
Merlyn Vaz Health and Social Care Centre, Leicester	13 March 2009
Hugglescote Surgery, Leicestershire	13 March 2009
Stafford Hospital, Stafford	26 March 2009
<i>April</i>	
Charing Cross Hospital, London	1 April 2009
Ashton Primary Care Centre, Ashton under Lyne	8 April 2009
Chorley and Ribble Hospital, Chorley	8 April 2009
Hillingdon Hospital, London	13 April 2009
Washington Primary Care Centre, Sunderland	23 April 2009
<i>May</i>	
Royal Brompton Hospital, London	6 May 2009
Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital, London	28 May 2009
Scarborough Hospital, Scarborough	29 May 2009

Palliative Care

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department has taken to implement the National service framework for long-term conditions; and what assessment he has made of his Department's effectiveness in doing so. [280274]

Ann Keen: Responsibility for implementing the national service framework (NSF) for long-term conditions rests with local health and social care organisations. The NSF has a 10-year implementation phase, with the expectation that health and social care organisations plan and deliver service improvements in line with local priorities and needs over the period of implementation.

"The National Service Framework for Long Term Conditions: National Support for Local Implementation", published in May 2008, provides an overview of the resources, tools and guidance provided by the Department and others to support local implementation of the NSF. A copy has been placed in the Library.

We have not assessed the Department's effectiveness in supporting local organisations to implement the NSF.

Strokes: Rural Areas

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how his Department plans to implement the national stroke strategy in rural areas; and how much funding has been provided to that end in 2009-10. [280160]

Ann Keen: Primary care trusts receive funding to commission services according to local needs and priorities. Extra funding has gone to national health service primary care trusts to implement, among other things, the stroke strategy and additional central funding over three years is available to help accelerate improvements in services, including those in rural areas. There are 28 stroke networks in England within the Stroke Improvement Programme, which are helping to develop innovative solutions to local problems, including issues of rurality.

Commissioners and service providers locally will need to ensure they take into account the challenges posed by rural locations—for example in ensuring that patients have access to time critical services such as thrombolysis.

Swine Flu

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the reasons are for the time taken to make available the national pandemic influenza service; on what date he expects the service to be available; and what contingency arrangements have been made for circumstances in which swine influenza spreads at a rate more rapid than that assumed for the purposes of his Department's existing arrangements for the distribution of anti-viral treatments. [281136]

Gillian Merron: With an innovative system such as the full National Pandemic Flu Service it was essential that there was rigorous scrutiny to ensure that the system would both work and offer value for money to the United Kingdom taxpayer. This inevitably led to some delays in signing the contract with British Telecom. The contract for the development of the system was signed with BT in December 2008.

The contingency arrangements, should the current outbreak spread at a more rapid rate, are that an interim National Pandemic Flu Service has been put in place to supplement the assessment and authorisation processes. The interim service has been tested and consists of a phone service that the public can access through a single 0800 number, and a supporting website application. That will mean that people can have their symptoms assessed either over the phone or online. If it is established that they have developed swine flu, they will be issued with an authorisation number that they will then be able to use to access antivirals in a timely and appropriate way.

The full National Pandemic Flu Service will be ready in the autumn, having been fully tested.

Tuberculosis: Vaccination

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of immunisation against tuberculosis in England. [279974]

Gillian Merron: Immunisation against tuberculosis (TB) is provided by the Bacillus Calmette-Guerin (BCG) vaccination. The BCG vaccine has been shown to be 70 to 80 per cent. effective against the most severe forms of the disease, such as TB meningitis in children. It is less effective in preventing respiratory disease, which is the more common form in adults. There are few data on the effectiveness of BCG vaccination when it is given to persons aged 16 or over.

The Joint Committee on Vaccination and Immunisation reviewed BCG vaccination policy in 2007 and advised that its advice for a targeted at-risk vaccination programme remained appropriate.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Elderly and Vulnerable Witnesses

15. **John Robertson:** To ask the Solicitor-General what steps the Crown Prosecution Service takes to assist elderly and vulnerable people to give evidence as witnesses for the prosecution. [280586]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service works closely with other criminal justice partners to provide individually tailored support for all witnesses. The Crown Prosecution Service published its policy on Prosecuting Crimes Against Older People in July 2008. Support for elderly and vulnerable witnesses can include specialist advocacy services and a range of special measures; for example the appointment of intermediaries, or the giving of evidence by live-link from the witness' own home.

Discontinued Prosecutions

16. **Simon Hughes:** To ask the Solicitor-General how many prosecutions have been discontinued on the advice of the Crown Prosecution Service on the first day set down for the trial in each of the last three years for which figures are available. [280587]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service maintains records of attrition at various points in the criminal process in both the magistrates court and the Crown court. These records do not include a discrete count of the number of cases discontinued on the first day set down for trial. It is therefore not possible to accurately answer the hon. Member's question. However, it is clear that there have been significant improvements in the level of attrition over the period in question.

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental Public Consultation

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what consultations have been carried out by the Cabinet Office since July 2007; and at what cost. [279341]

Angela E. Smith: Details of consultations carried out by Cabinet Office during the 2007-08 financial year are available in the Cabinet Office's Annual Report and Accounts 2007-08 which is available in the Libraries of the House for the reference of Members.

Details of consultations carried out during 2008-09 will be published in the forthcoming Annual Report and Accounts for 2008-09 which it is planned will be published prior to the summer recess 2009.

Costs of the consultations would be available only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Recruitment

Gregory Barker: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office pursuant to the Answer of 6 May 2009, *Official Report*, column 170W, on departmental recruitment, what progress has been made on consideration of whether a revised version of the European Fast Stream should be reintroduced for 2010. [280327]

Angela E. Smith: Discussions are continuing between interested Government Departments as to whether a revised version of the European Fast Stream should be reintroduced for 2010 and what form it would take.

Malnutrition

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many people died of each malnutrition condition, identified by its ICD-10 code, in each strategic health authority area in each year since 1997. [279247]

Angela E. Smith: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the Authority to reply.

Letter from Karen Dunnell, dated June 2009:

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many people died of each malnutrition condition, identified by its ICD-10 code, in each strategic health authority area in each year since 1997-98. (279247)

The attached tables provide the numbers of deaths where (a) malnutrition was the underlying cause of death (Table 1), (b) malnutrition was mentioned anywhere on the death certificate (Table 2), and (c) effects of hunger was mentioned anywhere on

the death certificate (Table 3), for persons resident in each strategic health authority in England, for the years 1997 to 2008 (the latest year available).

'Effects of hunger', as the effects of malnutrition may be reported on a death certificate, is never recorded as the underlying cause of death, because it is defined by the International Classification of Diseases as a secondary cause only.

Figures in Table 2 include those reported in Table 1. Tables 2 and 3 include deaths where malnutrition and effects of hunger respectively were a complication of a different underlying cause (for example cancer of the stomach).

Table 1: Deaths where malnutrition was the underlying cause of death¹, strategic health authorities in England², 1997 to 2008^{3,4}

Strategic health authority	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Deaths (persons)	
											2007	2008
North East	3	3	2	2	5	6	6	1	3	5	7	1
North West	5	5	3	6	9	9	9	12	6	4	8	9
Yorkshire and the Humber	10	1	7	6	3	4	6	6	3	5	9	5
East Midlands	6	14	8	8	4	5	8	2	1	7	8	4
West Midlands	11	9	7	9	9	10	11	3	7	8	9	9
East of England	5	4	7	2	7	4	3	5	11	8	7	10
London	6	5	6	6	7	7	8	5	5	6	9	11
South East Coast	2	5	4	5	3	4	1	1	4	4	6	3
South Central	5	2	4	4	1	4	3	6	11	6	4	5
Southwest	10	18	8	10	4	8	4	11	7	6	6	4

¹ Cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) codes 260-269 for the years 1997 to 2000, and the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes E40-E46 for 2001 onwards. The introduction of ICD-10 in 2001 means that the numbers of deaths from each cause before 2001 are not completely comparable with later years.

² Based on boundaries as of 2009.

³ Figures are for deaths registered in each calendar year.

⁴ Figures for deaths registered in 2008 are provisional.

Table 2: Deaths where malnutrition was mentioned on the death certificate¹, strategic health authorities in England², 1997 to 2008^{3,4}

Strategic health authority	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Deaths (persons)	
											2007	2008
North East	23	17	20	23	22	25	24	14	19	28	19	20
North West	35	37	31	30	28	33	33	38	39	32	43	43
Yorkshire and the Humber	33	26	31	26	21	22	31	19	15	25	29	34
East Midlands	16	31	29	33	16	21	23	22	28	30	28	18
West Midlands	62	40	55	46	35	50	40	44	24	37	45	47
East of England	25	28	38	25	30	33	19	23	36	30	30	41
London	36	38	42	31	23	22	27	16	16	25	29	36
South East Coast	18	18	22	25	17	18	15	21	15	22	23	23
South Central	21	16	20	16	8	21	17	19	26	36	25	25
Southwest	51	54	36	46	26	25	25	36	31	36	29	36

¹ Cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) codes 260-269 for the years 1997 to 2000, and the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes E40-E46 for 2001 onwards. Deaths were included where any of these codes were mentioned anywhere on the death certificate. The introduction of ICD-10 in 2001 means that the numbers of deaths from each cause before 2001 are not completely comparable with later years.

² Based on boundaries as of 2009.

³ Figures are for deaths registered in each calendar year.

⁴ Figures for deaths registered in 2008 are provisional.

Table 3: Deaths where effects of hunger was mentioned on the death certificate¹, strategic health authorities in England², 1997 to 2008^{3,4}

Strategic health authority	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Deaths (persons)	
											2007	2008
North East	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0
Northwest	2	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	1
Yorkshire and the Humber	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	0	0
East Midlands	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	2
West Midlands	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	1	4	2	1	0
East of England	1	0	0	1	2	1	0	1	0	1	1	1
London	0	0	1	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
South East Coast	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
South Central	1	1	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	2
South West	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	2

¹ Cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) code E904.1 for the years 1997 to 2000, and the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) code T73.0 for 2001 onwards. Deaths were included where these codes were mentioned anywhere on the death certificate. The introduction of ICD-10 in 2001 means that the numbers of deaths from each cause before 2001 are not completely comparable with later years.

² Based on boundaries as of 2009.

³ Figures are for deaths registered in each calendar year.

⁴ Figures for deaths registered in 2008 are provisional.

Suicide: Easington

John Cummings: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many suicides there were in Easington constituency in (a) 2005, (b) 2006, (c) 2007 and (d) 2008. [279853]

Angela E. Smith: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the Authority to reply.

Letter from Karen Dunnell, dated June 2009

As National Statistician, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many suicides took place in Easington constituency in (a) 2005, (b) 2006, (c) 2007 and (d) 2008. (279853)

The table attached provides the number of deaths in Easington parliamentary constituency where suicide was the underlying cause of death, for the years 2005 to 2008.

Table 1: Number of deaths where suicide was the underlying cause of death, Easington parliamentary constituency, 2005-08^{1,2,3,4,5}

	Deaths
2005	6
2006	4
2007	10
2008	8

¹ Suicide was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes X60-X84 and Y10-Y34, excluding Y33.9 (where the coroner's verdict was pending).

² Suicide and undetermined intent deaths have not been included for children under the age of 15 years.

³ Based on boundaries as of 2009.

⁴ Figures are for deaths registered in each calendar year.

⁵ Figures for deaths registered in 2008 are provisional.

JUSTICE

30 Year Rule Review

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what his response is to the recommendation of the Review of the Thirty Year Rule that reducing the period should be phased through the release of two years' worth of material each year. [279877]

Mr. Straw: The Prime Minister announced to the House on 10 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 797, that the Government will reduce the 30 year rule to 20 years.

The Ministry of Justice will respond to the detailed recommendations of the Dacre Review by the summer.

Administration of Justice: ICT

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether he plans to introduce an integrated IT system to link-up the probation, police, courts and prisons services. [280186]

Claire Ward: We have already put in place a technology infrastructure for these core criminal justice agencies and established a technology capability to help integrate the flow of information between these agencies through a secure, central exchange.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what plans he has to improve internal communications systems within the criminal justice system. [280187]

Claire Ward: We have done much to improve communications within the criminal justice system. Each of the core criminal justice agencies now has a technology infrastructure and we have put in place the capability for agencies to exchange information securely between each other and with those outside the system.

Of course, we need to continue to improve information sharing, and we are, for example, this year putting in place the ability for the police to gain access to the outcome of court hearings automatically.

Bail: Crimes of Violence

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many and what proportion of offenders released on bail in 2007 were (a) originally charged with and (b) subsequently sentenced for (i) offences of violence against the person and (ii) sexual offences; [279226]

(2) how many and what proportion of (a) defendants released on bail and (b) defendants charged with violence against the person or sexual offences and then released on bail (i) failed to attend sentencing hearings and (ii) broke their bail conditions in other ways in 2007. [279229]

Mr. Straw: The annual publication 'Criminal Statistics' contains estimates of the number of defendants in certain offence groups who were bailed by the courts. The estimated number of defendants who were granted bail at magistrates courts in England and Wales during 2007 in connection with 'Violence against the Person' and 'Sexual offences' was 43,200 and 4,800 respectively, corresponding to 9 and 1 per cent. of the total number of persons who were bailed at magistrates courts for all offences (Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, table 4.10). These figures include those also held in custody for some but not the whole period of the proceedings. The number of offenders subsequently sentenced for these offence types are not available.

The estimated number of defendants who were granted bail at all magistrates courts and who subsequently failed to appear as directed to any hearing, not just a sentencing hearing, in England and Wales during 2007 was 3,400 for 'Violence against the person' (8 per cent. of the number of persons bailed for this offence type). For 'Sexual offences' the figure was 300 (6 per cent. of the number of persons bailed for this offence type). For all offences, the figure was 51,500 (11 per cent. of persons bailed) (Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, table 4.10). These figures include those also held in custody for some but not the whole period of the proceedings. These remands data are not comparable with other court proceedings data.

The Ministry of Justice holds no data on how many defendants breached their bail conditions. Breach of bail conditions is not an offence and therefore carries no penalty. Any person who breaches a bail condition is liable to immediate arrest and it is the responsibility of the court to re-consider bail as a whole and decide whether to grant bail again on the same or different conditions or to remand into custody.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many defendants were charged with offences of violence against the person or sexual offences in 2007;

how many and what proportion of those so charged were (a) granted and (b) refused bail; and what condition of schedule 1 of the Bail Act 1976 was cited as the reason not to grant bail in each case; [279230]

(2) how many offenders were (a) prosecuted for and (b) convicted of (i) offences of violence against the person and (ii) sexual offences in 2007. [279231]

Mr. Straw: The number of defendants who were proceeded against at magistrates courts and found guilty at all courts for ‘violence against the person’ and ‘sexual offences’, England and Wales, for the year 2007 (latest available) can be viewed in the table.

Charging data are not held by the Ministry of Justice, so proceeded against data have been provided in lieu.

These data are on the principal offence basis. The figures given in the table on court proceedings relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offence for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences, the offence selected is the one for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

Court proceedings data for 2008 will be available in the autumn of 2009.

The annual publication “Criminal Statistics” contains estimates of the number of defendants in certain offence groups who were bailed by the courts. The estimated number of defendants who were granted bail at all magistrates courts in England and Wales during 2007 in connection with offences in the “Violence against the person and Sexual offences” groups was 43,200 and 4,800 respectively (Criminal Statistics, England and Wales, table 4.10). These figures include those also held in custody for some but not the whole period of the proceedings. Data for 2008 will be available later this year.

These data are not comparable with the court proceedings data presented elsewhere in this answer, therefore they cannot be used to compute the proportions of defendants granted or refused bail.

The court may withhold bail if it is satisfied that there are substantial grounds for believing that, if released on bail, the defendant would abscond, commit an offence, interfere with witnesses or otherwise obstruct the course of justice. In making its decision the court must consider all the circumstances of the case as appear to be relevant. This will include the nature and seriousness of the alleged offence and the weight of the evidence against the defendant, the defendant’s character, antecedents, associations, community ties and past record of complying with bail, as well as any other factors which appear relevant to the court. Data on bail collected centrally by my Department do not include information on the reasons given for refusing bail. This information would have to be retrieved by inspecting individual court records which could be achieved only at disproportionate cost.

Number of defendants who were proceeded against at magistrates courts and found guilty at all courts for sexual and violence against the person offences in England and Wales, 2007^{1, 2, 3}

	Proceeded against		Found guilty	
	Sexual offences ^{4, 5}	Violence against the person ⁶	Sexual offences ^{4, 5}	Violence against the person ⁶
2007	8,634	61,056	5,075	41,951

¹ The figures given in the table on court proceedings relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

² Sexual and violence against the person offences include ‘indictable only’ and ‘triable-either way offences’. ‘Indictable only’ are the most serious breaches of the criminal law and must be dealt with at the Crown Court. Triable-either-way offences may be tried at either the Crown Court or at magistrates courts. The offence groups do not include summary offences.

³ Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts, and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

⁴ The sexual offences category includes offences under the Sexual Offences Act 2003, which came into force on 1 May 2004. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 represented a major overhaul of the law and so comparisons with old offending regimes can be misleading.

⁵ The sexual offences category includes the following offences:

Buggery
Sexual assault on a male
Indecency between males
Rape of a female
Rape of a male
Sexual assault on a female
Sexual activity with child under 13
Sexual activity with child under 16
Familial sexual offences (incest)
Exploitation of prostitution
Abduction
Bigamy
Soliciting of women by men
Sexual activity etc. with a person with a mental disorder
Abuse of children through prostitution and pornography
Trafficking for sexual exploitation
Abuse of trust—sexual offences
Gross indecency with children
Miscellaneous sexual offences

⁶ The Violence against the person category includes the following offence classes:

Murder
Attempted murder
Threat or conspiracy to murder
Manslaughter
Infanticide
Child destruction
Causing death by dangerous driving
Manslaughter due to diminished responsibility
Causing death by careless driving when under the influence of drink or drugs
Causing death of a child or vulnerable person
Wounding or other act endangering life
Endangering railway passenger
Endangering life at sea
Malicious wounding etc.
Cruelty to or neglect of children
Abandoning child aged under two years
Child abduction
Procuring illegal abortion
Concealment of birth
Causing death by aggravated vehicle taking

Source:

OCJR—E and A: Office for criminal justice reform—evidence and analysis unit, Ministry of Justice

Crimes of Violence: Essex

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people in (a) Essex and (b) Castle Point convicted of serious violent offences and who served sentences of under two years duration re-offended in each of the last five years. [279282]

Maria Eagle: The requested information is not available. The data sets compiled by the Ministry of Justice to analyse reoffending by adults and juveniles do not enable reoffending rates to be calculated at this level of detail. Although data have recently been published on reoffending at a local level these data cannot be broken down by sentence length or offence type and so cannot be used to answer this question.

The available data on local reoffending can be found at

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/docs/local-adult-reoffending-2008-ii.pdf>

Crimes of Violence: Sentencing

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the average length was of sentences (a) handed down to and (b) served by those who were convicted of (i) violence against the person, (ii) sexual offences and (iii) robbery in 2007. [279225]

Mr. Straw: The following table shows the average length of a determinate immediate custodial sentence for 2007.

<i>Average length of immediate custodial sentence¹ in months for 2007</i>	
	<i>Average length</i>
Violence against the person	16.9
Sexual offences	42.9
Robbery	31.3

¹ Excludes life and indeterminate sentences.

Notes:

1. These figures have been drawn from administrative data systems.
2. Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system.

Source:

OMS Analytical Services, Ministry of Justice

Number and percentage of offenders sentenced for violence against the person or sexual offences receiving custodial and non-custodial sentences, 2006-07

	<i>Violence against the person</i>				<i>Sexual offences</i>			
	<i>2006</i>		<i>2007</i>		<i>2006</i>		<i>2007</i>	
	<i>Offenders</i>	<i>Percentage of offenders</i>	<i>Offenders</i>	<i>Percentage of offenders</i>	<i>Offenders</i>	<i>Percentage of offenders</i>	<i>Offenders</i>	<i>Percentage of offenders</i>
<i>Custodial sentences</i>								
Immediate custody	12,354	29.5	12,535	29.8	2,808	56.9	2,810	55.6
Suspended sentence	5,569	13.3	7,167	17.0	296	6.0	439	8.7
<i>Non-custodial sentences</i>								
Non-custodial sentences	23,982	57.2	22,377	53.2	1,828	37.1	1,805	35.7
Total number sentenced	41,905	100	42,079	100	4,932	100	5,054	100

Note:

These figures have been drawn from administrative data systems. Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system

Source:

OMS Analytical Services, Ministry of Justice

These figures are also available in the answer I gave the hon. and learned Member on 9 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 792W, and from table 1.2 of Sentencing Statistics 2007 found at the following link:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/sentencingannual.htm>

These figures can all be found in table 2.12 of Sentencing Statistics 2007 available at the following link:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/sentencingannual.htm>

It is not possible to provide data on time served for those prisoners convicted in 2007 because some will still be serving their sentences. If the offence was committed on or after 4 April 2005, release arrangements are covered by the Criminal Justice Act (CJA) 2003, where either a standard determinate sentence, Extended Sentence for Public Protection or Imprisonment for Public Protection would apply. The Criminal Justice and Immigration Act 2008 amended certain sentences from the CJA 2003. Life sentence prisoners are released under the terms of the Crime (Sentences) Act 1997.

Average time served in prison for 2007 could be found in table 9.1 of Offender Management Caseload Statistics 2007 available at the following link:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/prisonandprobation.htm>

This data is based on the principal offence. Where an offender has been sentenced for more than one offence it is the one for which the heaviest sentence was imposed, where the same sentence has been imposed for more than one offence the principal offence is the one for which the statutory maximum is most severe.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many and what proportion of offenders sentenced for offences of violence against the person or sexual offences received (a) a custodial sentence and (b) a non-custodial sentence or other disposal in each of the last two years. [279232]

Mr. Straw: The requested information is shown as follows:

These data are based on the principal offence. Where an offender has been sentenced for more than one offence it is the one for which the heaviest sentence was imposed, where the same sentence has been imposed for more than one offence the principal offence is the one for which the statutory maximum is most severe.

Departmental Press

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what (a) newspapers and (b) periodicals are delivered to the private office of each Minister in his Department; and at what cost in the latest period for which figures are available. [279416]

Mr. Straw: Details of newspapers and periodicals delivered to the private office of each of the Ministers in the Ministry of Justice (MoJ) in April 2009 (the latest month for which figures are available) are contained in the following table. The total cost for the provision of these publications for April 2009 was £1,642.

In May 2009 MoJ private offices, undertook a review of these costs and have made significant cuts in the number of daily newspapers ordered. It is estimated that this will result in a saving of approximately £500 per month.

Newspapers and periodicals ordered by MoJ ministerial offices for April 2009

Jack Straw's office

Newspapers

Financial Times

Times

Telegraph

Guardian

Independent

Daily Express

Daily Mail

Daily Mirror

The Sun

Daily Star

Evening Standard

Western Mail

Record

Periodicals

Economist

New Statesman

Spectator

Tribune

Prospect

Private Eye

David Hanson's office

Newspapers

Times

Guardian

Telegraph

Independent

Daily Mail

Daily Express

The Sun

Daily Mirror

The Morning Star

Evening Standard

Periodicals

Tribune

Private Eye

Spectator

Bridget Prentice's office

Newspapers

Times

Financial Times

Guardian

Telegraph

Independent

Daily Mail

Daily Express

The Sun

Daily Mirror

Periodicals

The Lawyer

Private Eye

Maria Eagle's office

Newspapers

Financial Times

Times

Guardian

Independent

The Mail

The Sun

Daily Mirror

Evening Standard

Periodicals

New Statesman

The Week

The Lawyer

The Spectator

Lord Bach's office

Newspapers

Times

The Guardian

Daily Telegraph

Independent

Daily Mail

The Sun

Daily Mirror

Evening Standard

Periodicals

Economist

Private Eye

Solicitors Journal

Shahid Malik's office

Newspapers

Times

Guardian

Mail

Periodicals

New Statesman

The Week

The Lawyer

The Spectator

Michael Will's office

Newspapers

Times

Guardian

Telegraph

Independent

Mail

Evening Standard

Periodicals

Nil.

Total cost for April 2009: £1,642.

Departmental Training

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what training courses have been attended by special advisers in his Department in the last 12 months; and at what cost. [279395]

Mr. Straw: None.

Domestic Violence

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice with reference to the answer to the hon. Member for Harborough of 6 October 2008, *Official Report*, columns 172-3W, on domestic violence, what the average period of time before offenders convicted of offences of domestic violence or abuse commenced integrated domestic abuse programmes was in each probation area in England and Wales in 2008-09. [279251]

Mr. Straw: The following table shows the average number of weeks that elapse from the date of sentence for offences of violence or abuse to the commencement of domestic violence programme requirements in probation areas for 2008-09.

These figures have been drawn from administrative data systems. Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system.

Average number of weeks that elapse from the date of sentence to the commencement of domestic abuse programme requirement in probation areas 2008-09

Probation area	Weeks
Avon and Somerset	22.9
Bedfordshire	16.4
Cambridgeshire	21.5
County Durham	19.0
Cumbria	25.0
Derbyshire	22.0
Devon and Cornwall	14.7
Dorset	17.6
Dyfed-Powys	19.4
Essex	25.4
Gloucestershire	14.1
Gwent	22.3
Hampshire	15.6
Hertfordshire	11.6
Humberside	17.5
Kent	16.6
Lancashire	15.7
Leicestershire and Rutland	19.8
Lincolnshire	16.3
London	8.4
Merseyside	15.3
Norfolk	18.0
North Wales	11.2
Northamptonshire	20.8
Northumbria	15.4
North Yorkshire	6.4
Nottinghamshire	12.6
South Wales	2.1
South Yorkshire	11.3
Staffordshire	15.6
Suffolk	13.5

Average number of weeks that elapse from the date of sentence to the commencement of domestic abuse programme requirement in probation areas 2008-09

Probation area	Weeks
Surrey	20.6
Sussex	21.0
Teesside	28.4
Thames Valley	2.3
Warwickshire	1.6
West Mercia	20.4
West Midlands	13.4
West Yorkshire	21.1
Wiltshire	20.7

Note:

Data are not available for Cheshire or Greater Manchester probation areas. Figures presented do not account for pre programme work undertaken with Offender Manager.

Freedom of Information

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice when he plans to publish his response to the consultation on extending the scope of the Freedom of Information Act 2000. [279879]

Mr. Straw: In my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister's statement on Constitutional Renewal on 10 June 2009, *Official Report*, columns 797-99, he emphasised the Government's plans to look at broadening the application of the Freedom of Information Act.

The Government are considering carefully the responses to the public consultation on extending the Act through a Section 5 order. This could include within the scope of the Act bodies performing functions of a public nature and contractors providing services that are functions of public authorities. The Government will publish their response to the consultation shortly.

Hillsborough Stadium: Disclosure of Information

Derek Twigg: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what progress his Department has made in identifying files and documents it holds relating to the Hillsborough disaster that can be released. [279537]

Mr. Wills: A number of files have been identified containing information relevant to the Hillsborough disaster. A review of the information is under way.

Intellectual Property: Crime

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many (a) prosecutions and (b) convictions for intellectual property crime there were under the (a) Copyright Designs and Patents Act 1988 and (b) Trademarks Act 1994 in 2007. [279248]

Mr. Straw: Information showing the number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts and found guilty at all court for offences under the 1988 Copyright, Designs and Patents Act and the 1994 Trademarks Act, in England and Wales in 2007 is shown in the following table.

Number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts and found guilty at all courts for offences under the 1988 Copyright, Designs and Patents Act¹ and the 1994 Trademarks Act², England and Wales, 2007^{3,4}

Act	Proceeded against	Found guilty
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988	514	365
Trademarks Act 1994	1,071	888

¹ Includes the following:

(a) Makes, imports or distributes illicit recordings. Makes for sale or hire, imports possesses or distributes articles which infringes copyright. (Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988, Sec. 198 1a, b, d.iii. & Sec. 107 1a, b, d.iv and E).
(b) Triable either way offences except sections included in (1)(a).

(c) Person infringes copyright in a work by communicating the work to the public. (Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 S.107 2A and 4A as added by Copyright and Related Rights Regulations Reg 26 (1))

(d) Person who infringes a performer's making available right in the course of business/otherwise (Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988 S.198 2A and 5A as added by Copyright and Related Rights Regulations Reg 26 (3))

(e) Summary offences.

² Includes the following:

(a) Unauthorised use of Trade Mark etc in relations to goods. Falsification of register etc. (Trade Marks Act, 1994 Sec 92 & 94).

(b) Unauthorised use of royal arms etc. Unregistered persons describing themselves as registered Trade Mark Agents. Contravention of the rules prescribing the conditions for person entitled to be registered Trade Mark Agents. Falsely representing trade mark as registered. (Trade Marks Act, 1994, Sees 84, 85, 95).

³ The statistics relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences the principal offence is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

⁴ Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

Source:

Evidence and analysis unit—Office for Criminal Justice Reform

Land Registry: Complaints

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many complaints about the way in which a decision relating to land registration had been reached were (a) received and (b) completed by the Office of the Independent Complaints Reviewer in each of the last three years. [279237]

Mr. Straw: The figures are set out in the following table. They show the number of complaints received and not investigated (there are two main reasons why a complaint may not be investigated; if the complaint has not gone through the Land Registry complaints procedure first; or the complaint is not lodged within six months of the final outcome with Land Registry), the number of complaints investigated, and the total number of separate allegations considered within the 'complaints investigated' figure. The 2008-09 report has not been finalised.

	Complaints received not investigated	Complaints investigated	Number of allegations investigated
2005-06	n/a	16	75

Prison	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Acklington	3.2	3.4	3.7	3.6	3.8	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.4	3.7
Ashwell	4.2	3.5	4.8	4.9	4.8	5.1	5.0	5.2	4.9	4.9
Blantyre House	3.2	3.2	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Blundeston	—	—	—	3.0	3.1	3.1	3.0	3.1	3.0	3.0
Brockhill	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2.2	2.2	—
Buckley Hall	—	3.4	1.1	—	—	—	3.4	3.5	3.5	3.5
Bullwood Hall	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2.1	2.5	2.8

	Complaints received not investigated	Complaints investigated	Number of allegations investigated
2006-07	38	24	121
2007-08	30	22	98

n/a = Not available.

Members: Correspondence

Sir Michael Spicer: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice when the Parliamentary Under-Secretary for Courts plans to reply to the email from the hon. Member for West Worcestershire of 28 April 2009 on the Probation Service. [281134]

Maria Eagle: I replied to the hon. Member on 17 June. I apologise for the delay.

National Offender Management Service

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the budget of each director of offender management in England and Wales is for 2009-10. [280181]

Maria Eagle: The operating budget for each Director of Offender Management region in England and Wales is:

	£
East Midlands	312,564,672
East	263,521,449
London	317,304,202
North East	161,503,899
North West	427,874,764
South East	453,671,901
South West	215,477,689
Wales	101,191,129
West Midlands	284,794,603
Yorkshire	287,324,035

Prison Service: Manpower

Mr. Garnier: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the ratio of prisoners to prison officers at each category C prison in England and Wales was on 1 April in each of the last 10 years. [272735]

Maria Eagle: Information on the prisoner to officer ratio at each category C prison since 2000 is contained in the following table. Information is provided only for establishments which were category C in each particular year. Establishments are allocated to a category based on the predominant accommodation. Establishments that also hold young offenders would be expected to have lower prisoner to officer ratios.

<i>Prison</i>	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
Camp Hill	3.0	3.4	3.6	3.5	3.8	3.6	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.7
Canterbury	—	—	—	—	2.8	2.9	2.7	2.7	2.5	2.7
Channings Wood	3.7	3.8	3.9	3.7	3.8	3.8	3.9	3.9	4.0	3.9
Coldingley	3.1	3.8	4.2	4.1	4.1	4.3	4.2	4.1	4.1	3.7
Dartmoor	—	—	2.9	3.2	3.6	3.8	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.7
Downview	2.7	2.7	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Edmunds Hill	—	—	—	—	—	1.3	2.8	2.8	2.9	3.0
Erlestoke	3.0	3.1	3.6	3.9	3.6	3.7	3.7	3.5	3.7	3.7
Everthorpe	3.4	3.5	3.2	3.2	3.7	3.5	4.0	3.7	3.8	4.0
Featherstone	3.8	4.0	4.3	4.4	4.3	4.2	4.1	4.4	4.3	4.4
Guys Marsh ¹	—	4.0	3.8	4.1	4.0	4.1	4.2	4.3	4.1	4.2
Haslar	—	2.6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Haverigg	2.8	3.8	4.3	4.2	4.4	4.0	4.2	4.2	4.4	4.2
Highpoint	3.2	3.4	5.9	4.0	4.4	4.3	4.1	4.2	4.1	4.3
Kennet	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2.3	2.4
Kirklevington Grange	4.7	4.6	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
Lancaster	2.0	2.1	2.7	3.0	2.8	2.8	2.7	2.6	2.6	2.8
Lindholme	3.2	3.0	4.0	3.6	3.4	3.6	3.8	4.2	4.5	4.6
Littlehey	3.8	4.0	4.2	4.6	4.5	4.4	4.3	4.4	4.4	4.4
Maidstone	—	—	—	—	3.7	3.6	3.8	3.6	3.2	2.4
Moorland ¹	2.9	2.9	2.8	2.9	2.3	2.3	2.4	2.4	2.3	2.3
Onley ¹	—	—	—	—	—	2.6	3.1	3.3	3.4	3.1
Ranby	3.6	3.6	3.4	3.4	3.1	3.5	3.6	4.1	3.8	3.9
Risley	2.6	2.8	3.0	3.7	3.7	3.8	3.6	3.8	3.7	3.8
Shepton Mallet	2.7	1.7	3.0	2.8	3.0	2.8	2.9	3.1	2.8	2.9
Stafford	3.2	3.3	3.5	3.9	3.7	4.1	4.2	4.1	3.8	4.0
Stocken	4.1	4.1	4.2	3.9	4.1	4.0	4.2	4.1	4.1	4.2
The Mount	4.2	4.6	5.3	5.2	5.1	4.8	4.6	4.7	4.3	4.4
The Verne	4.4	4.5	4.7	5.2	5.4	5.2	5.0	5.1	5.0	5.1
Usk/Prescoed	3.3	3.7	3.9	4.4	4.6	4.4	4.3	4.3	4.4	4.5
Wayland	4.0	4.3	4.5	4.6	4.7	4.6	4.6	4.7	3.5	4.0
Wealstun	4.1	4.1	4.4	3.7	3.0	3.7	3.9	4.0	2.7	2.7
Weare	2.8	3.0	3.3	3.4	3.3	3.5	—	—	—	—
Wellingborough	2.7	3.2	3.3	3.8	3.7	3.1	3.3	3.7	3.6	3.6
Whetton	3.5	3.9	3.8	3.7	3.9	3.5	2.6	3.7	3.8	3.9
Wolds	—	—	—	—	3.5	3.4	3.2	3.7	3.3	3.9
Wymott	3.7	3.7	4.0	4.0	3.5	4.1	4.1	4.1	3.7	4.0

¹ Establishment also holds, or until recently held, young offenders as well as category C prisoners. Moorland also has an "Open" section.

Prisoners: Compensation

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much the Prison Service paid in compensation to prisoners in respect of damaged or lost property in 2008-09. [279224]

Mr. Straw: £25,361 was paid out in settlement of prisoner civil litigation claims for damaged or lost property in 2008-09. Figures for settlements of claims resolved through the internal complaints system or through the Prison and Probation Ombudsman are not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Prisoners: Elderly

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many (a) male and (b) female prisoners in England and Wales are over (i) 70 and (ii) 75 years old. [279881]

Mr. Straw: The number of male and female prisoners aged 70 and up to 74, and over 75 years old at the end of April 2009 is as follows:

	Male	Female
70 and up to 74	331	¹ —
75 and over	188	¹ —
Total	519	6

¹ Fewer than 5

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

Prisons

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice pursuant to the answer of 9 June 2009, *Official Report*, column 797W, on prisons, how long on average elapsed between prisoners' cells being unlocked in the morning and prisoners being returned to their cells in the evening in each month between January 1997 and March 2007. [279845]

Mr. Straw: The figures requested are set out in the following table.

<i>Monthly average time unlocked (hours per prisoner per day)</i>											
	<i>1997</i>	<i>1998</i>	<i>1999</i>	<i>2000</i>	<i>2001</i>	<i>2002</i>	<i>2003</i>	<i>2004</i>	<i>2005</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>
January	11.11	10.64	10.46	10.16	9.12	9.32	9.78	9.91	9.91	10.09	10.08
February	11.12	10.59	10.60	10.13	9.58	9.48	9.84	9.86	9.91	10.12	10.06
March	11.15	10.93	10.46	9.82	8.95	9.32	9.90	9.89	9.97	10.04	10.11
April	11.00	10.75	10.39	8.81	9.66	9.66	9.94	9.87	10.03	10.08	—
May	11.06	10.70	10.39	9.54	9.77	9.75	9.97	10.04	9.99	10.03	—
June	10.93	10.65	10.26	9.59	9.67	9.89	9.92	10.07	10.05	10.20	—
July	10.89	10.70	10.27	9.80	9.83	9.80	9.96	10.03	10.02	10.08	—
August	10.96	10.60	10.16	9.76	9.69	9.78	9.96	9.90	9.99	10.07	—
September	10.86	10.60	10.22	9.99	9.72	9.83	9.96	9.86	9.99	10.11	—
October	10.95	10.56	10.13	9.97	9.67	9.73	9.91	9.91	10.06	10.11	—
November	10.86	10.53	10.12	9.88	9.50	9.60	9.87	10.04	10.13	10.13	—
December	10.69	10.50	10.10	9.78	9.41	9.54	9.88	9.94	9.92	9.99	—

Probation

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many directors of offender management there have been in each month since their inception of the post. [279891]

Mr. Straw: The first six directors of Offender Management took up their posts on 30 March 2009. An interim director also took up post on this date. The remaining three directors of Offender Management took up their posts during April. All 10 directors have been in post since 27 April 2009.

To assist in the design and development of the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) agency, Wales and the London region piloted an integrated management structure during the 2008-09 financial year. The two managers who led these pilots were called directors of Offender Management and held these posts from 1 April 2008 to 27 March 2009.

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many probation offices there were in each year since 1997; [279892]

(2) how many probation offices are open. [279893]

Mr. Straw: Information on the number of probation offices there were in each year since 1997 is not held or recorded centrally. The information requested could be obtained only at disproportionate cost as it would require approaching 42 probation trusts and areas across England and Wales.

Current central estates records show there are 1,049 occupied probation properties, of which 95 are Approved Premises.

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the caseload was of the Probation Service in (a) London and (b) England and Wales on the latest date for which information is available. [280183]

Maria Eagle: The total case load of offenders supervised by the probation service in London and England and Wales as at 31 December 2008 was as follows:

<i>All probation service supervision at 31 December 2008</i>	
	£
London	43,811

All probation service supervision at 31 December 2008

	£
England and Wales	243,434

These figures are provisional and were published on 30 April 2009 in the Ministry of Justice statistics bulletin probation statistics quarterly brief October to December 2008, England and Wales. Copies can be found in the

Libraries of the House and may be accessed via the Ministry of Justice website:

http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/probation_quarterly.htm

These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems, which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

Probation Service for England and Wales: Finance

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what budgetary reductions there will be for the Probation Service in England and Wales in (a) 2009-10 and (b) 2010-11. [280185]

Maria Eagle: A budget reduction of £20 million has been applied to the national probation service in 2009-10. No final decisions have been taken regarding the budget allocation for 2010-11.

We have set challenging efficiency targets for probation areas who want to become trusts, but in doing so we have always been clear that the priority is public protection and this will not be compromised.

In 2009-10, probation is required to make savings of £20 million out of a budget of £914 million, which was 2.2 per cent. In 2008-09, provisional figures show that probation areas underspent by £17 million, which demonstrates that the savings are completely realistic.

Public Opinion: Ministry of Justice

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment he made of the level of public confidence in the criminal justice system in 2008. [279249]

Mr. Straw: Public confidence in the criminal justice system (CJS) is measured using the British crime survey (BCS). In the year to March 2008 44 per cent. of people were confident that the CJS is effective in bringing

people who commit crimes to justice. This rose from 39 per cent. in 2003, and met the Government's target for the period 2003—2008.

The BCS now includes measures of public confidence in both the fairness and the effectiveness of the CJS as a whole. During the period from October 2007 to March 2008, 56 per cent. of people were confident that the CJS as a whole is fair and 37 per cent. were confident that it is effective. From April to December 2008 the level of confidence in fairness increased to 58 per cent., while confidence in effectiveness has so far remained stable.

Reoffenders

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many serious further offence reviews were carried out in (a) England and Wales and (b) London in 2008-09. [280184]

Maria Eagle: The figures for serious further offence reviews for 2008-09 will be published in the Offender Management Caseload Statistics on 31 July 2009. As the published statistics do not contain a breakdown by individual probation area, I will provide the hon. Gentleman with the figures for London, once the national figures have been published.

The most recent statistics available show that, between 1 April 2007 and 31 March 2008, there were 1,252 reviews carried out by probation areas in England and Wales, in cases which were initially notified to the National Offender Management Service. The corresponding figure for London was 165.

Reparation by Offenders: Clothing

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what proportion of offenders used high-visibility clothing whilst undertaking community payback work in the last period for which figures are available. [279895]

Mr. Straw: The use of distinctive high visibility clothing by offenders sentenced to Community Payback is monitored centrally by the number of hours worked. The number of offenders using high visibility clothing is not recorded. The last period for which figures are available is March, when 76.25 per cent. of the hours worked by offenders on Community Payback projects potentially in view of the public, were undertaken using distinctive clothing.

Exemptions to the use of distinctive clothing may be granted where convincing evidence is provided on the basis of health and safety concerns, or business risk to the organisation benefiting from the work. Probation areas have successfully engaged with beneficiary organisations to increase the proportion of hours worked using distinctive high visibility clothing. The hours worked using distinctive clothing increased from 210,974 hours in December 2008 to 401,680 in March 2009. Distinctive clothing is not worn on work projects taking place on enclosed premises, such as workshops, where the work done by offenders is not potentially in view of the public.

CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

GCSE: Essex

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families what proportion of children resident in (a) Essex and (b) Castle Point achieved five or more A* to C grades at GCSE in (i) 1997 and (ii) the latest year for which information is available. [280447]

Mr. Coaker: Consistent information about pupil achievement based on residency is only available for years 2002/03 onwards. The requested information for 2002/03 and 2007/08 is provided in the following table.

Percentage of pupils¹ resident in Essex local authority and Castle Point constituency achieving five or more A-C grades at GCSE and equivalents, 2002/03² and 2007/08³*

	Essex	Percentage Castle Point
2002/03	56.2	55.5
2007/08	64.5	61.0

¹ Pupils attending maintained schools only.

² Based on pupils aged 15 with a valid postcode at the start of the academic year and includes GCSEs and GNVQs.

³ Based on pupils at the end of key stage 4 with a valid postcode in that academic year and includes GCSEs and equivalents.

Source:

National Pupil Database (final data)

Schools: Crimes of Violence

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families what recent guidance his Department has issued to schools on (a) protecting staff from violent behaviour by pupils and (b) dealing with such behaviour. [280471]

Mr. Coaker: Violence against school staff is completely unacceptable and our guidance on exclusions, revised in September 2008, makes it clear that a pupil can be permanently excluded for violence even when it is a first offence.

In May 2008 we issued revised guidance on the education of children and young people experiencing behavioural, emotional and social difficulties as a special educational need (BESD). We have also commissioned the National Strategies to provide a wide range of support and advisory services, including a continuing professional development scheme, which includes study materials on managing behaviour in schools and addressing BESD.

In addition to guidance, we are implementing a comprehensive national programme to strengthen schools' capacity to manage behaviour. This includes targeted support for schools, high quality training, curriculum materials and consultancy support. We have also strengthened the law to help protect schools from challenges to their authority from pupils or parents, and enable them to foster a safe and orderly learning environment.

We are encouraging schools to develop a whole-school approach to improving social and emotional wellbeing and continuing to reduce behavioural difficulties, by promoting the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme and by publishing guidance on the management of behaviour.

Social Work Taskforce

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families if he will publish all of his correspondence with the Social Work Taskforce. [264842]

Dawn Primarolo: The Social Work Task Force was created in December 2008, to look at front line social work practice and to recommend how in the light of their conclusions, improvements could be made as part of a long term programme of reform for social work. The Secretaries of State for Health and for Children, Young People and Families, wrote to Moira Gibb, chair of the Social Work Task Force on 5 December 2008 to lay out this remit. This letter was copied to the other members of the task force with their invitations to join, and placed in the House Libraries.

The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families wrote to Moira Gibb again, in her position as chair of the Social Work Task Force, regarding Lord Laming's recommendations in his Progress Report on the Protection of Children in England on 12 March 2009. This letter was also placed in the House Libraries.

Moira Gibb wrote to the Secretaries of State for Children, Schools and Families, and for Health on 5 May 2009 with the Social Work Task Force's first report, which outlined its initial findings. The Task Force is expected to submit a further report in July, in advance of their full recommendations in October 2009.

WOMEN AND EQUALITY

Demos

Mr. Watson: To ask the Minister for Women and Equality what (a) private meetings and (b) public engagements Ministers in the Government Equalities Office have attended at which representatives from the think-tank Demos were present in the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement. [279520]

Michael Jabez Foster: The Ministers for Women have not attended any private meetings with Demos during the last 12 months are not aware of any public engagements attended at which Demos representatives were present during the same period.

Departmental Lost Property

Mr. Blunt: To ask the Minister for Women and Equality how many laptop computers belonging to the Government Equalities Office have been lost or stolen since its creation. [281058]

Michael Jabez Foster: The Government Equalities Office (GEO) was established on 12 October 2007. Since then there have been three reported incidents of stolen laptop computers. They have occurred in the following years:

Calendar year	Number of laptop computers reported as lost or stolen
2007	0
2008	2
2009	1

GEO laptops are encrypted and can only be used with security keys and passwords.

Equality and Human Rights Commission: Manpower

Robert Neill: To ask the Minister for Women and Equality pursuant to the answer to Baroness Warsi of 5 May 2009, *Official Report, House of Lords*, column 98WA, on the Equality and Human Rights Commission, what the (a) job title and (b) salary range is of each of the 83 full-time equivalent posts that are vacant. [279792]

Michael Jabez Foster: The following table summarises the 83 full-time equivalent vacancies as at 31 March 2009.

Directorate	Position	Vacancies FTE	Level	Salary range	Comments
Wales	Head of Legal	1	5	¹ £43,680 to £53,093	—
Wales	Head of Research	1	5	¹ —	—
Communications	Head of London and South Ops	1	5	¹ —	—
Corporate Management	Head of Corporate Change Management	1	5	¹ —	—
Corporate Management	Head of Commercial Management	1	5	¹ —	—
Strategy	Head of Programme Management	1	5	¹ —	—
Strategy	Head of Performance and Stakeholder Engagement	1	5	¹ —	—
Strategy	Policy Manager	7	4	² £34,224.75 to £41,600	—
Wales	Policy Manager	2	4	² —	—
Strategy	Executive Assistant	1	4	² —	—
Communications	Business Manager	1	4	² —	—
Strategy	Programme Manager	5	4	² —	—
Wales	Policy Manager	1	4	² —	—
Legal	Legal Policy Team Leader	1	3	³ £26,815.80 to £32,595	—
Scotland	Lawyer	1	3	³ —	—
Scotland	Policy Officer	1	3	³ —	—
Strategy	Research Officer	3	3	³ —	—

<i>Directorate</i>	<i>Position</i>	<i>Vacancies FTE</i>	<i>Level</i>	<i>Salary range</i>	<i>Comments</i>
Corporate Management	Grants Officers	2	3	³ —	—
Corporate Management	Admin Support	1	3	³ —	—
Corporate Management	Contract Managers	1	3	³ —	—
Corporate Management	Contract Managers	1	3	³ —	—
Communications	Executive Assistant	1	3	³ —	—
Communications	Regional Programme Adviser	7	3	³ —	—
Corporate Management	Para-Legal	1	3	³ —	—
Corporate Management	Executive Assistant	1	3	³ —	—
Strategy	Programme Officer	3	3	³ —	—
Wales	Policy Officer	1	3	³ —	—
Communications	Helpline Managers	3	3	³ —	These roles were in anticipation of the TUPE Sitel transfer which was completed 1 April 2009
Corporate Management	Grants Officers	1	2	⁴ £20,056.30 to £24,378	—
Corporate Management	Receptionist	1	2	⁴ —	—
Strategy	Admin Co-ordinator	1	2	⁴ —	—
Strategy	Services Support Co-ordinator	2	2	⁴ —	—
Communications	Helpline Co-ordinators	23	2	⁴ —	These roles were in anticipation of the TUPE Sitel transfer which was completed 1 April 2009
Commissioners	Secretary to Chair and CEO Private Office Team	1	1	⁵ £15,000 to £18,233	—
Communications	Helpline Administrator	1	1	⁵ —	—
Strategy	Admin Support	1	1	⁵ —	—
Total		83			

¹ Salary applies to all level 5

² Salary applies to all level 4

³ Salary applies to all level 3

⁴ Salary applies to all level 2

⁵ Salary applies to all level 1

Government Equalities Office: Drinking Water

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Minister for Women and Equality how much the Government Equalities Office has spent on bottled water in each of the last two years. [279368]

Michael Jabez Foster: Since its creation on 12 October 2007, the Government Equalities Office has not spent any money on bottled water in the conduct of its day-to-day business at its headquarters in Eland House, London. Bottled water has been provided at GEO-hosted conferences and seminars but the costs of this are not separately identified by the event suppliers.

Government Equalities Office: Homophobia

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Minister for Women and Equality what recent steps the Government

Equalities Office has taken to combat homophobia in the work place. [279365]

Michael Jabez Foster: The Government are committed to combating workplace homophobia. The Employment Equality (Sexual Orientation) Regulations 2003 made discrimination and harassment because of sexual orientation unlawful in employment and vocational training. The Government Equalities Office has made a commitment in its business plan for 2009-10 to work in partnership across Government to reduce homophobia in the workplace and to support employers to develop lesbian, gay and bisexual-friendly workplaces.

The Equality Bill, currently before Parliament, will introduce a public sector equality duty, which will require public bodies to consider lesbian, gay and bisexual employees' needs when carrying out their functions.

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