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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

Thursday 21 January 2010

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House of Commons

Thursday 21 January 2010

The House met at half-past Ten o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

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—

General Election Counts

1. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West) (Con): Whether the Electoral Commission has had discussions with (a) media organisations and (b) political parties on the timing of the election counts for the general election. [312126]

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): The Electoral Commission informs me that it had discussions with the BBC about the timing of election counts in September 2009. The commission further informs me that the timing of election counts was discussed with representatives of the political parties who attended the October 2009 meeting of the parliamentary parties panel.

Mr. Amess: Recalling my re-election to Parliament in 1992, when the count was completed within an hour of the close of poll—I am advised that the result indicated that there would be the re-election of a Conservative Government, and financial stability—does my hon. Friend agree that we should continue with the tradition of counting immediately after the close of poll, in order to bring financial stability and reduce the possibility of electoral fraud?

Mr. Streeter: That is, of course, my personal opinion, but as the House knows full well, whether to count votes on Thursday or Friday is a matter for individual returning officers; that has been our law for more than 100 years. However, the law does require returning officers to count votes as soon as is practicable after the election. The Electoral Commission website indicates which returning officers have so far decided to count on the Friday or are undecided, and I encourage hon. Members in those areas to enter into a dialogue with the returning officer to discuss whether their decision meets that criterion.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): We all welcomed your statement on this issue, Mr. Speaker, and I completely agree with what has been said from the

Opposition Benches—but will not the real story of election night be the fact that possibly up to 50 seats will have been bought by Lord Ashcroft's money, and what—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman knows that he is far exceeding the boundaries of the question; it was a good try, but I am afraid it did not work.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): As the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) said, the key words are as far as “is practicable”. There are constituencies where this is not practicable for geographical reasons, and sometimes simply because of historical practice. What an individual returning officer should not do, however, is delay the count simply because he thinks that verifying or counting postal votes might be a little bit difficult. That is the message the Electoral Commission needs to send out to returning officers.

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman is right. Throughout our history, several seats at every general election have counted on a Friday; I am sure colleagues on the Opposition Benches will be interested to know that in 1979 121 seats counted on a Friday. The hon. Gentleman makes an important point, and the Electoral Commission has encouraged returning officers to be clear about why they are making this decision, and be able to justify it to their local community.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

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

Wireless Audio Equipment

2. **Robert Key** (Salisbury) (Con): What steps the Church Commissioners are taking to assist cathedrals and parish churches to retune or replace wireless audio equipment which operates on frequencies within Channel 69 following the clearance of that channel by Ofcom. [312127]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Sir Stuart Bell): With your permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to refer to David Taylor. As you know, he was an assiduous attender at our Question Time. He put pertinent and important questions before the House and assisted our Ecclesiastical Committee, and he will be greatly missed. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”]

I can tell the hon. Member for Salisbury (Robert Key) that the Church of England has joined an industry-led campaign to press the Government for compensation for affected groups. We are encouraging churches to contact their installation companies for advice and to seek a compensation package.

Robert Key: The Government are making hundreds of millions of pounds out of the spectrum auctions, and as the hon. Gentleman has said, some compensation has been promised. This affects not only churches, cathedrals and voluntary organisations, but organisations right across the creative arts. Should not any compensation include not only the residual value of equipment but replacement value, as churches have been forced off those frequencies by the Government?

Sir Stuart Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising this issue. The compensation package takes into account the full cost of the significant disruption, particularly to larger churches that use a number of wireless microphones. I estimate that about one in eight churches will need to retune or replace their equipment, at an average cost of about £500. The Government agree with Ofcom that compensation is due, but the level, and eligibility, still need to be agreed.

Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire) (Con): May I tell the hon. Gentleman how much I welcomed support from the Church of England this week for early-day motion 323, in my name and those of 131 other Members? I urge him to use all the resources of the Church Commissioners to put the maximum possible pressure on the Treasury and the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills to ensure that justice is done in this very important matter.

Sir Stuart Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman, and I have read his early-day motion 323 on the Save our Sound UK campaign. I agree with his point. The Government recognise the importance of churches in our communities, and I am sure they will recognise that this is an unfortunate anomaly, as they did in relation to our unfair surface water charges last year. I urged the Government to respond robustly then, and I do so now, with the support of the House.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

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

General Election Counts

3. **Mr. Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): What estimate the Electoral Commission has made of the number of general election counts which will commence on polling day. [312128]

6. **Mr. Desmond Swayne** (New Forest, West) (Con): What estimate the Electoral Commission has made of the number of general election counts which will commence on polling day. [312131]

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): The Electoral Commission informs me that it has asked all returning officers to provide information about their current plans for commencing the count at the next UK parliamentary general election. This information has been made available in the House of Commons Library. In summary, as of 7 January returning officers for 586 out of the 650 constituencies had provided information. Of those, returning officers in 330 constituencies plan to start counting on polling day, a further 17 will commence counting on polling day unless the general election is combined with local authority elections, 52 have decided to count on the Friday and 187 were still undecided.

Mr. Bone: Unfortunately, one of the constituencies that plans to count on Friday is Wellingborough. Could my hon. Friend recommend to the Speaker's Committee that the law be changed, so that counts have to be made

on a Thursday unless there are exceptional circumstances and tin-pot, upstart little town clerks cannot change things?

Mr. Streeter: I wish my hon. Friend would say what he really feels! When the Electoral Commission was set up the House did not give it the power to direct returning officers, and of course, if the law is to be changed that is a matter for this House, not for the Electoral Commission. As we know, returning officers are usually the chief executives of local authorities, and Members of Parliament and councillors up and down the land are usually not without influence in working alongside these hard-working and respectable individuals.

Mr. Swayne: The New Forest constituencies will be doing the right thing, but I hope that the only present occupant of the Treasury Bench, the duty Whip, will have noted the words of my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Bone). We all appear to be in agreement that either we are going to do something about this or we are not, and we are just going to hope. Perhaps someone on the Treasury Bench could give some instruction as to the meaning of the law: what does "as soon as is practicable" actually mean?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend makes an extremely important point. It is to be hoped that the guidance that has been given from this House in recent days, including your own very powerful statement on this matter, Mr. Speaker, will influence the 187 returning officers who have not yet decided to take the view that counting on Thursday is the right thing to do. This is not a matter for the Electoral Commission.

Mr. MacShane *rose—*

Mr. Speaker: I shall give the right hon. Gentleman a second bite at the cherry, but I do not expect him to abuse the bite.

Mr. MacShane: My understanding is that if a question contains a reference to an organisation—[*Interruption.*] No, no, let me ask my question first, and Mr. Speaker may then rule me out of order. May I ask the hon. Member representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what conversations he has had with the Electoral Commission, not only on the counting of votes, which is so essential, but on the counting of the money that will be used to buy those votes?

Mr. Speaker: Order. I say to the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter)—I think he can guess what I am going to say—that although he will not want to ask me for a ruling on this matter, I shall give him one anyway: he cannot be expected to answer that which is not part of the question. I think that we have dealt with the matter, and the right hon. Gentleman had a go. I call Mr. Andrew Mackay.

Mr. Andrew Mackay (Bracknell) (Con): I am obliged to you, Mr. Speaker, because I wish to return to the question. Does the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) agree that the real problem is that, as he has pointed out, most of the returning officers are the chief executives of councils? Understandably, their first priority is to keep costs down and offer good value to council tax payers, so they are choosing to count on Friday, whereas they had previously counted on Thursday.

We need an absolute instruction from this House that that should not happen, except in exceptional circumstances. Without such an instruction all too many seats will count on a Friday, which will be—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The right hon. Gentleman is an immensely experienced parliamentarian, so he will know that it causes problems for the *Hansard* writers if a Member is not facing the House.

Mr. Streeter: It is worth reiterating that returning officers are independent under the law of this land, and have been for 100 years and more. Of course the Electoral Commission can and does issue guidance to returning officers, but its primary concern is about accuracy and ensuring public confidence in the outcome of any count that is held.

Electoral Register (Britons Abroad)

4. **Mr. Philip Dunne** (Ludlow) (Con): What estimate the Electoral Commission has made of the number of Britons living abroad who are on the electoral register.

[312129]

Mr. Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that although it has not made such an estimate itself, the Office for National Statistics collects and publishes annual electoral registration data. The most recent figures are for the electoral registers of 1 December 2008, and they show that there were 13,695 entries for overseas voters on UK electoral registers. The ONS is due to publish figures for the 1 December 2009 electoral registers next month.

Mr. Dunne: I am very grateful to my hon. Friend for giving us those figures, which appear at first sight to reflect a decline of some 2,000 since the previous year. Does he agree that this is a disgraceful performance, and what can he recommend that the Electoral Commission can do to give recommendations to any incoming Government to improve the ability of overseas expatriate citizens to participate in our national election?

Mr. Streeter: It is a matter for the Government and for this House whether the law on how people can register and vote from overseas is changed. The Electoral Commission is committed to increasing the number of eligible people who are registered to vote, and has recently conducted a campaign that resulted in nearly 7,400 overseas voter registration forms being downloaded from the commission's website. The commission plans to run further activity in advance of the general election targeting British citizens living abroad.

Simon Hughes (North Southwark and Bermondsey) (LD): We are grateful to the hon. Gentleman for those answers. First, will he encourage the Electoral Commission to continue to work and to do more, because there are huge numbers of people in all categories, including overseas voters, who are clearly eligible to vote but are not yet on the list? Will he suggest that colleagues from all parties might like an urgent meeting with the commission to discuss maximising activity, and therefore the number of people who are on the register, and therefore eligible to vote in the elections that we know will happen this spring?

Mr. Streeter: I am sure that the Electoral Commission is amenable to such a meeting. It plans to spend a further £189,500 targeting overseas voters in this financial year, and is committed to ensuring that the number of overseas voters who take part in our elections increases.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab) *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I have to say to the right hon. Gentleman that it is a case of third time unlucky. He cannot expect me to help him out again. I call Mr. Hugh Bayley—*[Interruption.]* I have to say to the right hon. Member for Rotherham (Mr. MacShane) that the length of time for which he lived abroad is neither here nor there when it comes to the selection of who asks questions—*[Interruption.]* With great respect, the right hon. Gentleman will hear this. He had two opportunities and I am not obliged to offer him a third.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

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

Fires and Fire Safety

5. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York) (Lab): How much the Church of England spent on (a) repairs necessary after fires and (b) fire safety measures in churches in the last five years. [312130]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Sir Stuart Bell): I am grateful for your protection, Mr. Speaker. This is a matter for individual churches and cathedrals, and the figures are not held centrally. I know, however, that many churches and cathedrals have undertaken work on fire prevention, detection and containment.

Hugh Bayley: After Christmas there was a fire in York minster's stone yard, where the cathedral's greatest window is being stored while it undergoes a £25 million restoration. The window was saved by firemen and minster staff, who carried it to safety. It is a work of art as important as the Sistine chapel ceiling. Will my hon. Friend ask the Church Commissioners to press the Government to protect such works of art from fire and other risks, just as they protect works of art in our national galleries and museums?

Sir Stuart Bell: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this matter. Fortunately no people were harmed in the fire, and the panels of the incomparable great east window were saved. The Church welcomes the recommendation by the Public Accounts Committee that cathedrals should receive direct funding from the Government.

Michael Fabricant (Lichfield) (Con): The hon. Gentleman will be aware that for specialised properties, bodies such as the National Farmers Union have created their own insurance companies. Have the Church Commissioners given any thought, given the nature of churches, to the idea that there should perhaps be a central insurance company to insure more effectively against the risk of fire?

Sir Stuart Bell: I am grateful for the opportunity to reassure the hon. Gentleman. I can tell him that advice on managing the risk of fire is available from Church House, from dioceses and from the Ecclesiastical insurance group, which insures most Church of England churches.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

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

General Election Counts

8. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): What information the Electoral Commission holds on the number of election counts that are not planned to commence on the evening of polling day in the general election. [312134]

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): The Electoral Commission informs me that it has asked all returning officers to provide information about their current plans for counting ballot papers at the next UK parliamentary general election. This information has been made available in the House of Commons Library. In summary, as of 7 January, returning officers for 586 out of 650 constituencies had provided information. Of these, 52 do not plan to count ballot papers on the evening of polling day at the general election. A further 17 have indicated that they may defer counting if the general election is combined with local authority elections, and 187 were still undecided.

Mr. Turner: I congratulate my hon. Friend. In 2001 the count in my constituency started at 10 o'clock at night and continued until after 5 o'clock in the morning. It was recommenced at noon the next day, and I did not get my result until well into the afternoon. I should point out that there was only one count. Is he aware that already the count may not be completed on election day, even without the extra day?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend makes an interesting and important point. I am pleased to see that his constituency has decided to continue to count on polling day itself even though, as he said, that may take some time. As we all know, some returning officers have decided to count on Friday because of the extra time and people required to check postal votes taken by hand to polling stations on polling day.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

The Solicitor-General was asked—
Householders (Protection of Property)

11. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West) (Con): What discussions she has had with the Director of Public Prosecutions on the policy of the Crown Prosecution Service in charging householders who have used force in cases of burglary. [312116]

The Solicitor-General (Vera Baird): The Attorney-General and I have regular meetings with the DPP, at which we discuss a range of issues within the terms of the protocol between the Law Officers and the prosecution departments that was published in July 2009.

Mr. Amess: The Solicitor-General must be aware that hardly a week goes by without some sort of report of a victim of burglary bizarrely being prosecuted. There is certainly a feeling of great injustice in the country, so will she give clearer guidance to the CPS when it considers prosecution?

The Solicitor-General: I do not accept that hardly a week goes by, although obviously I am well aware of the cases that hit the headlines recently and some years ago. As a consequence of the earlier case in 2005, a joint statement was issued by the Association of Chief Police Officers and the CPS that made it very clear that a person is entitled to use force to resist a burglar. The current case has brought the matter forward again, but it has not really impacted on the very good advice contained in that statement.

A survey of prosecutions shows that in the 15 years between 1989 and 2004, only 11 people were charged with responding in any way violently to being burgled. As the hon. Gentleman says, such cases clearly occur more frequently than that, which suggests that the law is right overall, and deals with them sympathetically. In his judgment yesterday on the most recent case, the Lord Chief Justice said that it was not at all about a person defending himself after a burglary, as the burglary was long over before the violence that gave rise to the sentence took place.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. and learned Friend accept my opinion that the law is right and that there must not be a change? Otherwise we would be putting property above life, and that is something that I hope our law will never accept.

The Solicitor-General: Certainly, an appeal against conviction in the current case was refused. There is no suggestion in the thorough judgment from the Lord Chief Justice that he considers there to be anything wrong with the law. The barrister who defended this family also defended Tony Martin, and he said on the radio this morning that he thought that the law was right. To avoid doubt, I emphasise that the law allows for what was referred to in the case as a "moment of unexpected anguish", when a person honestly and reasonably thinks that they are doing what is necessary. Members of the jury have to try to put themselves in that person's position, and evaluate how high their feelings would be. Even then, they must ask whether, taking all that emotion into account, the response was reasonable. I suspect that the law is pretty accurate, and that juries have every opportunity to give as much credit as they want to the incredibly tense situations that people can find themselves in.

Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): Given that the courts have shown that they can defend householders and understand the situations that arise, will the Solicitor-General continue to resist those siren voices who want the law rewritten? We have had enough criminal justice legislation as it is.

The Solicitor-General: Some of the criminal justice legislation that has gone through the House has been extremely good. It has benefited victims of domestic violence and rape and improved conviction rates enormously, so one cannot sweep all sorts of criminal justice law up together and say that it is all a bad thing. However, I agree that we should resist any calls to change the law. That is simply not necessary, as I think that the courts deal with such cases quite properly.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) (Lab): Is it not absolute nonsense to suggest that the current law, which has been in existence for so long, is soft on burglars? The law is quite clear, as my hon. and learned Friend has said, and if one believes in the rule of law one should not try to change the existing position.

The Solicitor-General: Yes, I do agree. The case of Palmer, which essentially set out in common law the principles that are now in statute, has been working since 1971 with very little complaint. In the two cases that have given the most cause for concern, the courts have made it clear—in both instances—that the violence happened after the burglary was over, and we do not allow that. That is breaking the rule of law, itself; it is revenge, not self-defence.

Mr. Edward Garnier (Harborough) (Con): One aspect of the Hussain case that has escaped public attention is the way in which the Coroners and Justice Act 2009, and before that the Criminal Justice Act 2003, badly restricted the discretion of the sentencer. Judge Reddihough would have been more able to produce the sentence that the Court of Appeal produced yesterday had he not been hogtied by the Sentencing Guidelines Council, or the Sentencing Council. Will the Solicitor-General please discuss with her Government colleagues getting rid of the Sentencing Council, so that judges can sentence on the facts before them, rather than having to follow a template issued by other people elsewhere?

The Solicitor-General: There is no template, as the hon. and learned Gentleman well knows. The judiciary have a discretion and they rightly exercise it, because they, at first instance, are the people who see the dramatis personae before them, and who can make a proper assessment of the absolute detail and the nature of the person. Judges have plenty of discretion, and in the judgment that I have read, the trial judge made no suggestion that he found himself hogtied—and the Lord Chief Justice certainly did not, either.

Criminal Charges

12. **Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): What guidance is issued to the Crown Prosecution Service on the period of time within which charges in criminal cases should be brought. [312117]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service is responsible for charging in about 35 per cent. of criminal cases. There is no separate guidance on time, but the principle is to charge as soon as possible, and there are obviously controls over the situation when people are remanded in custody. The hon. Gentleman made a freedom of information request about the average time between the police reporting to the CPS and a

charge, and he received the answer 8.3 days. I do not know whether he found that helpful, because some cases are dealt with very quickly and others require a forensic report before there can be a charge. However, that is the average.

Philip Davies: The longer it takes the Crown Prosecution Service to decide whether to charge somebody, the longer very serious criminals could be out on the streets on police bail committing further crimes. The average time that the CPS spends making a decision ranges from three days in Cumbria to an astonishing 20 days in Northamptonshire. What is the Solicitor-General doing to address that?

The Solicitor-General: It is hard to pinpoint the hon. Gentleman's complaint. I do not know the nature of endemic offending in the two parts of the country to which he refers; there may be significant differences. However, people are not automatically on bail pending charge; some are remanded in custody. Then a charge becomes urgent, and the CPS respond accordingly. There have been vast improvements through statutory charging, and its efficacy has been praised in no less than four recent reports.

Defendants' Health (Prosecutions)

13. **Simon Hughes** (North Southwark and Bermondsey) (LD): What consideration the Crown Prosecution Service gives to the physical and mental health of defendants in making decisions to prosecute. [312118]

The Solicitor-General: The evidence that a defendant has a significant physical or mental illness may mean that the Crown Prosecution Service decides that the public interest does not always require a prosecution. However, the defendant's health must be balanced with the seriousness of the offence and the need to safeguard the public.

Simon Hughes: Is the Solicitor-General willing to see me about a case in which the charge has just been dropped at the second review by the CPS? It relates to a constituent of mine, whose son, a member of our staff, has worked for us in this building. It was clearly inappropriate, for a domestic matter that occurred at home, with no support from the victim—another member of the family—and where the evidence was clear from the beginning, to prosecute a seriously mentally ill individual.

The Solicitor-General: I know the case to which the hon. Gentleman refers, because we looked into why the hon. Gentleman was asking the question. Of course I shall meet him, and it is better if we talk about it privately, as it were, because it is a family matter. However, my general understanding is that there was a mental health issue, and that the CPS received information early that the condition could be controlled, but had not been at the time. That raised the question of whether, if the man in question again did not take his medication, there would be a further threat to someone else. Later medical evidence has, I think, helped to put the matter to rest, but I am certainly very happy to discuss the case

with the hon. Gentleman. I hope that nothing that I have said here upsets the family further. There are clearly issues to discuss.

Bribery Bill

14. **Jo Swinson** (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): What recent assessment she has made of the extent to which Crown servants are engaged in the activities contemplated in clause 12 of the Bribery Bill. [312119]

17. **John Hemming** (Birmingham, Yardley) (LD): What recent assessment she has made of the extent to which Crown servants are engaged in the activities contemplated in clause 12 of the Bribery Bill. [312123]

The Solicitor-General: The Government have assessed that there are occasions when the fight against serious crime, the protection of national security or the safety of the armed forces may require the authorities concerned to offer financial or other kinds of inducement in order to carry out their functions effectively. The extent to which such conduct occurs has not been quantified, as far as I am aware, but the Government are satisfied as to the need for the defence in general.

Jo Swinson: Can the Minister explain why the Government have felt it necessary to give the police and the Army a licence to bribe, given that the draft Bribery Bill covered only the security services, and that the Joint Committee on the draft Bill said that it had received no persuasive evidence that even that was necessary?

The Solicitor-General: The Bill is in the House of Lords, is it not? I understand that those responsible for the Government's business there have accepted that the Bill's current definition of who may be covered by this is too wide, and that it would probably be better to specify a list. Perhaps there would then be arguments about who was on the list, but that approach would significantly narrow the present terminology, which is pretty general.

John Hemming: What I find particularly odd in this proposal is that under clause 6 the police are to be allowed to bribe a UK official but not a foreign official. Why is that?

The Solicitor-General: There is a specific exclusion from clause 12 to match the OECD treaty, which prohibits bribery of a foreign public official. The services are not going to be allowed to bribe, except in very particular cases. It will be a defence, which would have to be raised if somebody were prosecuted for bribery, and the burden would be on them to raise it. The matter is still being debated in the House of Lords, and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman's colleagues are putting forward full frontal attacks. It seems to us, however, that we must not hamstring the security services.

David Howarth (Cambridge) (LD): Obviously, the Bribery Bill is very welcome. However, can the Solicitor-General confirm that this particular proposal allows not only the giving, but the receiving, of bribes by the armed forces, the police and the intelligence services? Can she also confirm what appeared to be said in the House of Lords—that in the view of Ministers the purposes for which this can be done include not only

national security and suppression of crime but the furtherance of national economic purposes, which would not be consonant with our international obligations?

The Solicitor-General: It is very hard to give somebody a defence for giving a bribe if he has not given one already. Of course, the people to whom he has given it are ultimately likely to be involved in far more serious charges themselves. I have not understood economic advantage to have the remotest connection with it. This is about security, and it is intended to be used within a very narrow ambit.

Rape Cases (Prosecution)

15. **Mrs. Ann Cryer** (Keighley) (Lab): What steps she is taking to increase the rate of prosecution in rape cases. [312120]

The Solicitor-General: Steps that we have already taken have led to reports of rape to the police more than doubling in the past 10 years, and there has been a 50 per cent. increase in the number of convictions. We have set up a cross-governmental rape monitoring group, and there is a body continually going around areas of criminal justice to spread best practice from one place through all the others. We have commissioned Baroness Stern specifically to review the response of public authorities to rape, and she will report in February.

Mrs. Cryer: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for that very useful reply; we are clearly moving in the right direction. However, I think she will agree that at the end of the day there are too few successful prosecutions in rape cases, which could be because too many women are withdrawing. What are the Crown Prosecution Service and various police forces doing to support women so that they do not withdraw? Is anyone explaining to such women that when they do withdraw, the person concerned—the rapist—could well go on to rape and rape again, as in the recent “black cab” case?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend hits on a very important point that needs to be made much more regularly, which is that much rape is serial offending. When women do not complain or when they withdraw a complaint, they are not just making a decision on their own behalf; in many cases they are potentially putting other people at risk. I do not want to put any more pressure on rape complainants than there already is, but there is a clear and emerging position that much rape is serial offending.

Almost all sexual offence complainants are now given an independent sexual violence adviser who stays with them as a befriender and supporter from complaint to at least the end of the criminal proceedings and who helps them into counselling after that. That is a great support that is helping more women to be ready to come forward and to sustain a complaint when they do.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Although it is true that the interests of complainants are very high in importance, so too are the interests of defendants. May I say that we must do nothing to dilute the principles that require a case to be proven beyond a reasonable doubt and ensure that the burden rests on the Crown?

The Solicitor-General: Wise words with which I totally agree. We are not seeking to do that and have not done anything that will. What is important is to support complainants so that the pressures of having to talk in front of a court about something extremely intimate, distressing and traumatising are not so overwhelming that people will not come forward and ensure that justice is done. That is what we have been trying to do.

Corston Report

16. **Julie Morgan** (Cardiff, North) (Lab): What contribution the Law Officers' Departments are making towards the implementation of the recommendations of the Corston report on meeting the needs of women with particular vulnerabilities in the criminal justice system. [312122]

The Solicitor-General: The Government accepted almost all Baroness Corston's recommendations and are committed to diverting from custody vulnerable women who are not dangerous or serious offenders by strengthening services in the community that can tackle the complex needs of such women, who are frequently convicted of a lot of low-level offending. There have been 31 grants to such organisations, including Together Women and the Cardiff-based women's turnaround project, which is hosted by Safer Wales and offers practical support so that women can manage their lives better and do not fall into offending. My hon. Friend has been a great champion of the turnaround project.

Julie Morgan: I thank my hon. and learned Friend and congratulate the Government on the progress made on the Corston report and on the fact that the number of women in prison is now falling. I am particularly pleased about the Cardiff project. Does she agree that many women offenders are, or have been, victims of abuse to a disproportionate level? What more can the Law Officers' Department do to help women who have been abused as either children or adults when they present as offenders?

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. When I chaired the Fawcett commission on women and criminal justice, the evidence made it plain that a disproportionate number of women in custody for low-level, non-dangerous offending had either been sexually abused or suffered domestic violence, and through the chaos that followed that treatment had declined into crime. Because at that stage we were not intervening as quickly and as well as we do now in cases of either domestic violence or sexual abuse, we were, in a sense, punishing them twice—by not helping them early enough to prevent them from descending into offending and then by putting them in custody when they offended. We are now trying to tackle the problem, and it is notable that organisations such as the turnaround project and Together Women deal with women not just after they have they have been convicted but after they have been abused, when their lives are becoming chaotic, to try to save them from ever descending into criminality at all.

Snow and Ice Clearing

18. **Mr. Philip Dunne** (Ludlow) (Con): What discussions she has had with the Crown Prosecution Service on whether householders may be prosecuted in relation to snow and ice clearing activities which lead to the injury of another. [312124]

The Solicitor-General: The short answer to the hon. Gentleman—I hope that he will not take it badly if I put it briefly, and I know that you will not, Mr. Speaker—is that there have been no discussions about prosecuting people for clearing snow and ice.

Mr. Dunne: I appreciate that the Solicitor-General might have been trying to clarify the fact that clearing is not subject to criminal action, and if that was what she intended to say, I am grateful to her. However, she will be aware of the considerable concern among householders in recent weeks that they are potentially liable to prosecution either from local authorities or in civil cases. It would be helpful if she could get clarification from colleagues, perhaps in the Ministry of Justice, that that is not likely to occur.

The Solicitor-General: When I saw that the hon. Gentleman's question was about prosecution, which is our responsibility as Law Officers, I sent back to the Crown Prosecution Service to ask it to scour the four corners of jurisprudence to look for anything that looked like a possible prosecution for snow clearing with some bad effect, but we could not find anything, whether relating to local authorities or anything else. Between us, the hon. Gentleman and I can probably rule out prosecution for clearing snow. Civil liability is a different thing. It looks very remote to me, but I am not going to give free legal advice.

Youth Matters (Expenditure)

19. **Mr. Andrew Pelling** (Croydon, Central) (Ind): How much was spent in respect of her responsibilities for youth matters in the last 12 months. [312125]

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman asks in general terms how much was spent on youth matters. Reducing youth crime and improving the criminal justice system for young people is a central part of the Government's effort to build safer communities, and action is planned for that.

However, if he is asking about such things as the Law Officers' youth network, which encourages understanding and respect for the rule of law and the criminal justice system, I can tell him that in the past 12 months, it has cost just over £4,500. In addition, the Crown Prosecution Service has spent almost £86,000 on a national schools project, with a similar information motive.

Mr. Pelling: Is there a danger that police officers spend too much time doing youth work that should really be provided by professional youth workers?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman would be asking me only for a view about that, because the police are not my responsibility. My constituency engagement tells me that police are very usefully involved in talking in schools, and they are sometimes even posted at schools for a while and have regular liaison with them, but I doubt they go beyond the four corners of their responsibilities and try to give people counselling and advice. I am not sure anything is going wrong, but he should take the matter up with the Home Office if he is worried.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

The Leader of the House was asked—

Reform of the House of Commons Committee

20. **Jo Swinson** (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): When the Government plans to respond to the report of the Select Committee on Reform of the House of Commons; and if she will make a statement. [312136]

The Leader of the House of Commons (Ms Harriet Harman): The Government firmly believe in strengthening the role of the House of Commons, and making Parliament more effective is an essential part of restoring public trust in our political system. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday, the Government propose to accept a large number of the recommendations of the Wright Committee's report, including the election of Chairmen and members of Select Committees, a House Committee for scheduling non-Government businesses, and allowing Back Benchers to initiate debates on motions that will be voted on by the House. We intend to bring the matter to the House for debate and decision on 23 February.

Jo Swinson: I thank the Leader of the House for that response, and particularly for giving us the date, for which we have all been waiting, on which we will be able to discuss and vote on the Wright Committee proposals. I welcome the fact that the Government are minded to accept many of the proposals, although I would imagine that we are talking about House business, and therefore a free vote, and that it would not be for the Government to accept or reject the proposals. If the Government are accepting most of the proposals, which will she personally be rejecting?

Ms Harman: There will be a free vote on this—of course, this is House business—but the hon. Lady will be aware that it is for the Government to table the motions. We take the Wright Committee's argument that that needs to be done with two characteristics: firstly, we need to seek consensus in order to take the matter forward, which is certainly what our approach will be, and I look forward to working with her and other hon. Members; and secondly, we need to make progress bit by bit. We will be making a good start and, I hope, a substantive and major start, with four key areas that I have outlined for debate and, I hope, decision by the House on 23 February.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): So now we know, after months of prevarication, that the full recommendations of the Wright Committee are not to be put before the House, that the House is not to be trusted to vote on all the recommendations, that the Government will choose those they accept, and that those will be the only ones put before the House. May I suggest to the right hon. and learned Lady that that is simply not right? It is not what was anticipated when the Wright Committee was set up, and it will be a grave disappointment to those who want genuine reform of this House.

Ms Harman: I do not think it acceptable to suggest that what we have done is prevaricate. I think the Wright Committee worked with expedition and on a wide-ranging area of complex issues. The Committee itself said that the matter needed to be dealt with bit by bit and that further work was needed on some proposals. The hon. Gentleman has a choice. Either he can seek to work with us to make progress, or he can get in a huff about the process. It is down to him to choose.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire) (Con): The Wright Committee did indeed work with expedition, as the Leader of the House has just said, which is more than the Government have done—23 February is a long way off the eight weeks that the Wright Committee proposed for a response. Further to the question posed by the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath), can she confirm that, whatever the House decides on 23 February, those recommendations will be implemented before the Dissolution of Parliament?

Ms Harman: Indeed, we intend to give the House an opportunity to decide on a series of motions that will go beyond being an endorsement in principle and actually give to recommendations. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will reflect on his attempt to suggest that we are dragging our feet on this issue. We want to ensure that we work together to bring forward changes that are comprehensively agreed.

The convention is that, after a Select Committee report, the Government have two months in which to make a response. It is 21 January today and the two months is up on 24 January, and I am giving the Government's response here. The response is that we will have a debate on 23 February and suggest that we go forward in four key areas. Rather than a written response that can be debated generally outside the House, we think that it is better for the Government to give the House the opportunity to debate and decide these issues. Again, I put to the right hon. Gentleman the point that I made to the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath). He can either get tangled up in an argument about the process or he can accept my suggestion that we work together to make substantive progress on four key areas of the Wright Committee's proposals.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): Having campaigned for the handing back of authority from the Executive to the House for more than a decade—certainly while I was Chairman of the Procedure Committee and as a member of the Modernisation Committee—may I welcome the announcement by the Leader of the House, which was signalled yesterday at Prime Minister's questions? The Leader of the House has chosen the important and fundamental issues that will give greater authority to Back Benchers. As long as the motions will be decided on a free vote, I warmly welcome what she has said in answer to this question, and I look forward to the House having more authority by the time that I leave it at the general election.

Ms Harman: The request from the House to the Wright Committee was to make proposals that will—as the hon. Gentleman suggests—strengthen the way in which the House works.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

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

CO2 Emissions

21. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York) (Lab): Which hon. Members have written to the (a) Serjeant at Arms and (b) House of Commons Commission in the last 12 months with proposals for the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions from the House of Commons part of the parliamentary estate. [312137]

Nick Harvey (North Devon): Responsibility for environmental matters in the House rests with the Director General of Facilities. In the last 12 months, four Members have written in with proposals for the reduction of carbon dioxide emissions on the parliamentary estate. Such correspondence is viewed as confidential, so it would not be right to name them. The number does not include Members who made requests for the Commons to participate in environmental campaigns, and several proposals were made orally or through parliamentary questions—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. Far too many private conversations are taking place in the Chamber. A question was asked and the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) was answering it, but people kept on chuntering away. That is just bad manners.

Hugh Bayley: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman. On 19 October, all members of the House of Commons Commission, from all parties, agreed that the House of Commons was not in a position to sign up to the 10:10 commitment. Two days later, the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Clegg) proposed a motion committing the House to 10:10. Did the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) tell his party leader that the House of Commons Commission had considered the matter and decided that it was not practical and that he personally would not vote for that motion?

Nick Harvey: I had a discussion with my hon. Friend the Member for North Southwark and Bermondsey (Simon Hughes), who was, I think, moving the motion to which the hon. Member for City of York (Hugh Bayley) alludes. I had a discussion with my hon. Friend and explained why the Commission, much as it would have wished to sign up to the 10:10 campaign, did not feel able to do so.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

The Leader of the House was asked—

Parliamentary Questions

22. **Mr. Andrew Turner** (Isle of Wight) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with ministerial colleagues on the accuracy of responses to parliamentary questions. [312138]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Barbara Keeley): My right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House and I keep the quality and timeliness of Ministers' answers to

written parliamentary questions under continuous review. Following recommendations by the Procedure Committee and discussions with my right hon. and learned Friend, the Prime Minister has recently written to Cabinet colleagues reminding them of the importance of answering written and parliamentary questions in a timely way and to an acceptable quality. We are, of course, always happy to make representations to Ministers on behalf of Members.

Mr. Turner: The number of ministerial corrections in the column headed MC in *Hansard* seems to be growing. Does that mean that the accuracy of ministerial responses is improving or getting worse?

Barbara Keeley: I have not reviewed that recently, but I am perfectly happy to look into it. Of course, both the Leader of the House and I, and the Procedure Committee, are aware that the number of written questions keeps climbing, and sometimes very large numbers of written parliamentary questions are tabled to Ministers and Departments on the same day. However, if there is interest in checking the accuracy figures, I am certainly happy to do that.

Mr. Lindsay Hoyle (Chorley) (Lab): Obviously, I am sure that the deputy Leader of the House will agree that there seems to be a growing problem with Ministers taking the easy option and saying that they do not have the information available. That could be on the salary of chief executives in the north-west or ambulance times, or even a basic question on Monitor. MPs are being denied such information because Ministers are taking the easy line. Will she do something about this?

Barbara Keeley: I am very happy to take up individual examples. The best response to such issues is to say that if Members give me examples of where they have had issues, I will be happy to write to Ministers and have meetings with them and officials, which I have done quite recently.

Question Time

23. **Mr. Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): If she will bring forward proposals to amend the procedures of the House to prevent hon. Members who have secured a question for oral answer by a Minister from also asking a topical question to the same Minister at the same Question Time. [312139]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Barbara Keeley): When it recommended the introduction of topical questions, the Modernisation of the House of Commons Committee concluded that Members should not have to choose between the two types of question. I understand the hon. Gentleman's point, but the Procedure Committee might have to consider the matter further based on the number of Members called on both substantive and topical questions at the same Question Time.

Mr. Hollobone: Under the old system, for an hour's Question Time to a particular Department, each Member of the House got one chance to ask a question. Under the present procedures, some Members get to ask two questions, while others are frozen out altogether. Given

the interest of the deputy Leader of the House and her boss in issues of equality, would she be kind enough to look seriously at that?

Barbara Keeley: It would be for the hon. Gentleman to make representations to the Procedure Committee if he wanted to have a change. Members feel that topical questions are quite a good opportunity to raise a question without notice, and they have proved to be one of the most popular innovations, so the issue is difficult. The Leader of the House is not responsible for the fairness of the shuffle, but this issue might be something for the Procedure Committee to look at.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

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

Severe Weather (Staffing)

24. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What estimate the House of Commons Commission has made of the number of hours spent by staff covering for colleagues unable to get to work owing to the recent period of severe weather; and if he will make a statement. [312140]

Nick Harvey (North Devon): It is not possible to identify separately the additional hours worked by staff as a result of the recent severe weather, but I am sure that I speak for all Members of the House when I say that we are very grateful to the staff of the House for their commitment and flexibility in ensuring that services to the House and its Committees continued as usual.

Michael Fabricant: The hon. Gentleman has stolen my thunder, because I was going to ask him if he would join me, and indeed the whole House, in praising the valuable work undertaken at a very difficult time by members of staff who came in, in very bad weather, worked quite late on occasions to replace those who were unable to come in, and enabled a functioning democratic process, such as that in our House of Commons, to continue despite the appalling weather conditions.

Nick Harvey: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. We are grateful to those members of staff who battled in against the weather conditions and to those who worked extra hours. The House takes business continuity very seriously and has done everything possible to learn the lessons of last winter.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

The Leader of the House was asked—

Members' Expenses

25. **John Mann** (Bassetlaw) (Lab): When proposals will be brought forward to implement Sir Christopher Kelly's recommendations on hon. Members' expenses; and if she will make a statement. [312141]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Barbara Keeley): In relation to those recommendations of the Committee on Standards in Public Life that were identified as requiring legislation, a written ministerial statement was made by my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House on 10 December 2009 detailing the Government's proposals for legislation. The House will have the opportunity to debate those proposals shortly.

John Mann: We have now got a real dog's breakfast from Sir Ian Kennedy, who has come up with a series of proposals that totally contradict Sir Christopher Kelly. Kennedy clearly does not understand the role of an MP—how he perceives it is more than 30 years out of date. Why are we not implementing Kelly's thought-through proposals in full, so that we can move beyond the problem of MPs' expenses?

Barbara Keeley: MPs did decide not to decide on their own allowances. We have legislated to make the Parliamentary Standards Authority independent, and that body is consulting. I note my hon. Friend's strength of feeling on the issue, but that body is two or three weeks into its consultation. If he has strong concerns, which he clearly does, I would urge him and other right hon. and hon. Members to get involved in that consultation and tell the independent authority what they believe should be happening.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Does the deputy Leader of the House agree that if we are to build on the progress that we have made over 25 years in enabling women in particular to live with their families both in London as Members of Parliament and in their constituencies, it is vital that we should have an allowance system that facilitates that? Moving to a system whereby new Members would be forced to live in tiny state-run flats in London would not help families to stay together in London and their constituencies.

Barbara Keeley: As I have just pointed out, Members have opinions and comments that they want to make, and it is important that they should do so. Sir Ian Kennedy and some of the other IPSA board members were here for a meeting with Members on Monday. They are due to have three other meetings as part of their consultation. I urge the hon. Gentleman to make his points in one of those meetings or in writing, whichever he prefers.

Natascha Engel (North-East Derbyshire) (Lab): I want to add my voice to the concerns expressed about weakening Christopher Kelly's proposals, which were welcomed by every person in this House—well, most people. The proposals outlined by the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority weaken his proposals on travel, employing relatives and the capital gains allowance. My hon. Friend really must keep an eye on the proposals coming out of IPSA, because they are deeply concerning to everybody.

Barbara Keeley: I have to keep re-emphasising that that body is independent. This is not the place to debate such matters. The place to talk about them is in the consultation, either in writing or at meetings; it is not in this Chamber.

Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): Can the deputy Leader of the House explain to some of her colleagues that if Sir Christopher Kelly does not hold a proper consultation, any decision that he makes thereafter will be at risk of being challenged by judicial review? It is therefore in everyone's interest that, for future certainty, there should be a proper consultation, so that whatever proposals emerge are not vulnerable to being struck down by judicial review.

Barbara Keeley: Yes, indeed. The consultation process that is being embarked upon is statutory. The Parliamentary Standards Act 2009 says which Members are to be consulted, but in addition to the specific consultees who are listed, for the first time there will also be a substantial consultation with the public. The public can express their views, Members can and should express theirs, and I urge people to take part in that consultation.

Private Bills

26. **Mr. Peter Bone** (Wellingborough) (Con): If she will bring forward proposals for amendments to Standing Orders to reduce the number of private Bills introduced in a parliamentary Session. [312142]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Barbara Keeley): Private Bills

enable individual local authorities to obtain legal powers that are additional to those generally given to them. Reducing the number of private Bills would mean denying that facility to local authorities or other bodies. Private Bills are also needed to deal with those bodies that are established under private Acts such as the Crossrail Act 2008 and the Channel Tunnel Rail Link Act 1996, which can be amended only by private Bills. I therefore have no plans to bring forward changes to Standing Orders.

Mr. Bone: I regret the response of the deputy Leader of the House. She is quite correct that large-scale projects such as the channel tunnel should be dealt with through private Bills. However, a lot of cities are currently trying to change the law on pedlars through private Bills, which is wasting parliamentary time. This afternoon we will spend another three hours on such Bills. Their number should be limited.

Barbara Keeley: I have figures for the length of time that was spent on private Bills in the 2007-08 Session: it was less than 0.5 per cent. of our sitting time. I am slightly surprised that the hon. Gentleman cannot see the benefits of a localised approach that gives specific powers when they are needed. There tend to be only three or four private Bills each year, and they do help local authorities when they have specific issues.

Exchange Rate Movements (FCO)

11.30 am

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury) (Con) (*Urgent Question*): To ask the Foreign Secretary if he will make a statement on the impact of exchange rate movements on Foreign and Commonwealth Office programmes.

The Minister for Europe (Chris Bryant): I am grateful for this opportunity to make a brief statement. The total Foreign and Commonwealth Office budget comes in at roughly £2 billion, of which only £830 million is discretionary spend, as £1.1 billion is spent on subscriptions to international organisations, peacekeeping and counter-conflict funding, the BBC World Service and the British Council. There are significant challenges to the Foreign and Commonwealth Office budget, not least because 50 per cent. of it is spent in foreign currency, and exchange rate volatility has made it difficult for the Foreign Office.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary said in a reply to the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks (Mr. Hague) on 7 December 2009 that the estimated impact, including that relating to the overseas pricing mechanism, comes to over £100 million in the financial year 2009-10. There has been quite a lot of speculation about what this means for counter-terrorism. The FCO's overseas counter-terrorism budget has increased significantly in recent years. In 2008-09, it was £35 million; in 2009-10, we will be spending £36.9 million, and we are projected to spend around £38 million in 2010-11.

Mr. Lidington: What the Minister failed to confirm—I hope he will do so in a moment—was that his noble Friend Baroness Kinnock explained to the House of Lords yesterday that the Foreign Office was cutting its expenditure on counter-terrorism programmes in Pakistan and on anti-narcotics programmes in Afghanistan, not through any reassessment of strategic priorities but because of the movement of exchange rates and the Government's overall debt crisis. That is not the way to run an effective foreign policy. It is appalling that, yesterday, we had the spectacle of the Prime Minister standing in the House of Commons talking about fighting terrorism, while at the same time in the House of Lords, his Minister was admitting that debt and exchange rate problems meant that the Government were cutting the very counter-terrorist programmes to which they attach such importance in their public statements. That suggests that we have a Government—and, in particular, a Prime Minister—who are indifferent to the point of negligence towards the global interests of the United Kingdom.

I have three questions for the Minister. First, can he explain how the Government got themselves into this mess? We know that the problem started with the decision to end the overseas price mechanism and to transfer exchange rate risk from the Treasury to the Foreign Office. Did Ministers not understand what harm might be done to Britain's international interests as a consequence of that decision, and why did the present Foreign Secretary allow it to happen on his watch?

Secondly, what is the scale of the damage done so far? Can the Minister confirm the figure given to the Foreign Affairs Select Committee by his permanent

secretary—namely, that the cost to the FCO in 2008-09 was £60 million, and Baroness Kinnock's statement yesterday that the shortfall has risen to £110 million in the current financial year and is set to rise further in 2010-11? Will the Minister also confirm that that figure adds up to about a quarter of the budget for the FCO's core activities, once the ring-fenced budgets for the British Council and the BBC World Service have been stripped out?

We know from the permanent secretary's evidence that, as a consequence of this, the FCO has now "stopped most training" and put some staff on involuntary unpaid leave or four-day weeks. We know from what Baroness Kinnock said yesterday that there have been reductions in conflict prevention work in Africa and in climate change programmes—again those to which Ministers have said publicly that they attach great importance. Is it not time for the Government to come clean about what they are doing and to make public a full list of the cuts they are imposing as a result of the debacle of their exchange rate policy?

Thirdly, what are Ministers' intentions for the future? I have seen an internal FCO memorandum from December last year that says

"further cuts could and should not be achieved by salami slicing", but instead by stopping activity, closing posts and reducing staff numbers. Officials have apparently been instructed to work up contingency plans for substantial cuts, which "could be implemented soon after the election".

As always, the difficult decisions are postponed.

The memorandum also states that this plan was discussed with the Foreign Secretary and his ministerial team on 21 December 2009. Did the Minister and his colleagues approve this strategy? In particular, how far has work now proceeded on a contingency list of British posts overseas that now face closure? How many of our embassies face the axe because of the Government's decisions on exchange rate risk, and when will Ministers finally come clean to the House and to the British people about what they are planning?

Chris Bryant: I shall respond first to the hon. Gentleman's questions about counter-terrorism, which I think is accepted by all Members as the overriding and single most important element of the work we have to do. The total amount of money we are spending on counter-terrorism is rising each year and the percentage of the amount we are spending on Pakistan has increased. Pakistan now receives 28 per cent. of the total amount of counter-terrorism spending; Afghanistan 13 per cent.; Saudi Arabia 7 per cent.; east Africa 7 per cent.; and Yemen 5 per cent. We believe that those are the appropriate priorities.

The total spend on Pakistan has therefore gone up from £3.7 million in 2007-08 to £6.2 million in 2008-09, £8.3 million in 2009-10 and we project it to be somewhere between £9 million and £9.5 million in 2010-11. I gently point out to the hon. Gentleman that we have been able to increase that funding because we have taken the right economic decisions for this country. I have never heard from any shadow Treasury Ministers that they would even protect the Foreign Office budget, let alone increase it as we have over the last few years.

The hon. Gentleman referred to the overseas pricing mechanism. We have been completely open about the existence of a problem here, and I think that the hon.

Gentleman must have written his comments before he heard what I said. I said quite clearly that the Foreign Secretary had replied to the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks, to whom I presume the hon. Gentleman occasionally talks. My right hon. Friend wrote to the right hon. Gentleman in December last year, saying that “the estimated impact” was going to be more than £100 million in 2009-10. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that the permanent secretary at the Foreign Office spoke openly and clearly on this matter when questioned by the Foreign Affairs Committee. At no point has there been any element of trying to obfuscate or hide the situation we face from the House or the public. No final decisions have been made about next year’s budget. There are ongoing discussions with the Treasury and I hope that they will be fruitful.

Finally, the hon. Gentleman asked whether there is a list of posts that are going to be closed, whether some embassies are not protected and whether some work is going to come to an end. No, we believe it is vital to maintain our presence in the world, with Britain, as a great nation, making a significant difference around the world. We also believe that the overseas aid budget is an important part of the work we do in Pakistan. We are the second largest donor in the world, and will give £665 million over the period from 2009 to 2013. The hon. Gentleman can huff and puff as much as he wants about this, but unless he is prepared to make commitments about the Conservative party’s funding after a general election, I do not think that anybody will take him seriously.

Mr. Edward Davey (Kingston and Surbiton) (LD): How does the Minister square what he has told the House with what his ministerial colleague Baroness Kinnock said in the House of Lords yesterday? She said:

“Counter-narcotics programmes in Afghanistan, capacity building to help conflict prevention in Africa, and counterterrorism and counter-radicalisation in Pakistan have all been cut”.—[*Official Report, House of Lords, 20 January 2010; Vol. 716, c. 992.*]

In the light of the figures that have been given, is it not the case that the budget for counter-terrorism and counter-radicalisation in Pakistan was much higher at the beginning of this financial year? Why did the Foreign Secretary not demand that the Chancellor and Prime Minister make good any funding gap to secure such important programmes?

What representations have the British Government received from the United States or other allies in Europe and beyond about the impact of such dramatic cuts on our diplomatic efforts with them? If beating terrorism is the Government’s top priority, they are clearly too shambolic to be trusted with the task. The country is at war to make Britain safe from terrorists. To do that, every military, political and diplomatic sinew should be strained. Our troops are risking their lives. If we do not put in the investment to counter the terrorist threat in Pakistan, we betray their efforts.

Chris Bryant: The hon. Gentleman mischaracterises the situation. As I have made clear—[*Interruption.*] He can point to House of Lords *Hansard* as often as he wants, but it will not make any difference to the facts. As I have articulated already, total counter-terrorism spending on Pakistan was £3.7 million in 2007-08,

£6.2 million in 2008-09, £8.3 million in 2009-10, and we project next year’s spending to be between £9 million and £9.5 million.

The hon. Gentleman is right in one sense: of course we would like to be more ambitious, but we have had to curtail our ambitions in this field. On burden sharing in counter-terrorism, the work that we do in Afghanistan and the work that we have done in Iraq, the truth is that this country bears a substantial burden. We have received no representations or criticism from other countries in that regard.

I find it a bit difficult to accept the hon. Gentleman’s comments about the protection of people in this country, because his party has systematically opposed every measure that we felt necessary in that respect.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East) (Lab): As the Minister knows, Lord West, the counter-terrorism Minister, has said that the budget for the security services has increased to £3.5 billion, a 250 per cent. increase. What concerns me about Baroness Kinnock’s comments is the possible impact on the joint visa operation between FCO and Home Office staff. Abdulmutallab was denied a visa to come to this country to attend a bogus college because of the good work of our entry clearance operation. Will the Minister assure the House that that will not be affected by suggestions concerning changes in the rate of exchange, as it is an important way of preventing from coming to this country people who should not be here?

Chris Bryant: My right hon. Friend is right to say that the Foreign Office budget, and the £2 billion under discussion, is not the only budget that affects our relations with different countries. The UK Border Agency budget and the overseas development funding to Pakistan are also significant. We want to ensure that such funds are protected for aid and development, and are not siphoned off, as other parties have suggested, to deal with security issues. The figure does not include the funding of the Secret Intelligence Service, which is protected.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): Will the Minister calmly and clearly tell the House whether Baroness Kinnock’s comments were accurate or not?

Chris Bryant: As I have said to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington), Baroness Kinnock was right that the amount of money that we have spent on counter-terrorism in Pakistan has increased and will increase next year. There is not a cut; we will not spend less next year. However, we will be spending less than we had an ambition to spend.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): Is this not an artificial hullabaloo? Obviously if the exchange rate goes down, things will cost more abroad—every one of our constituents finds that out after taking the Eurostar to Paris. During my eight years as parliamentary private secretary and a Minister, we were constantly closing and opening posts and reallocating budgets.

I was shocked to learn that the actual real spend of the Foreign Office, as announced today, is £830 million, less than 1 per cent. of Government income. I think we should be spending more. However, the Conservatives

[Mr. Denis MacShane]

have an answer: if they win power, they will shut everything down by isolating us from Europe and the rest of the world.

Chris Bryant: My right hon. Friend is right. Ultimately, overall spending on our Foreign Office budget and, for that matter, all the budgets that affect our relations with other countries—including the budget of the Department for International Development—is a question for the whole of Government; and given the Conservatives' deliberate intention to cut budgets now, I do not think they have a leg to stand on.

Mr. Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth, East) (Con): The Minister has now acknowledged that we are going to spend less than was intended. Let me remind him what the Prime Minister said yesterday. He said:

"The action that we are taking to counter terrorism at its source in the Afghanistan-Pakistan region and elsewhere is a central part of our wider counter-terrorist strategy."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 2010; Vol. 504, c. 303.]

May I ask the Minister why he did not include the information that there would be a real-terms cut in spending because of the exchange rate problem?

Chris Bryant: I think that the hon. Gentleman is confusing himself. He refers to a real-terms cut, but there will not be a real-terms cut.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North) (Lab): I applaud my hon. Friend's robust answers to the hon. Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington).

It is obvious that when our currency depreciates overseas costs go up, but does my hon. Friend agree that we must retain that degree of flexibility in our currency for broader economic reasons? Had we been stuck in the euro, we would now be in a disastrous situation, rather like that of Ireland. The Prime Minister must be congratulated on keeping us out of the euro all those years ago.

Chris Bryant: I had a sneaking suspicion that my hon. Friend might refer to this matter. I know from conversations with my counterparts in other Ministries of Foreign Affairs that they are experiencing similar difficult circumstances, because their currencies also vary in relation to other currencies in the world. The exchange rate between the US dollar and the euro has fluctuated significantly over the last two years, which has made things difficult for foreign affairs departments in other countries as well.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Is not this matter another example of the Prime Minister's lack of candour? Yesterday he said:

"We and our allies are still clear that the crucible of terrorism on the Afghan-Pakistan border remains the No. 1 security threat to the west."—[*Official Report*, 20 January 2010; Vol. 504, c. 305.]

He went on to detail what he was seeking to do, but what he omitted to say was that projected spending—anticipated and desired spending—on that very matter was to be cut, as Lady Kinnock has now made plain. Why did the Prime Minister fail to give the House that information?

Chris Bryant: I reject that charge. We have been very open throughout the process. The Foreign Secretary answered questions before the Foreign Affairs Committee, and the permanent under-secretary answered specifically on the issue of the overseas pricing mechanism.

No final decisions have yet been made about next year's budget, but we are engaged in discussions with the Treasury, which has been immensely helpful in trying to examine the issues with us. We want to ensure not only that we meet our absolute priorities, but that all our spending is clearly devoted to those priorities. That is what we are focusing on.

Mr. Tony McNulty (Harrow, East) (Lab): I thank my hon. Friend for confirming that the counter-terrorism spending of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has risen and will continue to do so, especially its spending on Pakistan. Does he agree that the current events are occurring in the context of the largest ever spend by this country—domestic and foreign—on the intelligence and security services, and the largest ever significant spend on developmental and military activities in both Pakistan and Afghanistan, at a time when the Pakistan Government are themselves finally getting to grips with counter-terrorism? In the narrow field of counter-terrorism, at least, the Opposition's charges are irresponsible partisan drivel.

Chris Bryant: My right hon. Friend is right. Elements of the work we have done have not been as effective as we would have liked, and of course we constantly review the question of which are the right things to do. However, it is worth bearing in mind the fact that much of DFID's work in its overall £665 million spend in Pakistan has been focused on education programmes and support for better economic management in Governments, which, I would argue, has had an effect on counter-terrorism as well.

Stewart Hosie (Dundee, East) (SNP): I am sure the Minister would agree that anxiety has been caused by the apparent contradictions between Baroness Kinnock's statement, his statement today on rising budgets, and the reported shortfall of £110 million. However, he did say that he wishes to be open, so can he arrange for a root-and-branch review to be carried out of the FCO's foreign currency exchange operations, including a very close look at how—and, indeed, whether—they hedge against losses? It seems ridiculous to me that a Government the size of this one cannot take the necessary simple steps to minimise the losses from foreign exchange movements.

Chris Bryant: Significant elements of Government spend have, in fact, been assisted by the fluctuation in the value of the pound—my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Kelvin Hopkins) referred to that. It has also made it much cheaper for foreign visitors to come to the UK. The hon. Gentleman is right, however, to suggest that we have to keep this process under constant review. We must also make sure we get the best value for money around the world by balancing how many UK staff we have in different overseas posts, and how many locally employed staff we have, while still maintaining a core team effort across the whole of our presence.

Mr. Shailesh Vara (North-West Cambridgeshire) (Con): I appreciate that there are sensitivities in providing detailed information on the impact of exchange rate fluctuations on British expenditure on counter-intelligence and security measures. However, will the Minister undertake to provide a full list of other areas where exchange rates have an impact, such as staffing? Will he place such a list in the Library for everybody to look at, detailing which countries, embassies and high commissions will be affected?

Chris Bryant: To be honest, I think that would be very burdensome to produce, and it would be a constantly changing document anyway. I am more than happy to be open with the hon. Gentleman, but I am not sure that what he suggests would be helpful. A lot of the British Council's spend is also overseas, so it has faced a difficult time in relation to currency fluctuation as well, whereas the World Service, the vast majority of whose spending is in this country, has not met these problems.

Mr. Greg Hands (Hammersmith and Fulham) (Con): There is also the important question of the hedging of the risk. Can the Minister tell us whether any hedging has taken place since the abolition of the mechanism in 2007, and if so, how much of the 50 per cent. foreign exchange expenditure has indeed been hedged and how it has been hedged? If it has been hedged properly, the gains on the hedge should offset the losses outlined by Baroness Kinnock yesterday.

Chris Bryant: The process of hedging happens within financial years, and I am very happy to write to the hon. Gentleman about it. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary wrote to the shadow Foreign Secretary about this before Christmas.

Mr. Paul Goodman (Wycombe) (Con): As the Minister knows, some of the programmes in Pakistan are anti-radicalisation programmes; they are essentially extensions of the Prevent programme here. Has an assessment been made of the effectiveness of these programmes, and whether or not that is the case, will they be cut?

Chris Bryant: We always have to review the success of such projects. One of the difficulties is that some of the elements of them deliver outcomes only over a sustained period. Consequently, it is difficult at one snapshot moment to assess the precise value and the impact they are having, but the hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that that is one of the things we need to do, and if elements of the programme do not work, we should cut them back and find other ways of engaging that are more effective.

Mr. Andrew Pelling (Croydon, Central) (Ind): Will the Minister respond to his Front-Bench counterpart in respect of the description of the exchange policy as a debacle? It is, in fact, especially well timed to have a devaluation when there is excess capacity, as we get low

inflation. Also, if there has indeed been hedging, as the Minister said in response to the hon. Member for Hammersmith and Fulham (Mr. Hands), does he not accept that it is his responsibility to ensure that money is recouped into this budget and is fully protected?

Chris Bryant: In the Foreign Office, we also have to do a bit of good housekeeping. We are reviewing, and discussing with trade unions, the allowances paid to UK staff based abroad and those working for the Foreign Office in the UK. Where savings can be made that are consonant with ensuring there is a high level of morale in the Foreign Office and we deliver value for money, we will make them.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) (Con): As the Minister will know, the debates on fiscal responsibility that took place in the last few days have demonstrated the fiscal irresponsibility of what he describes as a great nation. He and his Government have brought this country to its knees.

In the context of the issue before us now, the results of setting up European embassies, and also Europol, in Afghanistan, which were discussed in the European Scrutiny Committee only a couple of days ago, are part of this problem. There has been a failure there because we are putting money in the wrong places. We should be using British money for British purposes, and not spending money on completely pointless operations that are not working effectively.

Chris Bryant: As much as I like the hon. Gentleman, I completely and utterly disagree with him. I believe that if we had not taken the necessary financial steps that we took over the last 18 months, and instead had taken his advice and that of his political party, this country and others that have followed similar routes would have ended up in a slump or a depression. I believe the decisions we have made have put us in a stronger position for the future, and I think we will be seeing precisely that over the coming days. I should just say, too, that across the whole of Government, spending on counter-terrorism in Pakistan increased by 50 per cent. from the last financial year to this one.

Mr. Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Can the Minister confirm whether in times past, when exchange rates were the other way round, the Treasury clawed back any surplus? If it did so, does that not go straight to the heart of the argument and suggest that the Treasury should come to the rescue this time?

Chris Bryant: Well, it does not quite work like that, but the way it does work was set out by my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary in a letter to the right hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks, and I think it would help the whole House if I were to lay a copy of that letter in the Library of the House.

Business of the House

11.57 am

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire) (Con): May I ask the Leader of the House to give us next week's business?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Ms Harriet Harman): The provisional business for next week is as follows:

MONDAY 25 JANUARY—Remaining stages of the Financial Services Bill.

TUESDAY 26 JANUARY—Consideration in Committee of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill (day 4).

WEDNESDAY 27 JANUARY—Opposition day [3rd allotted day]. There will be a debate on dementia services and care of the elderly, followed by a debate on out of hours care. Both debates will arise on an Opposition motion.

THURSDAY 28 JANUARY—Topical debate: Subject to be announced; to follow, the Chairman of Ways and Means will name opposed private business for consideration.

FRIDAY 29 JANUARY—Private Members' Bills.

The provisional business for the week commencing 1 February will include:

MONDAY 1 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Flood and Water Management Bill.

TUESDAY 2 FEBRUARY—Consideration in Committee of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill (day 5).

WEDNESDAY 3 FEBRUARY—Motions relating to the police grant and local government finance reports.

THURSDAY 4 FEBRUARY—Remaining stages of the Corporation Tax Bill, followed by remaining stages of the Taxation (International and Other Provisions) Bill.

FRIDAY 5 FEBRUARY—Private Members' Bills.

I should also like to inform the House that the business in Westminster Hall for 4 February will be:

THURSDAY 4 FEBRUARY—A debate from the Joint Committee on Human Rights entitled "Demonstrating Respect for Rights? A Human Rights Approach to Policing Protest".

Sir George Young: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Lady for giving us the forthcoming business. Further to the exchanges that have just taken place, which she might have heard, it struck me that a number of issues were left hanging in the air, so I think it might be helpful to have a debate in Government time on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office budget.

May I repeat my request for a debate on Haiti? The tragic events there have been the most terrifying humanitarian disaster witnessed in recent years, and apart from a very short exchange at Department for International Development questions yesterday, the House has not had an opportunity properly to debate it, so will she take this as a suggestion, yet again, for next week's topical debate?

Further to the exchange of a few moments ago about the Wright report, may I say that I am delighted that at long last the Government have belatedly accepted some of our arguments for strengthening and reforming

Parliament, and that we welcome them to the table? The Leader of the House announced that there would be a debate on 23 February, but what really matters is not what the Government have decided—she told us what that was—but what the House decides. She has denied the House an opportunity to debate this until 23 February, some three months after the Wright Committee reported, and there is no good reason for that delay.

May I again press the Leader of the House for a clear commitment on the question that I asked a few moments ago? If, for the sake of argument, the House agrees on 23 February to the setting up of a Back-Bench business committee—I hope that it will agree to such a committee—can she assure the House that all the necessary changes to Standing Orders will be made before Dissolution, so that at the beginning of the next Parliament, irrespective of who has won, we can establish a Back-Bench business committee? I hope that she can give me and the House that clear commitment.

Mr. Speaker, may we play another round of the popular panel game that the Leader of the House hosts each week, "Guess the date of the Easter recess", which still awaits a winner? I have asked seven times why she has been unable to supply the date in the usual way and, although she does not pause and she does not hesitate, she is extremely repetitive. Can she give us the Easter countdown today? Can she also tell the House when the Chancellor will present his Budget?

Can the right hon. and learned Lady clarify what is going on with the Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill? She has announced two more days for consideration, but there is confusion about whether one of those days will be wasted on debating the alternative vote, when we might be debating the Wright report. Yesterday, the Prime Minister appeared to embrace voting reform, but only three days ago it was reported that the parliamentary Labour party was split down the middle, with the Schools Secretary lobbying against any amendment to the Bill. What is going on? Are we going to debate it? On what side of that dividing line does she lie?

May we have a statement on the Government's nutrition action plan? This was promised by December 2008, but we are now in 2010 and that report has still not been published. All the evidence shows that the incidence of malnutrition in our hospitals is getting worse, not better, so when can the House expect to debate that report? May we also have a debate on the performance of Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs? According to the National Audit Office, the department failed to answer 44 million calls last year, with just one in three inquiries being responded to at busy times, such as when tax credits need to be renewed. Vulnerable people cannot afford to be put on hold, so when can we have a debate about that?

Finally, may we have a debate on the speech on inequality that the right hon. and learned Lady is due to make tomorrow? The whole country will be bewildered by the total confusion in the Government's strategy on this. One week we are told that the Prime Minister wants to soak the rich, the next week, following a conversation with Lord Mandelson, he is promising support for middle Britain and now the right hon. and learned Lady is promising to open up a new front in the class war. Is this confusion due to the Labour party manifesto being dreamt up on the hockey fields of St. Paul's?

Ms Harman: I join the right hon. Gentleman in acknowledging the great importance of the international effort to tackle the appalling suffering that has followed the earthquake in Haiti. I wish to pay tribute to the search and rescue teams that have gone out from this country and to say how important the Department for International Development aid contribution is, not only in terms of the search and rescue effort, but of the assessment of and contribution towards the reconstruction that will be required. I should also say how important the incredible generosity of the British public is. I believe that about £20 million of additional aid has been pledged immediately by DFID, but that about £26 million has come from donations by individual members of the public, not only those who have relatives and friends in Haiti, but other good-hearted people who want to help do their part in alleviating the suffering. Not everything good that happens is done by government.

Last week, we made a statement on Haiti and this week, as the right hon. Gentleman said, we had DFID questions and the issue was also addressed in Prime Minister's questions. I agree with the right hon. Gentleman that we need to keep the House updated on Government and international action, and we need an opportunity for Members to contribute. I shall look for an opportunity, in some form or another, for Haiti to be debated on the Floor of the House next week.

On the Wright Committee, yes, of course, what is important is what the House decides. Although I think that it is perfectly right and proper that we place before the people at the general election a big choice of an alternative view as to how Britain goes forward, with the Tories on one side and us on the other—and the other parties in the fray too—when it comes to the way this House operates, we should surely be able to work together, as the hon. Member for Macclesfield (Sir Nicholas Winterton) said earlier, to try to make progress. I shall offer to have plenty of fights with the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young) on many issues and on many occasions, but can we just try to work together sensibly on this, because on 23 February we might be able to make some progress? Rather than spending a lot of time saying, “Why is it on 23 February, rather than 23 January?”, let us get on with working together to ensure that we make our 23 February debate an opportunity to make progress. If we make progress then, we will, as I said earlier in questions to the Leader of the House, be able to pass resolutions that put into effect the proposals from the Wright Committee, so that they can begin in operation before the House rises.

As far as Easter is concerned, it is on 4 April.

On the Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill—I shall call it the CRAG Bill, as I keep getting the name wrong—we have had a full day on Second Reading and three days on the Floor of the House for the Committee stage already. We have two further days on the Floor of the House, thus making five days in Committee. We have a day on Report and Third Reading, which makes seven days in all. A number of Committees have looked at this Bill, including a Committee of both Houses that looked at the draft Bill, so this House will have given it thorough scrutiny, and the proposals that will be introduced by way of Government amendments or new clauses will be brought forward in the normal way.

On HMRC and tax credits, the right hon. Gentleman can be sure that we are pledged to continue to improve tax credits, which make a very big difference to families on middle and modest incomes. We want to support those who are working, and working hard, by topping up their income with tax credits, and we will continue to support the way that that is distributed.

On equality, it is clear from reading the statement that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government made just before last week on race and socio-economic inequality or the Government response via the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to the Milburn report on access to the professions, as well as the Department of Health's report on health inequalities—the Marmot report—that will be considered soon or the very important report from the National Equality Panel, which is chaired by Sir John Hills, which will be published next week, that this Government is in no doubt that this country ought to be a place where everyone, no matter what their family background, no matter whether they are a man or a woman and no matter what their ethnic origin, can achieve their full potential. We should have a fair society where everyone can fulfil their aspirations, not one held back by prejudice or discrimination. The Hills report will show that we have halted the inequality that increased so badly in the '80s and '90s, but we have to take more action to eradicate it, for the sake of not only every individual, but of having a prosperous economy and a peaceful society.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): May I welcome the indication that the Leader of the House gave that there would be a debate on Haiti? In her response on that issue, she mentioned the exchanges at yesterday's Prime Minister's questions. May I say that it was hugely welcome that the Prime Minister made a short statement on Haiti, and did so in considerable detail? However may I put it to the Leader of the House that there is a growing tendency for Ministers and, in particular, the Prime Minister to use short Question Times to make what are, in effect, statements, and that that is not helpful to Back Benchers who want to put questions? If there is a statement to be made, will the right hon. and learned Lady encourage her right hon. Friends to make it as a statement rather than using Question Time to do so?

Yesterday, the Prime Minister was also asked a very pertinent question, it seemed to me, by my right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr. Clegg) about the takeover of Cadbury. The Prime Minister's answer was—how can I put it—a little bit “Curly Wurly”, and possibly even “Flake-y”. May we have a statement from the relevant Department on the role of the Royal Bank of Scotland—a bank owned by the British people—in providing the finance for a takeover of a British company by an American conglomerate? That issue must be answered.

May I welcome the additional day that has now been provided—I had a bit to say about this when we debated the programme motion on Tuesday—for consideration of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill? However, the right hon. and learned Lady has still not answered the question put by the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire (Sir George Young), the shadow Leader of the House. Will she simply say, without equivocation, whether a Government amendment on

[Mr. David Heath]

the reform of our electoral system will be tabled for debate in Committee? Yes or no? She must have decided by now, surely; it has been fought over for weeks. Will she tell us whether there will be such a Government amendment?

May we have a debate on the continuing problem, which I know affects a lot of Members on both sides of the House, of funding in further education and the activities of the Learning and Skills Council? After the fiasco of last year, a huge number of decisions are waiting on a backlog of schemes that were given provisional support but on which the funding has not been confirmed. That delay affects a college in my constituency, Frome community college, and the college is now desperate to know whether the scheme, which is supposed to be going ahead this year, can go ahead and whether the funding will be provided. May we have a debate on that?

May I return to a point made by the right hon. Member for North-West Hampshire? The Leader of the House has answered, very helpfully, with the date of Easter. I am personally not terribly interested in the dates of the Easter recess, but I am very interested to know when the Budget will be. Will she tell us what the date of the Budget will be?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman mentioned statements and the question of Haiti. As I have said, we had a full statement from the Secretary of State for International Development on Haiti and I think that it was important for the Prime Minister to update the House yesterday during Prime Minister's questions. It is important not just that we hear from the Secretary of State but that the Prime Minister has the opportunity to update the House. The Prime Minister has made an unprecedented number of statements in the House on a range of issues and we will continue to keep the House informed on action in Haiti.

As for the Cadbury's debate, I would certainly not want to give a "Flake-y" response. Perhaps I can give a "Crunchie" response and tell the hon. Gentleman that there will be an Adjournment debate on the matter on the Floor of the House next week. This is an important issue because people are concerned not only about their pride in this historic brand but, above all, about the work that is generated for 5,500 people in factories up and down the country. It will be debated on the Floor of the House next week.

On the Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill, the Secretary of State for Justice will bring forward amendments and new clauses in the normal way. This is not an occasion for the announcement of Government new clauses on individual Bills.

On the Learning and Skills Council, I shall ask Business Ministers to look into the case of Frome community college. We all recognise that despite the fact that there has been a great deal of important extra funding for further and higher education, the LSC presided over mismanagement on that very important programme, which is only just being sorted out. I shall ask Ministers to look into the case of that college but I have to say to the hon. Gentleman that Frome community college and all other further and higher education would not prosper if his party had its way and introduced savage cuts.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. Twenty-seven right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. As always, I should like to be able to accommodate everybody, but if I am to have any chance of doing so, I shall require the help of the House in the form of short questions and short answers.

Hazel Blears (Salford) (Lab): I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend can clear something up for me. On 4 January, the Leader of the Opposition said that giving married couples a tax break was

"something we want to do, something we believe we can do"

and

"something...I'll definitely hope to do".

Will my right hon. and learned Friend provide time on the Floor of the House for a debate on married couple's allowance so that we can all be enlightened about the difference between a promise, a belief, an aspiration, a pledge and any other word that might describe the Leader of the Opposition's policy?

Ms Harman: I note that the Opposition have not chosen the married couple's allowance as the topic for their Opposition day debate next week. One thing that my right hon. Friend's question brings out is the fact that families cannot rely on the Opposition. They can rely on this Government to back them up. We would not penalise women who get divorced and we would not use a tax penalty to penalise men who find themselves divorced. We want to support families in all shapes and sizes, including not only families made up of parents and children but grandparents, who play an important role.

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The Leader of the House will know of the work of the Liaison Committee in improving financial scrutiny in this House, which has led to the alignment project in the Treasury, which I welcome. As we will debate increasing the powers of Select Committees on 23 February, will she say that she is at least open-minded—I am not asking for a commitment—about giving Select Committees more resources through the Scrutiny Unit and eventually more powers through substantive motions to control spending in the House of Commons, which was a traditional function of the House of Commons?

Ms Harman: The Wright Committee made some recommendations in that regard and when we come to the debate on 23 February, that issue can be thoroughly aired.

Jacqui Smith (Redditch) (Lab): May I push my right hon. and learned Friend on the subject of a debate about support for families so that I can raise the concerns of working parents across Redditch—married and unmarried—who fear that they will lose the little bit of help that comes from their tax credit as well as access to Redditch's children's centres so that funding can be given to an unthought-through and ill-conceived tax break to encourage them up the aisle?

Ms Harman: It might well be a good idea to have a debate on this issue. On that occasion, we will ask the Opposition to explain whether they think that any couple has got married thinking, "Well, we weren't

going to get married but we will get married now because we have heard that there will be a tax break.” Relationships do not work like that and there is no evidence that couples can be made to stay happy together simply on the basis of a tax break. The point about the proposed tax break is that it will not work when it comes to making families happy together. However, it will penalise those who find that their marriage has failed and stigmatise children in families who have not stayed together. Such a debate might be a good opportunity to air the subject on the Floor of the House.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): May we have a debate on the impact of the Human Rights Act 1998 on immigration? On Monday, the Bradford *Telegraph and Argus* reported how the Somali man who hid the killer of PC Sharon Beshenivsky won his appeal against deportation on the grounds of human rights, rightly angering the family of Sharon Beshenivsky and the West Yorkshire police federation. Surely, when the Government passed the Human Rights Act, they did not have it in mind that it would stop Somali nationals who hide the killers of police officers from being deported from the country.

Ms Harman: The Human Rights Act is a matter for interpretation by the courts, but whenever the Government believe that an interpretation by the courts has crossed the line and interfered with national security, we do not hesitate to take action either to appeal or to amend the substantive law.

Mr. Parmjit Dhanda (Gloucester) (Lab): Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider a debate in parliamentary time on the subject of regional spatial strategies and their current status, particularly in the south-west, where we have been waiting for them for quite some time? As we have been waiting, local authorities such as Stroud district council have been working with speculators and developers to dump their entire housing allocations on the end of places such as Tuffley in the Gloucester district area. Clarity, an early debate and early decisions would be very helpful.

Ms Harman: Perhaps that is something that my hon. Friend, who I know strongly supports the communities living in his constituency, can raise in Communities and Local Government questions next week.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): I indicated earlier at Question Time that I welcomed the debate on the reform of the House, and that I shall certainly support the motions to be tabled by the Leader of the House. However, will she admit that there is ongoing concern that the House Committee that she has announced will deal only with Back-Bench business and not with the overall business of the House? Does she accept that there has been no mention as yet of the reduction or removal of guillotines—programme motions—on the remaining stages of a Bill? Those stages are very important for Back Benchers who were not part of the Public Bill Committee and were not called to speak in the Second Reading debate.

Ms Harman: The Wright Committee made a great many proposals on a wide range of issues, and recognised that they needed to be taken forward step by step. The

hon. Gentleman is absolutely right: what I said in my comments this morning, and what the Prime Minister said yesterday, was that we had identified the need for a House Committee for Back-Bench business to be brought forward. I hope that we can agree that on 23 February. I also hope that those who think that we should have a House Committee for Government business will not make the best the enemy of the good, and that we can achieve a wide range of agreement the next time we debate the matter on 23 February.

Martin Salter (Reading, West) (Lab): I am sure that the Leader of the House remains a committed reformer of Parliament, but the Prime Minister made the incredible commitment yesterday that he would implement all three tranches of the Wright Committee report. Will she assure the House that there will be an immediate vote as well as a full debate on 23 February on the resolution that the Wright Committee prepared, rather than any other device?

Ms Harman: Actually, there are four tranches, as follows: the Chairs of Select Committees to be elected by the House, the membership of Select Committees, private Members’ motions that can be brought to the House to be debated and voted on, and the question of the House Committee. We want to take the opportunity to debate those matters and then adopt resolutions to give them effect. If, as I hope and expect, there is consensus in the House on those four areas, we want to get work under way. The point is to make a start on those matters over which there is the widest possible agreement.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The right hon. and learned Lady will have heard the evidence given to the Chilcot inquiry by the former Defence Secretary, the right hon. Member for Ashfield (Mr. Hoon), to the effect that it was the decisions of the present Prime Minister that resulted in British forces going to war in Iraq under-resourced, and in the lack of helicopters in Afghanistan. She will also have heard the Prime Minister’s statement that he is willing to give evidence to the inquiry before the general election. Can we have a debate next week so that the House can encourage Sir John Chilcot to call the Prime Minister to give an account of his activities before the general election?

Ms Harman: The Prime Minister has made it clear that the Chilcot inquiry operates under the general procedures that usually govern such inquiries. Sir John Chilcot has said that he will take as much of the evidence in public as he can without risking national security. The Prime Minister has said that he will give evidence as and when requested to do so. We should leave it to the members of the independent Chilcot inquiry to get on with their work, and not constantly breathe down their necks or tell them whom they should call, and when. We should not try to discuss the results of the inquiry before it has even produced a report.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley) (Lab): May we have an early debate on a possible conflict of interest in the Office of the Rail Regulator? The ORR has responsibility for both investment and safety, but we now discover that 1,500 front-line workers are to be made redundant

[Mrs. Ann Cryer]

by Network Rail. Those people have responsibility for track inspection and maintenance, overhead cabling and signalling, all of which are crucial to the safety of the railways for passengers and rail workers. Could we therefore have a look at this conflict of interest?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend is a great champion of rail users. She has urged that more freight as well as more passengers should go by rail, and she is also a great champion of those who work on the railways. Perhaps I could suggest that she raise the issues that she has brought to the House today with Ministers at Transport questions next week.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon) (LD): The Wright Committee, which was elected by this House, addressed itself to the problems that arise at Report stage, when key groups of amendments go undebated and key decisions on legislation are not even put to the House. In its conclusions, the Committee said that

“we recognise that unless the current problems in this area are resolved, then there will continue to be dissatisfaction and a sense that the House is failing to perform one of its core duties. In those circumstances, we will have failed one of the primary parts of our mission.”

Does the Leader of the House agree?

Ms Harman: Well, I agree that we should do everything that we can to make sure that all aspects of a Bill are scrutinised at all stages, but to some extent that is in the hands of the House. One thing that I will never understand is why people who justifiably complain about the lack of time to debate substantive issues use up loads of time on procedural motions. If we used that time to debate the substantive issues, we would reach more conclusions.

Dr. Tony Wright (Cannock Chase) (Lab): This is normally a session for complaints and demands, so may I simply say that I welcome what the Leader of the House has said about a secure date for the House to consider the report from the House of Commons Reform Committee? In addition, I endorse her hope that the House will want to operate on a consensual basis, and that there will be a mechanism enabling it to come to some firm decisions.

Ms Harman: I am glad to have the opportunity to thank my hon. Friend for his very important work in proposing the Committee. His effective leadership has brought the Committee very quickly to some profound and radical solutions. I think that Members of this House can have major arguments, debates, disagreements and rows about the economy, public services and the sort of society that we want in the future, but I hope that we can at least agree on a non-partisan basis about how to ensure that the House works better in future.

Mr. Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): My concern about the Wright report is that the consensus will be between the Executive and the shadow Executive, and that it will not take the views of Back Benchers into account. The consensus must be across the House, and not just between the two Executives.

Ms Harman: I hope that we can build a consensus across the whole House based on the proposals made by the Wright Committee, which is a Back-Bench Committee.

I do not think that any of its members would say that they were responding to pressure from either the Executive or the shadow Executive, and they would give anyone who suggested that a dusty answer. The Wright Committee is made up of Back Benchers, and we have responded to their proposals by saying, “Fair enough, let’s get on with implementing a great many of them.”

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle) (Lab): Do the Government intend to bring in a stand-alone Bill to deal with non-doms in Parliament, or will the Government rely on amending the Constitutional Reform Act 2005?

Ms Harman: We are determined to make sure that people who are not prepared to be registered as taxpayers domiciled in this country cannot purport to represent taxpayers in constituencies or legislate in the House of Lords in ways that affect taxpayers. The only real question—my hon. Friend has adverted to it—concerns the right vehicle for bringing the matter to the House. We expect to reach a conclusion on that shortly and to bring it to the House.

Ann Winterton (Congleton) (Con): Notwithstanding the fact that there will be a defence review in the next Parliament, whoever wins the general election, may we have a debate on future defence policy in the light of the thought-provoking speech to the International Institute for Strategic Studies by the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir David Richards? We need such a debate not least because of the profound implications for the three services, and for procurement in particular.

Ms Harman: The hon. Lady will know that we have regular defence debates. There will probably be one next month, so perhaps she can amplify her comments then.

Natascha Engel (North-East Derbyshire) (Lab): I, too, welcome the announcement of a debate on the Wright Committee report on 23 February. Normally, honourable parliamentarians on both sides of the House would share my disdain when changes are introduced to legislation or to the procedures of the House on a nod and a wink and under the cloak of consensus, but that does not apply in this case. I was a member of the Committee and I was not part of that consensus. Will my right hon. and learned Friend guarantee that none of the proposals will be introduced without a full debate on every issue? I do not share the consensus on electing the Chairs and members of Select Committees, or on the establishment of a House business Committee. I have deep concerns about those proposals, and I want a full debate on them. I am not part of this consensus.

Ms Harman: There will be a full debate, and I hope that there will be reassurances on my hon. Friend’s concerns. I know that she played a full part in the Committee, but following its majority decisions, we would like to see changes made in the four areas that I have identified.

Mr. Ian Liddell-Grainger (Bridgwater) (Con): The Independent Planning Commission is about to receive an application from Hinkley Point in Somerset. Everything is going well, and I am very grateful for the Government’s support, but we have hit a snag. The relevant Department also has to do its own consultation, and it is not doing it

properly. Can we please have time to debate that? Unless the IPC gets the application right, the application could be knocked back or, worse still, undermine the whole IPC system. Can we have time to discuss that?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman could raise that issue in Communities and Local Government questions next week and obtain an answer from the Secretary of State or one of the Ministers in that Department.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): May we have an early debate about debt, debt collection and, in particular, the activities of bailiffs? I have received an increasing number of complaints from constituents, many of them young single mums, about the intimidating and bullying behaviour of debt collectors. Although people should pay back their debt, they should not be subject to such behaviour. One of the big issues is that people do not understand their rights in terms of access to their homes, so can we have a debate as soon as possible about that issue?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend makes an important point, about which a number of hon. Members might be concerned, so in the first instance he might seek a debate on the Adjournment or in Westminster Hall.

Mr. Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): May we have a statement from the fire services Minister about the tremendously good work that British firefighters, who are specialists in urban search and rescue, are doing in Haiti? I had the privilege of visiting their state-of-the-art training facility at Moreton-in-Marsh in Gloucestershire, and their tremendously good work really should be commended.

Ms Harman: I am sure that everybody agrees with those sentiments. If the hon. Gentleman wants a further chance to question Communities and Local Government Ministers, he should take up the opportunity next week at Communities and Local Government questions.

Julie Morgan (Cardiff, North) (Lab): There has been a further welcome fall in the unemployment figures for Wales this week, but many of my constituents will suffer from the announcement that Bosch, in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (John Smith), will close with the loss of 900 jobs. When can we have a debate not only about the very welcome measures that the Government have introduced to help people who lose their jobs, but to discuss what more can be done?

Ms Harman: We remain very concerned about the jobs question, which is very much at the top of our agenda, and I shall refer to the Business Secretary and the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions the points that my hon. Friend has made. I agree with her about how important it is that, for the first time, unemployment has gone down—based not only on the claimant count, but on the International Labour Organisation unemployment rate. That is in marked contrast with previous recessions, when unemployment went up dramatically and continued to rise long after the economy had returned to growth. That shows, in a reversal of the Tory election slogan, that Labour is working.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury) (Con): The Leader of the House will be aware of increasing public concern at excessive bank charges and the Office of Fair Trading's decision to throw in the towel. Can we have a debate, in Government time, about the Government's failure to extract a voluntary agreement? They promised that they would extract one from the banks, but they have so far failed.

Ms Harman: I agree with the hon. Gentleman that we need strong regulation and regulatory bodies to protect consumers. We have no doubt about that; it is his party, generally speaking, that regards such measures as the nanny state, as a burden on business and as a surfeit of regulation. However, if he wants to support our stance of leaving no stone unturned to protect consumers and ensure the right regulations, he can work with us to achieve it.

Mr. Richard Caborn (Sheffield, Central) (Lab): May I reinforce the request for a debate about married couples' tax breaks, a policy that contrasts starkly with the concerns of my constituents, who have benefited hugely from child tax credits and the child trust fund? My constituents are greatly concerned by such "back to basics" Victorian standards. The real worry is that the Leader of the Opposition is becoming more and more a captive of the right-wing of his party, which, as I have said, contrasts very much with this Government's approach to tax breaks for the family.

Ms Harman: My right hon. Friend has hit the nail on the head. It is a modern-day version of "back to basics"—it is "back to basics" with an open-necked shirt. People want good support for families, which come in all shapes and sizes, and we rightly have child tax credits, child trust funds and Sure Start centres. Those are the practical measures that help families make their way in life, and it does not help families to be told by politicians of any Government that they should get married and stay happily married. No Government's Ministers have all been able to manage that, so how can we tell people, through tax relief, that they should be able to do so?

Mr. Andrew Pelling (Croydon, Central) (Ind): I am grateful to you for calling me towards the end of these proceedings, Mr. Speaker, which saves my having to go to the gym, which I need to go to because I have been eating too much chocolate. Everyone keeps referring to chocolate, but that is very dangerous. Fudge is obviously the chocolate of choice for us here; the Leader of the House obviously has a soft caramel centre; and I have a close connection with Frank Muir's and Cadbury's "Fruit and Nut Case".

To be serious, I must say that we can benefit from more people visiting the Palace of Westminster, but unfortunately, as we tell visitors, it has a habit of burning down. Bearing in mind that there is now a different line of route, through Westminster Hall, what can be done to ensure that there are proper facilities to advise people of any emergency, and that we are able to detect fires as early as possible?

Ms Harman: That is an important issue not just for Members, but for those who work for Members, all other staff and, as the hon. Gentleman has said, people who visit. The House has a detailed programme of

[Ms Harman]

works to make the whole parliamentary estate compliant with fire safety legislation. That programme is based on an assessment of fire risk and is planned to be completed over a number of years. It includes the installation of automatic fire detection and voice alarm systems, fire compartmentalisation and detailed services. I shall ask the House authorities to write to him with further information.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North) (Lab): I strongly support the request by my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer). There are also serious concerns about the feeble performance of the rail franchise companies—especially First Capital Connect—about the ordering of new rolling stock from foreign producers rather than British-based producers and about the future, given the inadequacies of, and cuts in, rail freight capacity. We need a wide-ranging, general debate about the whole railway industry.

Ms Harman: Transport questions take place next week, as I told my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer), but my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Kelvin Hopkins) has raised broader issues that go beyond an oral question to the Minister during that session. I shall therefore consider the issues that my hon. Friend has put forward, possibly for a topical debate.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): It should come as no surprise to the Leader of the House that immigration is one of the British people's top concerns, having had 13 years of our immigration system's shambolic mismanagement by the current Government. Will she make time for a debate about the subject? If we do not tackle it, the gainers will be those on the far right, whom none of us wants to succeed.

Ms Harman: The House considers immigration regularly, not only in statements but in questions, and the Prime Minister answered a question about it from the hon. Gentleman yesterday. However, I shall keep under review the question of whether there should be a full and further debate.

Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central) (Lab): Clause 1 of the Equality Bill gives legislative backing to my right hon. and learned Friend's words a few moments ago about the impact of socio-economic class in our society, and the importance of making not simply a statement about but a reality of Britain as a nation where no child is limited by, among other things, their socio-economic class, which has disfigured this nation for so long. Will my right hon. and learned Friend tell the House whether the Equality Bill, which is now in the Lords, will come back with that part intact, so that we can say to the British people that it is a Labour Government who have put that legislation into practice?

Ms Harman: I thank my hon. Friend for that question. We considered the Equality Bill in the House of Commons, and we included in it clause 1, which requires all public authorities, when taking big decisions and taking action, to consider how they play their part in narrowing the gap between rich and poor and making for a more fair and equal society. Despite the fact that the Tories voted in Committee against that measure for social mobility

and for people to achieve their aspirations, the Bill has gone to the House of Lords, and I fully expect it to come back to the House of Commons with that clause in it. We want to see a more fair and equal society. We have made a lot of progress, but more progress needs to be made.

Mr. Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth, East) (Con): May I underline the calls for a debate on Haiti and British involvement and support there? Yesterday, the Prime Minister announced that a decision has been made to send the Royal Fleet Auxiliary Largs Bay to the Caribbean. It will take three weeks for that ship to arrive. We already have a ship there, HMS Iron Duke, which has marines on board, helicopter support and so forth. It could provide assistance immediately instead of waiting for three weeks. I urge the Leader of the House to allow us to have a debate on Haiti immediately.

Ms Harman: As I have said, we have had a statement and the Prime Minister's response on this. I would hate the hon. Gentleman to give the wrong impression to people who care so much about the fact that we should do everything we can to help people faced by the devastation in Haiti. We are providing immediate assistance with our search and rescue teams out there. We provided immediate additional resources to the international aid effort, so we are not waiting three weeks. However, we recognise that the effort to help people in Haiti will need to go on for much longer than the immediate crisis period. Therefore, we will be fully engaged with the need to plan not only for the immediate term but for the next months and, indeed, years. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman would agree with that.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): Will my right hon. and learned Friend find time for an urgent debate on the role of the Governor of the Bank of England? Will the board—that is, the Cabinet—consider giving him the football manager's vote of confidence, so that we can get someone in who actually knows about the economy such as David “Danny” Blanchflower?

Ms Harman: We all heard David Blanchflower's comments. Labour Members support the idea that there should be public investment to ensure that the recovery in the economy takes root, so that we do not take any risk with the recovery and threaten it by pulling the plug on public investment.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am pleased to tell the House that after the exchanges between the shadow Leader of the House and the Leader of the House, 27 Members from the Back Benches who wished to contribute to business questions were able to do so in the period of 28 minutes occupied by those Back-Bench exchanges. That shows what can be done when the spirit is willing, both among those Back Benchers and, indeed, very creditably and fortunately, on the part of the Leader of the House. I am grateful to the House for its co-operation.

ROYAL ASSENT

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

Video Recordings Act 2010

Beverley Freeman Act 2010.

Point of Order

12.44 pm

Mr. Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I seek your advice about the conduct of business for the rest of the day? I see from the Order Paper that the next debate is going to run for one and a half hours, which would take us to about quarter past 2, but the business after that does not start until 3 o'clock. Will you advise the House on why the Leader of the House and the appropriate authorities have not made appropriate provision for the efficient conduct of business today?

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. I think that I am right in saying that the requirement that the private Bills set down for debate this day should begin at 3 pm is a requirement of the Standing Orders of the House. That is, I hope, the conclusive answer to question posed by the hon. Gentleman.

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Barbara Keeley): Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. The Leader of the House tabled a motion to vary that requirement for today, so that we would have been able to start that business as soon the topical debate had finished, but Conservative Members objected to it. That is why we will have to suspend the House, wasting time on procedural matters, which relates to the point that the Leader of the House made earlier. I hope that we will not be doing too much of that in future, because we could have got on with this afternoon's business more promptly.

Mr. Speaker: I am very grateful to the Deputy Leader of the House. Obviously, it is not a matter for me to say anything about wasting time; I would not dream of making such a partisan remark. However, I think that I owe the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Hollobone) an apology, because I suggested that my own response to his point of order might be considered to be conclusive. Clearly, it was not, but it is fair to say that the response by the Deputy Leader of the House was indeed conclusive.

Food Industry Competitiveness

12.46 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Jim Fitzpatrick): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of food industry competitiveness.

Let me begin by congratulating the food sector on its progress as a successful industry that provides us with a wide range of tasty and healthy foods. The industry contributes more than £80 billion to our economy and is our largest manufacturing sector; the food and farming industries employ 3.6 million people. The industry contains high-tech and innovative companies and is well placed to meet the challenges of the future: producing more food, for more people, while minimising its environmental impact on the planet, adapting to a low-carbon future and continuing to make more efficient use of resources.

To meet these challenges, the Government's food strategy, "Food 2030", which we published on 5 January, sets out our vision of what the food system should look like in 2030. The industry welcomed this vision; I thank the National Farmers Union, the Food and Drink Federation and the British Retail Consortium for their words of support. A thriving food sector will be better placed to invest in the changes necessary to deliver that vision. The Government are committed to fostering competitive markets that work in the best interest of consumers, and the groceries supply chain is no different. By looking for ways to help make markets work better, we can enable businesses to compete freely and fairly, giving UK consumers more choice and better value.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): With that in mind, when will the Government bring forward legislation on the supermarket ombudsman or support the private Member's Bill promoted by my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen)? The hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George) and I, among others, want that to be done in this Parliament rather than waiting for a future Parliament.

Jim Fitzpatrick: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his question. If he will bear with me, I will come to that when I discuss in some detail the Government's announcement that we are in favour of an ombudsman following the conclusion of considerations by the Competition Commission, which has made a number of recommendations. The Office of Fair Trading also has a role to play. I know that he and many other Members in all parts of the House have been lobbying for this initiative for some considerable time, and it has been welcomed pretty much across the piece.

Lynne Jones (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab) rose—

Jim Fitzpatrick: I will give way to my hon. Friend, but I am limited to 10 minutes and I want to get my remarks across so that as many colleagues as possible can contribute and I can respond in due course.

Lynne Jones: In advance of my Adjournment debate on Tuesday on Cadbury, and because I have to leave for a constituency engagement, may I take this opportunity to ask the Minister what lessons the Government are learning from the hostile takeover of Cadbury, which

[Lynne Jones]

has meant that a well-run, debt-free company is now saddled with billions of pounds-worth of debt while those who have no interest in the long-term health of that company or any other industry have made a huge killing?

Jim Fitzpatrick: As my hon. Friend knows, that is a matter primarily for the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and my noble Friend Lord Mandelson and his ministerial colleagues are examining it closely. We want to ensure that the best interests of the UK economy, UK production and UK workers are to the fore in the consideration of the takeover. I am a West Ham United supporter and, having followed the football club's recent takeover, I know that anybody who is interested in any takeover of a commercial operation wants to ensure that it is as successful as possible. I know that the Cadbury-Kraft issue will evolve in the weeks and months ahead, and my hon. Friend and many other Members will take a keen interest and wish everybody success.

As I said, there has been mounting concern over recent years among various industry and lobbying groups about the power of the major supermarkets and the impact that that has on the supply of groceries, including the ability of local producers to access markets. The Government and the Office of Fair Trading shared those concerns and asked the Competition Commission to investigate the groceries market and see whether supermarket power was detrimental to consumer interests. We welcomed the commission's final report, published last year, and thanked it for its work.

The commission found that in many respects, competition between supermarkets was strong and working effectively. Competition in the groceries market provides consumers with diverse choice, good value and low prices, and that is reflected in the numbers of shoppers who choose to buy their groceries in supermarkets. However, the commission identified two adverse effects on competition—areas in which the market structure does not work in the best interests of consumers.

The first finding was that in some areas local groceries markets were dominated by single retail chains, restricting the choice available to shoppers. We are still considering our response to that. The second finding was that certain supermarkets' practices passed unacceptable risks or costs on to suppliers—mainly food manufacturers and processors—creating high levels of uncertainty about their income and so limiting their ability to invest and innovate.

The commission proposed a number of remedies and recommendations to address the adverse effects on competition identified. They included a new groceries supply code of practice—GSCOP—for all supermarkets with a turnover of more than £1 billion a year. The Office of Fair Trading will play an important role in overseeing its implementation. Additionally, the commission recommended that the Government establish an ombudsman, as my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) mentioned, to monitor GSCOP and arbitrate disputes between suppliers and retailers.

That is a complex issue, and we have considered the recommendation carefully. My hon. Friend the Minister for Further Education, Skills, Apprenticeships and

Consumer Affairs announced on 13 January that he agreed with the Competition Commission that there was a need for a body to enforce the code of practice independently, to prevent retailers from being able to pass excessive risks and unexpected costs on to their suppliers. To support that, it was decided that the ombudsman should also have the important power of hearing anonymous complaints.

The revised code of practice is a great improvement on the current regime. However, the power that large grocery retailers remain able to wield over their suppliers can still create pressures on small producers, especially in these difficult economic times. Ultimately, that may have an impact on consumers.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Does the Minister not accept that the best ombudsman is the customer? I have no idea about the Minister's experience of working in the supermarket industry, but does he not agree that for any supermarket to succeed, by definition it has to have good relationships with its suppliers?

Jim Fitzpatrick: The hon. Gentleman makes a very good point. It is important that the retail sector has good relationships with its suppliers, and by and large that is the case across the piece. However, in the course of the investigations into the relationship between supermarkets and producers, processors and the farming industry, it became clear that there had been some abuses. For example, sometimes there were no written contracts between the retail sector and the producers and processors, which seems very strange in this day and age. Also, prices were being changed after the event, which meant that the price that a producer or processor expected was not reflected in the cheque that came through the post from the retailers. Those abuses were taken into account, which was why the strengthened code of practice was produced and why all parties concluded that an ombudsman of some description would be appropriate to oversee the application of the new code. We were not convinced that the system was working as effectively as it could have done.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury) (Con) *rose*—

Nick Herbert (Arundel and South Downs) (Con) *rose*—

Jim Fitzpatrick: I give way to the hon. Member for Arundel and South Downs (Nick Herbert), who leads for the Opposition. If the hon. Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) will allow me a couple of minutes, I will give way to him if I can get through my remarks.

Nick Herbert: I am grateful to the Minister. Does he agree that the Competition Commission was clear that the absence of action would have meant suppliers innovating and investing less, and that crucially, that would not be in the interests of the consumer and could lead to higher prices in future? The chairman of the commission said recently that the economic downturn was a reason for action, not inaction.

Jim Fitzpatrick: The hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. Processors and producers needed certainty that the payment agreements and contracts that they had entered into would be honoured, allowing them to

project what their future investment in their business or farm should be. That was not happening across the piece, and the uncertainty could have led to a number of businesses and farms going under. As he said, that could ultimately have acted to the detriment of the consumer.

Andrew George (St. Ives) (LD) *rose*—

Mr. Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con) *rose*—

Jim Fitzpatrick: I am wasting time explaining this, but if I can give way—

Mr. Hollobone: On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. The Minister is making a very interesting speech that we are all following closely, but I am not convinced that he is aware of the extra time that he gets for allowing interventions. I wonder whether you might be able to enlighten him.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Sylvia Heal): I inform the hon. Gentleman that the Minister does not get time for each intervention in these debates. He gets one minute of additional time, but it is still up to him to determine whether he will take an intervention.

Jim Fitzpatrick: I am grateful for your explanation, Madam Deputy Speaker. I can tell the hon. Gentleman that I have had the additional time that I was allowed for the first two interventions. I have since taken two or three others, and as I said, if I have time I will certainly give way to him. However, I am not sure whether I will get through my remarks. I will have to run through them at pace.

GSCOP will come into force on 4 February, and we will quickly follow that up with a consultation on how best to enforce it, including on the structure of the ombudsman and what powers it could have. We do not anticipate that a significant impact on consumer prices or staffing levels in retail will result from the creation of an enforcement body. We will consult not on whether a body is needed—we have decided that—but on exactly how that body will operate. We will consult on its nature and role, to ensure that all interested parties can make their views heard and that informed decisions are made.

The new, tougher code and proper enforcement will mean that the grocery supply market works in the long-term best interests of consumers. The new ombudsman will help strike the right balance between farmers and food producers getting a fair deal and the interests of supermarkets. That will enable consumers to get the high-quality British food that they want at an affordable price. Helping our farmers produce as much as they can, while using fewer resources, is at the heart of the Government's food strategy, "Food 2030."

I have previously commented in the House on the relationship between retailers and farmers. GSCOP will be for companies that supply produce direct to retailers. Most fresh produce is supplied to retailers through intermediaries such as packers, processors and fresh food wholesalers rather than by farmers. Although most farmers will therefore be outside the direct scope of GSCOP, the limited value of direct purchases by grocery retailers from farmers understates the closeness of the trading relationship between primary producers

and grocery retailers. As farmers may be members of, or shareholders in, intermediary businesses that market their produce to grocery retailers, in that respect GSCOP will provide them with some certainty.

As I have said, the industry contributes more than £80 billion to our economy and is our largest manufacturing sector. Through our "Food 2030" strategy, we will work to help ensure that it can thrive as an innovative, competitive and resilient sector, and as a sustainable source of growth and jobs. The Government are supporting the food industry not only through funding for innovation and skills but through our public procurement policies, through our "Love Food, Hate Waste" campaign to reduce waste, and by supporting the development of small and medium-sized enterprises and promoting regional foods.

Andrew George: In the circumstances, why are the Government proceeding with a further period of consultation? Office of Fair Trading referrals to the Competition Commission on this matter go back to April 1989 and the supermarkets will want to string the process out for as long as they possibly can. There have been inquiries and consultations enough. Why not simply implement the policy now?

Jim Fitzpatrick: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point about the impatience of many of us regarding progress on this matter. However, as the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) said, there are still differences of opinion about the operation of an ombudsman. The Conservatives made a proposal on that recently, the Government are clearly outlining a different structure and responsibilities, and I am sure we will shortly hear the views of the Lib Dems from the hon. Member for St. Ives (Andrew George). The consultation will offer certainty that after the election campaign there will be an ombudsman and that all three parties will have had the opportunity to say in detail what shape and powers the ombudsman should have. They will also have the opportunity to say whether the ombudsman should be inside the OFT or an independent entity. That is what the consultation will be about.

In conclusion, the new code and its enforcement, which are the result of two intensive investigations by the Competition Commission, will ensure that markets work effectively in the interests of consumers.

1.1 pm

Mr. James Paice (South-East Cambridgeshire) (Con): May I remind the House of my interests, which are declared in the register?

I welcome the fact that at last we are having a debate on food and farming in Government time. I cannot remember the last time that happened, but I congratulate the Government on it, even if they have hung the debate on a very small hook—the one action they have taken that they believe to be in the interests of agriculture.

I shall address the issue of the ombudsman later, but the Minister began by referring to "Food 2030", which the Opposition welcome. After nearly 13 years in office, the Government have recognised that they got it wrong in their previous 12. The two previous Secretaries of State—the present and previous Foreign Secretary, indeed—repeatedly said that domestic food production

[Mr. James Paice]

was unnecessary and that our food security could be achieved by importing from several different countries. In that time, pork production went down by one third, and bacon and ham by a quarter. Production of poultry, vegetables, milk, eggs and most of our commodities also declined before the Government saw the error of their ways.

Mr. Shailesh Vara (North-West Cambridgeshire) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that one advantage of having domestic suppliers is that it guarantees the quality of the produce and helps substantially to encourage local economies?

Mr. Paice: My hon. Friend makes a very important point. Local sourcing guarantees provenance. Of course, it does not always guarantee high quality, but it certainly enables the consumer to know where a product comes from and to check the quality, which we strongly support.

Dr. Murrison: My hon. Friend knows of my interest, albeit amateur, in the pork industry. Does he agree that for consumers to exert choice they need to know from where a product is sourced? Does he share my concern that certain supermarkets are in the habit of claiming that pork is sourced in the UK, but when one looks on their shelves, one finds that their bacon is produced anywhere but the UK? Does he agree that the ombudsman needs to look into that as a matter of urgency?

Mr. Paice: I have never known my hon. Friend to do anything amateurishly, and I will come to the issue of food labelling in a few moments.

The real issue with “Food 2030” is not what is in it, but what is not in it. There are no substantive proposals to restore the prosperity of our food supply industry, and therefore assure us of food security. The first thing must be to ensure that consumers are properly informed. We must have proper, honest country-of-origin labelling, initially in the meat sector. Even the Government have come round to that, but they have blocked four different private Members’ Bills that would have provided such labelling. While the Minister and the Secretary of State have been declaring their support for country-of-origin labelling, we have it on record that Food Standards Agency officials have been voting against it in meetings in Brussels. There is not a lot of substance there.

“Food 2030” says that agriculture must be supported by first-class research and development, yet the Government have been cutting funding on agricultural research for most of the past 12 years. The fundamental objective of the document is that the demand for food should be met by profitable, competitive, highly skilled and resilient farming—fish and food—businesses. It refers to the market and sharing risks, yet the Government have taken two years to respond to the Competition Commission report.

We wholly support the new code of practice—GSCOP, as it is being called—and as we announced before the Government did, we support the idea of an ombudsman. Some think it odd that the Conservative party supports an ombudsman.

Philip Davies: Hear, hear!

Mr. Paice: I know that at least one of my Back-Bench colleagues takes that view. My hon. Friend is an aficionado of Adam Smith and he will recall that Adam Smith actually says that a true free market is one in which there are an equal number of buyers and suppliers, which, of course, is patently not the case in the grocery market. The ombudsman is about addressing a market failure, not about interfering in a free market. However, we welcome the Government’s albeit belated decision to respond.

Andrew George: The hon. Gentleman says “albeit belated”, but he is quoted as saying this at his party’s conference in October:

“There needs to be a code of practice properly enforced, but whether that requires a freestanding ombudsman which would be a new bureaucracy is not clear.”

It would therefore be fair to say that the change in the Conservative position is also belated.

Mr. Paice: That is absolutely astonishing nonsense. We have done exactly what I said at that time. We have said that we will appoint an independent ombudsman, not in a separate office with all the paraphernalia—a reception and a new set of office rates and so on—but within the OFT. We want an independent, discrete unit within the OFT in order to keep the costs of providing an ombudsman down, but he would none the less be independent.

I would be interested to know whether the hon. Gentleman supports the principal spokesman for the Liberal Democrats on such matters. The latter says that we should have not an ombudsman but a price regulator who would fix prices, which would be totally contrary to European Union and World Trade Organisation law. The hon. Gentleman is completely deceiving farmers in this country if he believes that a Liberal Government—God forbid that one should ever exist—could actually fix the prices that supermarkets paid farmers for their milk or anything else. I look forward to his response to that.

The “Food 2030” document refers to the need for better and more friendly regulation. That from a Government who introduced national muck-spreading day and put in statute the date when farmers may go and spread their muck!

The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has a target to reduce its administrative burden by 25 per cent. by May, but it will not hit it. The expectation is that at best it will reach 20 per cent., but even so, that is 20 per cent. of the wrong target, because targeting administration costs completely ignores the capital costs on businesses of meeting DEFRA regulations. The nitrate-vulnerable zone storage regulations cost tens if not hundreds of thousands of pounds to each and every livestock farmer in the country. The cost of regulation is still huge. Even if the Department declares in a few months’ time that it has decreased the administrative burden by 20 per cent., I do not expect many farmers to have noticed the difference.

Mr. Hollobone: I am most grateful to my hon. Friend for mentioning NVZs and the increased capital costs faced by farmers, particularly dairy farmers. However, the milk industry is clearly part of a chain where the market is not working properly. Farmers cannot sell

milk for a greater price than it takes to produce it. What is the answer to the problem of reviving the dairy industry in this country?

Mr. Paice: I obviously do not have time to retail a long list. We have two debates on the dairy industry in the House and Committee next week, when my hon. Friend might want to go into a bit more detail. Many dairy farmers are making a profit: part of the problem is the 6p or 7p a litre difference between the highest and lowest prices paid. The other issue is the cost of production. In a market in which the Government no longer—rightly—set prices, they are bound to do what they can to reduce the input costs, and that is part of what I am addressing, especially on regulation.

On the issue of regulation, can the Minister bring us up to date on the situation with battery cages? We are hearing many stories of backing down on the 2012 ban, and we know that most European countries have hardly begun to introduce the enriched cages. What will the Government do to protect our industry and those farmers who have made significant new investment, but face egg imports from countries that have not done so?

The Minister also referred to public sector food procurement. He mentioned improvement, but there has been precious little of that. This country should be predominant in supply of orchard fruit, given the industry in Kent and parts of the Welsh marches, but domestic supply fell from 46 per cent. in 2007-07 to 30 per cent. in 2007-08. The Government are consulting on a pilot healthier food mark, but does the Minister agree that that should involve the Red Tractor, or is it true that they propose to drop it from their proposals?

Animal health is critical if we are to compete with other countries, especially in the grazing sector. The Government have announced their responsibility and cost-sharing proposals and appointed Rosemary Radcliffe to look into the issue and produce a report in November. However, we will have a draft Bill this month or next. What can be in that Bill if we will not have the substantive proposals from Ms Radcliffe until November? We cannot talk about increasing production and ignore the fact that some 40,000 head of cattle were culled last year because of bovine tuberculosis, up from 3,000 head a year when the Government took office—

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle) (Lab): Can the hon. Gentleman confirm that Conservative policy is to cull badgers in England?

Mr. Paice: Conservative policy is to attack this disease with a comprehensive strategy using all available measures and, yes, that does include recognition that will require selective culling in certain hotspots, but not across the whole of England, as the hon. Gentleman implies. We will continue to study the science as it develops over the next few weeks and months. A vaccine that is of any use—an oral vaccine, in other words—will not be available until 2014 and, at the current rate of expansion anything between 80,000 and 100,000 head of cattle could be slaughtered each year by then. I suggest that we cannot wait until 2014 for any improvement.

With your indulgence, Madam Deputy Speaker, I wish to ask the Minister about another animal health issue not directly related to food—at least not in this country. It relates to the outbreak this week in Wiltshire

of equine infectious anaemia in two horses imported from Romania. My understanding is that EU law has, since 2007, required testing prior to export. I hope that the Minister can tell us what has gone wrong, whether those animals were tested and how they got to Wiltshire before being detected.

The Minister also referred to energy and waste reduction. He may not be aware that over the past few weeks I have tabled questions to every Department about food waste and only the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs has been able to give me any figures. Almost every other Department has said that it does not collect those statistics. I suggest that the Government start leading by example and collecting those statistics. The Government talk about spending £10 million on anaerobic digesters as demonstration plants, but that ignores the fact that many are already in place and running, based on renewable obligations certificates. We now find that the Department of Energy and Climate Change proposes to renege on those certificates and there will be no grandfather rights for existing plants. However, DEFRA proposes more regulations on the size of store that will need a licence—another difficulty for anybody who wants to set up an anaerobic digestion plant, even though this country is already way behind in that area and needs to improve.

When it comes to the Government's document, rarely can there have been so much hype over so little substance. The Government seek credit for admitting that they have got this issue completely wrong for the past 12 years, because domestic food production does matter. That is in the face of the fact that the farming and food industries have been saying for years that the Government's policy was wrong. The Conservative party has consistently called for food security, but the Government rubbished it. The Conservative party called for honest labelling and country-of-origin information, and the Government blocked that. The Conservative party is committed to public procurement, but we have a pale imitation of that from this Government. We are committed to an ombudsman, and all we have from the Government is a consultation. For years, the real interests of the countryside, farming and the food industry have been pursued by the Conservatives, not by the Government. For years we have been setting the agenda that the Government are belatedly beginning to follow—

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman's time is up.

1.16 pm

Andrew George (St. Ives) (LD): Like the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), I am pleased that the Government have provided time to debate this important issue. I welcome the Government's belated statement on 13 January. I should also declare an interest as someone who has chaired an organisation called Grocery Market Action Group for the past four years. It has cross-party support and representatives from the National Farmers Union, the National Farmers Union of Scotland, Friends of the Earth, ActionAid, Traidcraft, the British Brands Group, the Association of Convenience Stores, the British Independent Fruit Growers Association and several other organisations with an interest in a competitive and effective food industry in the UK and in fair trade with suppliers in developing countries.

[Andrew George]

It is important to note that those organisations and others, who have watched how this sector has developed over the past 11 years of various inquiries by the Office of Fair Trading and the Competition Commission, and the original voluntary supermarket code of practice, are not criticising the supermarkets and their behaviour as being in some way criminal. Indeed, their activities have been entirely rational. It would be surprising if anyone in the position of the Sainsburys, Tescos and Asdas of this world did not take the fullest possible advantage of their impact on market—the OFT has described them as able to dictate market conditions. They are in a very powerful position and their behaviour is entirely rational. The issue that the competition authorities have considered over the years is whether those firms' use of power in the marketplace has turned from effective and clever into an abuse. The important work of the Competition Commission in an excellent report published in April 2008—and the length of time since then is one reason why people are getting frustrated—demonstrated that we are talking about a level of abuse. The Minister himself in his opening remarks referred to the transfer of excessive risk and unexpected costs, and that has been clearly demonstrated by the thorough inquiry by the Competition Commission. The inquiry stated that it has

“an adverse effect on investment and innovation in the supply chain and ultimately on consumers.”

The last important point was left out of the Minister's comments. It is important that we have a market working in the interests of consumers.

Philip Davies: The hon. Gentleman is working on the premise that there are big, horrible, nasty supermarkets screwing poor, small suppliers into the ground. If that is the case, as he seems to think, and if his ombudsman is to deal with it, the only upshot will be that prices will have to go up for the consumer, because supermarkets pass on those savings to the consumer. How much extra is he happy for his constituents to pay in their shopping bills to meet his desire for an ombudsman?

Andrew George: That is a complete misapprehension and fails to understand how the market works. The Competition Commission has clearly shown that there are abuses within the supply chain and that suppliers are being pushed to the wall. That is during the deepest recession when the largest supermarkets are now posting record profits. It is not entirely unknown for the supermarkets achieve record profits. Yes, there is a benefit for someone—and we all know where it is going. Whether that is, as the Minister said, the impact of retrospective changes in the unwritten contracts, the lack of notice in delisting, the holding of suppliers liable for losses due to shrinkage, or other overriders within the system itself, the fact is that the whole thing needs a serious review.

In January last year, we commissioned Roger Clarke of the Cardiff business school to undertake an independent investigation into the cost impacts on the supermarkets resulting from the application of regulation. He has since published a report for us. He made himself clear:

“While the creation of an Ombudsman will involve some cost (estimated at about £5-6 million per year) this is likely to be small relative to consumer benefits as a whole. As noted by the CC, the

actual size of the food retail industry in the UK is £110.4 billion and a 0.1 per cent. price fall for the largest 4 retailers is equivalent to a reduction in consumer expenditure of £80 million a year”.

He also stated that

“the costs are likely to be minor compared to the benefits for consumers that arise.”

Dr. Murrison: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there might be some benefits for the British food industry in, for example, labelling, which supermarkets currently use in an adverse way? I mentioned the pork industry in my earlier intervention and the fact that the implication to consumers is that some products are British-sourced when in fact they are not. That clearly needs to be sorted out. Had supermarkets done that already, and not behaved as I am afraid that they have, perhaps some of us would be less enthusiastic now for an ombudsman to sort it out.

Andrew George: I am grateful for that extremely helpful intervention. One of the knock-on effects of the proposals would be greater transparency through the groceries supply chain, which would be to the enormous benefit of suppliers, and I think the supermarkets are now waking up and recognising that it would be in their interests as well. While there remains this uncertainty and while supermarkets continue to be accused of treating their suppliers in an adverse manner, the existence of an ombudsman would be of clear benefit to the supermarkets, because it would give them a clean bill of health—if there were no findings against them in a particular year. There would be a big benefit to them.

I know that the supermarkets have expressed concerns about a slippery slope and explained that it would result in further regulation. However, I do not think that that would be the case. I am concerned that the Government are opting for further consultation after 10 years. Clearly the supermarkets want to string this out for as long as possible. To reassure the hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice), this is not a price-sensitive initiative. Although my hon. Friend the Member for Westmorland and Lonsdale (Tim Farron) will continue to float ideas, I welcome the measure and hope that we can introduce it as soon as possible.

1.25 pm

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire) (Con): I am delighted to have the chance to speak in this debate. I echo the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice). It is good to have such a debate in Government time and to welcome this belated food strategy. Many of the component parts, and certainly several of the good component parts, follow long-standing policy initiatives and issues set out by my hon. Friends on the Front Bench, in particular by my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire, who has done such a tremendous job in his position over the years and speaks with knowledge and great integrity.

I would like to set out the background to this debate. As we know, British agriculture has had some difficulties over the years and trends in self-sufficiency have been poor. We reckon that we have lost self-sufficiency in indigenous food of about 9 per cent.—from 82 per cent. in 1998 to 73 per cent. in 2007. Most of us who represent rural and agricultural areas know of the problems

with livestock, the declining numbers of beef and dairy cows, and the pig industry. Many Members will remember the lobby by the pig industry a couple of years ago, which tried to alert the Government to the issues and problems, including the loss of 40 per cent. of the national herd between 1997 and 2008.

The background to the problems with food, farming and agriculture are well known to us and have over the years caused great distress to those who represent these areas. However, I would like to demonstrate the resilience of all parts of the food chain by looking at one particular constituency—my own—and seeing how, in many aspects of the Government's core objectives in the food strategy, my own constituency illustrates what can be done. It is simply a symbol for other areas that can do the same.

I start, however, with a matter that is particular to my constituency. I am lucky to have Peter Kendall, the National Farmers Union president, as a constituent of mine. He farms a well-known family farm in Eyeworth—a popular family and a popular man—and has been a far-sighted leader of the NFU. He has done some terrific things to accentuate the positive aspects of farming and to get the farming industry and farmers to proclaim what they can do, instead of always being seen sitting on the sidelines saying what cannot be done.

Jim Fitzpatrick: I am pleased to put on the record my personal commendation of Mr. Kendall and to endorse the sentiments outlined by the hon. Gentleman. However, given that there is an NFU election at the moment, I would not want to prejudice Mr. Kendall's chances or give any indication that there is a Government candidate in the election. I offer the hon. Gentleman an opportunity to say that this is a politically neutral election and that it is for the NFU members to make up their own minds.

Alistair Burt: The Minister has absolutely said what needs to be said. As Peter Kendall's Member of Parliament, I am entitled to give a more rounded endorsement that will not be coloured by any sense that it comes either from the Government or the official Opposition. It is simply a recognition of a man who has been an outstanding farmer in his own area and has taken those skills to the national level.

I remember the first speech that Peter gave to the NFU dinner in his home area after he became NFU president and how proud people were of him. He picked out a series of points that he said he would major on over the following few years. They included an understanding of the global issues facing agriculture, the number of people who needed to be fed over the next 30 to 50 years and the disappearance of agricultural land across the world. Not only was that an issue in itself, but it required us to think again about science and the relationship between science and farming. There were some easy things that people could say, but some hard issues to be faced by people who needed food, not warm words. He was very conscious of the UK's own food production and the issue to which I referred earlier—our self-sufficiency.

Above all, Mr. Kendall emphasised to the local NFU, to which I shall return in a moment, the importance of projecting a positive image of farming. I believe that he has done all those things. He was also keen to talk not only about UK farming, but about the EU, and to recognise the importance of the UK's relationship

with the EU and how important it was to think of the EU collectively, as well as in relation to our national interest.

That issue is particular to my constituency, given Peter's position, but I want to illustrate how some of the companies and other businesses in the area work to fulfil the objectives of "Food 2030". We have Jordans in my constituency, which puts Biggleswade on the map—a town that, as all hon. Members present will know, is a fulcrum in Bedfordshire. Jordans was innovative in realising many years ago that food tastes—and particularly breakfast food tastes—were changing. People wanted a different, healthier breakfast cereal and they wanted it delivered in a different form, through energy bars and cereal bars. The family went out and developed them, and they built an extraordinary business.

Jordans has a great relationship with farmers, as all food producers must. The company pays a premium to farmers to plant 10 per cent. of their land with nature-friendly habitats to conservation-grade standard. Jordans has been a pioneer, it works in healthy food, it is innovative, and it relates to its consumers. The current campaign on its website is about encouraging its customers to think about putting spare food into a compost bin at the end of day, instead of throwing it away. Jordans recognises the importance of the food chain right the way through.

As we are talking about vegetables and food waste, let me say that I recognise what my hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire said about the need to use energy, through the work of Biogen and anaerobic digestion. Biogen is one of the companies he talked about that is taking a lead on the issue, turning food waste into power. The company is based in Milton Ernest in my constituency. Through pig slurry and food waste, it produces 1 MW of electricity a year—enough to provide continuous power and electricity to 800 or 900 houses. That is a perfect example of small-scale microgeneration. When we hear the big arguments about onshore wind, for example, we say to people, "There may be an alternatives. Renewables are not all about wind farms. There are other ways to go about it." Plants that use anaerobic digestion—the conversion of waste into methane and, ultimately, electricity—is a perfect example. I therefore share the concerns that my hon. Friend expressed about regulation.

Mr. Paice: I just want to clarify that the company to which I was referring in my speech was indeed Biogen, because it has contacted me—as I am sure it has my hon. Friend—to express its great concern that the Department of Energy and Climate Change is proposing to renege on its agreement on renewables obligation certificates. That means that the financial deal that the company entered into, and on the basis of which it made its original investments, no longer necessarily holds. Those investments would never have been made on that basis, and certainly none will be made in future.

Alistair Burt: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, in what might be the sting in the tail of this crafted speech, for illustrating what my constituents are doing. In that way we come full circle, to some of the problems that they are facing and how, despite the Government's intentions, as set out in their paper, their actions do not always ensure the ends that they seek. They say one

[Alistair Burt]

thing, but are doing things that make life more difficult for those whom they want to encourage. My hon. Friend has picked out a perfect example of that. I commend the Ibbett family and Andrew Needham at Biogen for all they are doing to pioneer renewable energy in that way.

Before we get on to vegetable waste, however, we start with the vegetables themselves. Bedfordshire, an area noted for the growing of vegetables, also has people who recognise that, with different shopping and working habits, we need to retail in a different way. My family and I get our vegetables every week in a veg box from Garden Friends. There is no unnecessary packing, and we get vegetables that are locally produced, where possible, and seasonal. The whole family get a chance to eat slightly different things and cook different things according to season, using locally sourced products. Garden Friends has now expanded, with a farm shop based in Roxton in my constituency. I commend Val and Mark for the work they are doing, but they are not the only ones to have pioneered that form of retailing, recognising the changing culture. They too are working hard to fulfil the Government's objective of providing healthy food in a sustainable manner.

Right at the other end of the scale from Jordans, a national company with a strong export record, and Garden Friends, which operates on a small scale, is Unilever, the multinational. Unilever's main food science research establishment is based at Colworth park in north Bedfordshire. It is a remarkable establishment, containing the most northerly tea plantation in the world—Lipton is the brand—and looking after such wonderful things as ice cream and so on. In the recent restructuring of Unilever, I was delighted that Colworth park remained in what is now a handful of world renowned research establishments. The work done at Colworth park fulfils the Government's aim in key point six of their strategy, which talks about

"Increasing the impact of skills, knowledge, research and technology".

Unilever is looking at how to take the bad fats out of food—the trans fats and saturated fats—and ensure that only the good fats remain, as well as how to present food in a healthier manner and how to take existing brands and make them better. Unilever also looks at new products to ensure that they are safe.

Colworth park is developing: it is becoming a science park. I am delighted to say that the Institute of Food Research will have a presence there from next year. That fits in with Bedfordshire's overall strategy to be part of what we call the Oxford-Cambridge arc and—to use another geometric symbol—part of the golden triangle, of Oxford, Cambridge and Imperial college London, where science and technology is based. Unilever's presence is therefore key; but again, in just one constituency, we have research and development, and the multinational, the local, the farmers and the growers. Despite the difficulties of food and all the problems over the years, we can see in just one constituency the people, the skills and the talent needed to combat them.

There is one final link in the chain: us eating the food. I pay tribute to the growing number of farm collectives that are being set up to market their produce. There is one in London called the Farm Collective, a deli in

Smithfield where this morning I had a really good bacon roll and a nice cup of coffee. Everything is British-sourced—the provenance is there to see, and we can trace it through. [Interruption.] The hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Pelling) raised an eyebrow when I mentioned coffee. That point is tackled in a little note produced by the Farm Collective, which says:

"At the Farm Collective we represent a new movement in food. Our ingredients are sourced by us from British farms (ok, coffee is tricky but the award winning Square Mile Coffee Roasters take care of this for us)."

I think that the Farm Collective can be allowed a little leeway on coffee. I know all that from having my bacon roll and coffee there this morning with my son Mat, who is working there for a few months, and I thought that I would put it on the record. I hope that I do not have to declare an interest, Madam Deputy Speaker, as that young man begins to make his way in the world. All those examples show what can be and is being done in our food industry at all levels to deliver not only the Government's objectives, but what the consumer is looking for.

Finally, let me return to my local NFU branch, which I met last week, because that is where the rubber meets the road. Despite everything that I have said about the positive attitude of farmers, what they want from the Government is to ensure that warm words are followed by action. To say that they are suspicious of the current Government is a bit of an understatement, as I am sure that the Minister would acknowledge. Farmers have been through a tough time, and after all that time they are not sure whether everything put forward in the strategy will be delivered. For example, there are conflicting messages. Farmers are being asked to produce more food, but the Government are still ambivalent about some of the pesticides and chemicals that can be used, and that worries them. We cannot take the science out of farming. Farmers need a clear lead on that issue. Why has it taken so long to get the supermarket ombudsman up and running? The issues between farmers and supermarkets predate the current Government—things have been exceptionally difficult—and they are worried that everything has taken so long.

Andrew George: One point that I did not have time to expand upon was about that very relationship. The proposal for a supermarket ombudsman deals only with the ultimate supplier and the supermarket. What is required under that proposal—I hope that the Minister will address this in his summing up—is something to ensure that issues can be investigated right through the supply chain, up to the farmer and the grower. Does the hon. Gentleman agree?

Alistair Burt: Yes, the hon. Gentleman makes a fair point. Part of the problem is that this process has had such a long gestation period, and we still do not know exactly how it will work. My hon. Friend the Member for South-East Cambridgeshire was kind enough not to suggest that we had prompted the Government into action with our own announcement just a few days before they made theirs in Oxford. Perhaps they had not thought the matter through at that point. The details need to be worked through, and I am confident about the contribution that my hon. Friend will make to enabling those details to become a practical reality.

Why has there been such a long delay on labelling? The problems with meat labelling raise serious issues for those who rear and produce food in this country. They have to abide by health regulations, and they face competition, but that is nothing new. It was not enough to hear a squeak from the Government just before Christmas to the effect that this matter was moving on to the agenda. It is no wonder that my friends in the local NFU are suspicious. They really want to see something delivered on this; they have been waiting too long.

Finally, when will the Government truly understand the problems associated with gold-plating directives? We hear all the talk on this. Indeed, I was questioned heavily by members of the NFU on my own party's position on this, because they hear the same talk. They want a Government who understand the damage that gold-plating and over-gilding the regulations can do. Open Europe has estimated that the cost of regulation has tripled for the farming industry since DEFRA was formed in 2001. That tells its own story.

I am grateful for the time that I have been allowed this afternoon. I hope that I have managed to illustrate what one typical rural constituency can do, right the way through the chain from the largest company to the smallest, from those who work on an international scale to the individual suppliers, from research to growing, and from retailing to consuming and to dealing with the waste remnants in an innovative fashion. People are looking for a Government who will understand what they are about and work to help them and deal with the conundrums that I have raised, to which they want real answers. I am confident that, in a short time, they will have a Government who will do just that job.

1.42 pm

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): I will try to be brief. I know that the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Pelling) wants to speak, and I want to give him enough time to set out his stall as well.

I want to focus on the proposals for a supermarket ombudsman. I am afraid that the debate so far on this issue has been familiarly depressing. Debates in this place seem to follow the same old routine. First, an outside body makes a recommendation about something. In this case, it was the Competition Commission, but it can be Select Committees or other bodies set up by the Government. Whatever happens, we seem to take the view in this place that, whenever such a body produces a report, we all have to stand up and say, "Wasn't that a marvellous report? We can't think of anything bad to say about any of the recommendations, and everyone's done a wonderful job." We build up a cosy consensus in this place based on the fact that no criticism can ever be made of any report done by anybody about anything.

I do not share that view. Are we really saying that we are happy to give the Competition Commission a blank cheque, that we are going to agree with everything that it comes up with, and that it must be marvellous simply because the Competition Commission says so. That appears to be the nature of the debate that we have had on this matter so far. Everyone seems to have said, "This must be a good thing because the Competition Commission says so." Some of us have thoughts and experiences of our own, however. I am not sure how

much experience of the supermarket industry other hon. Members have had. I am one of the few who has spent a number of years working in it, and I would like to use the short time available to expose a few of the myths that have grown up around this subject in the House.

I do not know whether it is a particularly British disease, but we seem to have a need to knock every successful industry in this country. We try to knock down any industry that reaches a certain size and level. We should be incredibly proud of our supermarket industry. It employs hundreds of thousands of people. Indeed, it employs people in each hon. Member's constituency, although I am not entirely sure whether some have any great desire to see those people in work. Supermarkets also provide a very good service to tens of millions of customers each week.

Jim Fitzpatrick: There have been two intensive investigations involving examinations and consultations by the Competition Commission, and the Front-Bench teams of all three parties concluded that there was evidence to suggest that something was wrong and that we needed a code of practice. We introduced a code of practice, but it did not work very well, so we tried to strengthen it. We have now all concluded that there needs to be a means of enforcing it. Does the hon. Gentleman acknowledge that he might perhaps not be right on this, and that there is another side to the argument?

Philip Davies: I do not doubt that there is another side to the argument; that is the side that I am trying to give. We have only heard one side so far. The Minister might believe that, because there is a cosy consensus between all the main parties, everyone is right. In my experience, however, such cosy consensus usually means that everyone is wrong. I do not know whether you will allow me the luxury of giving the House a catalogue of examples, Madam Deputy Speaker. It would include joining the exchange rate mechanism and setting up the Child Support Agency. I could go on, but I will not. Just because all those on the three Front Benches agree on something, it does not necessarily follow that it is right. I am grateful to the Minister for letting me put the other side of the argument.

The supermarket industry is incredibly successful. Why is this? Everyone is so concerned about it being too powerful, but how has it got to the state that it is in? It has done so because it does something that we should encourage all businesses to do: it offers the customers who voluntarily go through the supermarkets' doors—I am not aware of any that use a lasso to drag people in to shop against their will—a wide range of products that they want to buy at a price—

Mr. Andrew Pelling (Croydon, Central) (Ind): It has a big market share.

Philip Davies: The hon. Gentleman will have an opportunity to speak, if he calms down. If he does not, I might have to go on for too long, so that he does not get a chance. I urge him to calm himself down for a second.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. May we have the debate conducted in an orderly manner?

Philip Davies: Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker. I am grateful for your support.

Mr. Pelling: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Philip Davies: I will.

Mr. Pelling: Let us do this properly. Would it not be possible to argue that supermarkets go for a large market share and act in an oligopolistic manner, which might go against the interests of suppliers and, indeed, consumers?

Philip Davies: If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue, I will come to the details in a moment. I want to address those issues as well. At the moment, I am merely setting the scene.

Supermarkets sell the products that people want to buy at prices that they want to pay. That is why they have become so successful. No supermarket starts out as a huge multinational company. All businesses start out as small businesses, as did all the supermarkets. They became big businesses by looking after their customers and their employees and, to a large extent, by looking after their suppliers.

One element that seems to have been conveniently forgotten in this debate is that supermarkets sell products, and that those products come from suppliers. If the supermarkets did not look after their suppliers and build up a good relationship with them, they would end up with nothing but fresh air on their shelves. They would have no business without suppliers. In the real world of retail, things can go wrong. A supplier could have a problem, perhaps as a result of a health scare, or of foreign objects being found in their products. Supermarkets desperately need to have a good relationship with their suppliers at such times, so that they can go to another supplier and say, "We've got a problem at that factory. Can you increase overnight the amount you can supply to us, because we're in a bit of a pickle?" If supermarkets did not give a stuff about their suppliers, and if all they were interested in was screwing every single one of them into the ground as much as possible, they would never be able to rely on that kind of good will. Anyone here who thinks that supermarkets can not only survive but thrive without building up good, close relationships with their suppliers is completely misguided, and miles off the case. That is a ludicrous thought.

Mr. Martlew: I worked in the food industry for more than 20 years. If the hon. Gentleman is correct, why do we get copycat products—own-brand products—with very similar packaging to the branded goods appearing on the supermarket shelves beside the branded goods? If the supermarkets want to keep a good relationship with their suppliers, why do they try to copy the packaging of the branded goods?

Philip Davies: The hon. Gentleman may think that all of his constituents are stupid and cannot tell the difference between an own-brand product and a branded product. He seems to follow the theme of what this Labour Government think—that everybody is so stupid that the Government have to decide everything for them—but I actually have more faith in consumers. I think that my constituents, who I am not entirely sure are greatly

different from the hon. Gentleman's, are perfectly able to decide whether they want to buy an own-brand product or a branded product, as they can tell the difference between one that says Tesco on it and one that says Kellogg.

Mr. Martlew: The hon. Gentleman's language about my constituents being stupid is offensive, Madam Deputy Speaker, but I am used to him being offensive. If the supermarkets do not want to deceive, why do they do it?

Philip Davies: I was not saying that the hon. Gentleman's constituents are stupid; I was saying that he seems to think his constituents are stupid. I do not think they are, which is why I do not think that we need to intervene, as they are more than capable of distinguishing a packet that says Tesco on it from a packet that says Kellogg on it. The hon. Gentleman obviously does not think that they can.

Mr. Pelling *rose*—

Philip Davies: I am going to press on, as I want to allow the hon. Gentleman time to elaborate his views later.

I do not accept the premise that supermarket businesses are built on screwing suppliers into the ground and on not having a good relationship with their suppliers. To my mind, that would be nonsense.

I will say in passing that the idea that we need an ombudsman to improve innovation in the food industry is laughable. We have a hugely innovative industry, so the idea that the ombudsman is essential to promote innovation in the industry is absolutely and utterly ludicrous. The ombudsman is being set up, it seems, on the premise that we have big, horrible and nasty supermarkets screwing their suppliers into the ground on price. The only possible upshot of a successful ombudsman, for those people who want to set it up, is that supermarkets will pay more to their suppliers for their goods. The only consequence of that is that the price to the consumer will go up.

I would not mind this so much if we had an honest debate in this House. If people stood up and said, "I believe in a supermarket ombudsman; the likelihood is that it will put prices up by X per cent. but, overall, that will be beneficial to the country as a whole", that would be fine. I might disagree, but at least it would be an honest debate. Instead, we are offered something from cloud cuckoo land—I think Sir Alfred Sherman described that as politicians always offering "painless panaceas", and here we have our latest painless panacea. The painless panacea is this: we can have a supermarket ombudsman, which has the support of all three Front-Bench teams, who looks after suppliers, makes supermarkets pay more money to them, but, crucially, the upshot will be a lower price for the consumer. I do not think that many people would have to study that proposal for very long before they knew that that is patently and utterly ridiculous. If people want supermarkets to pay more to the suppliers, that is a perfectly legitimate point to argue, but at least have the honesty to accept that the only possible outcome is to put up prices to the consumer.

Mr. Chope: As always, my hon. Friend is putting forward a brilliant analysis. Does he accept that in dealing with the protection of consumers, the Government—and the Opposition, for that matter—would be much

better exercised if they attacked the common agricultural policy, which adds the best part of £1,000 a year to the food bill of a family of four?

Philip Davies: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We have this ludicrous situation in which the parties are trying to bring in measures supposedly to help suppliers and consumers, while on the other hand the Government are party to the common agricultural policy, which puts great costs on consumers, while producers and food suppliers are facing more and more regulations that are probably a bigger problem than anything that supermarkets might do to them.

Mr. Pelling: I am enjoying the hon. Gentleman's speech. Is there not a danger with this new scheme of failing to recognise that the suppliers can be quite strong and are sometimes large international corporations themselves? It may well be that the new system benefits only the likes of Unilever or, to mention the company that I am associated with, Nestlé.

Philip Davies: The hon. Gentleman is right. I was going to come on to that point, but I shall touch on it now. The fact of the matter is that the biggest supermarket chains in the country, on which the efforts of the new ombudsman will be focused, have big suppliers by definition, as those suppliers are the ones who can produce the stuff in sufficient quantity to get it across the country. By definition, then, big supermarkets tend to have big suppliers. Many of those suppliers are huge multinational companies in their own right.

In fairness to my hon. Friend the Member for Arundel and South Downs, he has recognised the issue and wants an ombudsman to look at smaller suppliers rather than suppliers per se; I give credit to my hon. Friend in that regard. However, we could end up with a ridiculous situation in which an ombudsman intervenes on behalf of a huge multinational food company that is actually bigger than the supermarket. In many cases, we should congratulate supermarkets on being hard-nosed in making big multinational companies reduce their prices for the benefit of the consumer rather than building up even bigger profits for themselves. Some pharmaceutical companies, for example, are massive and have huge marketing budgets.

Another myth is that supermarkets persuade suppliers to do special offers and make the supplier pay for them. The fact is that suppliers fall over themselves to provide special offers for supermarkets. They say to the supermarket, "Please can we do a 'buy one, get one free' offer on our product?", because it is part of their marketing budget. They use those huge budgets to urge supermarkets to make such offers, and they are quite happy to pay for them, because it helps to build their market share. In my time at Asda, I might add, we used to say to suppliers, "Rather than you coming to us with 'buy one, get one free' or 'three for the price of two' offers, why not just have a long-term reduced price?", so that rather than the people who buy the product in that particular week or month or families of five or six benefiting, every single customer benefits from an overall lower price. It is not supermarkets that force suppliers into these deals; it is often the suppliers themselves who are insistent on those special offers. It is another misapprehension.

Mr. Paice: I hesitate to intervene on my hon. Friend—clearly, we are not going to agree on all fronts—but I entirely share his view that if a supplier wants to do a "buy one, get one free" offer, it is a matter between the supplier and the supermarket. My concern, however, is where the supermarket goes to the supplier and says, "We have decided to do one of these offers and you are going to fund it." Does my hon. Friend think that that sort of retrospective impact on a supplier, which the code of practice is designed to get rid of, is fair? Another issue is the principle of retrospective discounts, where at the end of the financial year—I know this from first-hand experience of businesses in my constituency—supermarkets decide that they have paid suppliers too much for potatoes, onions and carrots over the year, so they demand big cheques, some of which have run to seven figures.

Philip Davies: I am genuinely sorry that my hon. Friend has come to that conclusion. What he is proposing is an ombudsman to rule on contracts and deals between two private enterprises—on one side a supermarket, on the other a food producer and supplier. I am not at all surprised that the Labour Government would want to stick their noses into every contract entered into between private businesses, as that is their rationale in life—the state has to stick its nose into everything. I am not surprised either that the Liberal Democrats follow the same tack, as they think that there might be three extra votes for them in Cornwall, and anything that generates three extra votes anywhere will find favour with them. I am genuinely not surprised that those parties are jumping on this particular bandwagon, but I am genuinely disappointed that the Conservative party has reached the conclusion that the best way to proceed is for the state to interfere in private arrangements between one private company and another.

Where will it end? I might look at many contracts entered into by one company or another and think to myself, "Why has that clause been allowed in a contract. If it was my business, I wouldn't have allowed it." It is a matter for them. Will we start interfering in every contract between one private company and another to ensure that we think it is fair to both sides?

Andrew George: The hon. Gentleman makes a decent point with regard to the relationship between larger suppliers and the supermarkets. I would like a code of practice and its enforcement to cut both ways. Wherever evidence of unfair dealing exists, that should be rooted out, whichever direction it goes in. From my experience in the food production sector, particularly farming, I am well in touch with what is going on, as he is from his experience with Asda. Will he acquaint himself with the Roger Clarke report, which states that the remedy proposed is

"likely to lead to more choice, better quality products and lower prices in some cases. Even very small price reductions and other benefits are likely to result in consumer benefits far outweighing the modest cost of the Ombudsman"

to the supermarkets? Surely he must accept that there are benefits to the proposal.

Philip Davies: The hon. Gentleman may take the view that if he reads something in a report, he must agree with it. I do not take that view. I think that the quote he has just given is utter drivel. He might be taken in by

[Philip Davies]

any report, written by anybody. The fact that something is in a report does not make it any more sensible than if somebody down the street said it without any evidence whatever; it is still drivel. I thought that he was going to say that I had a good point about the Liberal Democrats saying something just for three extra votes in Cornwall, but he disappointed me on that.

The proposal is ludicrous. It will have no benefit whatever for the consumer—quite the reverse. If we think about it for a second, the UK grocery market is worth about £130 billion a year. If the ombudsman managed to extract from supermarkets an extra 1 per cent. in payment for suppliers, an extra £1.3 billion a year in costs would be passed on to consumers. If people want consumers to have that extra bill, and if they think that it is a price worth paying to have the ombudsman, let them at least have the decency, courage and honesty to stand up and say so. What I cannot stomach is the idea that we can promote painless panaceas and that more regulation will benefit consumers, supermarkets and suppliers. Clearly, that is ridiculous; it will not happen. Although it comes as no surprise that the Government and Lib Dems have gone down that line of state intervention, I am genuinely saddened that the Conservative party believes that that is the way forward.

2.3 pm

Mr. Andrew Pelling (Croydon, Central) (Ind): I am grateful to the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) for giving me seven—I want to give the Minister time to respond—of the remaining 28 minutes available for this debate. As a confirmed Heathite, I naturally recoil when he rises to speak, but he has nevertheless highlighted some real difficulties with the GSCOP. However well meaning government is, sometimes its good intentions are not only not delivered, but have malevolent unintended effects.

As the hon. Gentleman has said, GSCOP could end up strengthening the hand of large international corporate suppliers against the supermarkets. A great deal of work remains to be done on the code of practice and the role of the ombudsman, but it is important that we are reassured that that will not be the result. There are some good reasons for Government intervention, however, one of the most fundamental being food security. The Government's consultation on "Food 2030" recognised that as an important role for government. We must therefore hope that they realise the importance of watching the financial and agricultural markets. At the beginning of the recent equity rally in the City, huge amounts of money were invested in agricultural products, which had a hugely distorting effect on the markets, compromising food supply in certain parts of the third world. There is an important means of intervention in that area.

There is a recognition that what we eat is what we are. In that regard, government has an important role in monitoring what goes into our food system. The hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt) raised the important issue of trans fats. In relation to that, obesity is an issue of concern. Many people suffer from that condition in my constituency and in Croydon, South, and they are unable to get effective operations from the NHS to deal with it.

My constituency has only one farm, so it can hardly be said to have a farming interest. Nevertheless, it has significant food interests. Nestlé UK, which is based in Croydon, is by far the biggest employer in the constituency. I am sure that the prospects for Nestlé are greatly enhanced by the unfortunate situation of Cadbury, a debt-free company that believed strongly in philanthropy, which has been bought at a price that will not prevent asset stripping greatly damaging it. Nestlé, however, is an extremely good citizen in Croydon and takes very seriously corporate responsibility. The company has been the subject of great criticism in the past, and, amazingly, was attacked by my predecessor as Member of Parliament for Croydon, Central. I believe, however, that it has very high standards and is a typical triple A company.

Croydon has important food interests in other ways. It has a large black and minority ethnic community and their involvement in importing many products from abroad has an important food role and is an important part of our economy. On the London road just across the constituency border in Croydon North, the diversity of products available means that one can shop the world.

For Croydon, food is also an important green issue. The Heathfield ecology unit and other community activities strongly push the importance of community foods. Food is seen as an important part of securing status for New Addington as an eco-town. We also benefit from many good fish and chip restaurants, especially McDermott's and Top Fryers.

If we are to have competitiveness in our food industry, we can no longer afford, under the aegis of the European Union, a wasteful and expensive common agricultural policy, or a fisheries policy that causes appalling environmental damage. We should move away from the current EU fishing policies to the effort-based ones of the Faroe Islands, where fisheries bid for an amount of fishing time. That would avoid a situation in which huge amounts of fish are thrown back into the oceans.

From the point of view of the consumer, the "buy one get one free" approach is extraordinarily discriminatory against those in small families and particularly the elderly. It is unreasonable that they see in shops that if they buy a smaller amount they will suffer a significant financial loss compared with others. We also need to consider the strength of large organisations—for example, Tesco—vis-à-vis local authorities. They are often dominant, and through use of section 106 agreements they can dominate their way into communities. In New Addington, there was a great deal of controversy over a development that would not have been in keeping with the area, although I am sure that, despite pulling out of New Addington several years ago, Tesco would be welcome with a more modest scheme.

Tesco's moves into corner-shop territory sometimes compromise good business in the shape of small providers, typically south Asian families. In Woodside Green in Croydon, the branch of Londis run by Mr. Patel is threatened by the establishment of a Tesco Express only about 500 yards from the nearest one. Supermarkets should exercise balance and discretion.

I recall a most enjoyable visit to New Covent Garden with the Minister and the Secretary of State to inspect regional British foods. We should celebrate the added value that can be provided by the specialisms of British

food manufacturers, and we should also bear in mind the importance of regional foods in reducing the number of “food miles”. We should pay attention to what is put on our plates here in London. The Minister was, of course, an excellent Minister for London.

Many regional food businesses provide employment for my constituents. We may have only one farm, Heathfield farm, but many of the wineries that have grown up in Surrey provide important employment as well.

2.11 pm

Jim Fitzpatrick: I am grateful to the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Pelling) for allowing me time to respond to some of the issues that have been raised, and, indeed, to his own observations on “Food 2030”. I, too, recall the recent celebration and promotion of the best of British regional food at New Covent Garden, and I know that Members in all parts of the House would endorse his comments on that. He also raised genuine concerns about the Cadbury-Kraft situation. I hope that my earlier remarks reassured him that, as my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday, the Government are taking the closest interest in looking after the well-being of the business, its staff and, indeed, UK plc.

The hon. Member for South-East Cambridgeshire (Mr. Paice) began by asking when we last debated these issues in Government time. During my first week as Minister of State, we had two agricultural debates, one in Government time and the other on an Opposition motion. I assure the hon. Gentleman that such debates happen, and hopefully we shall have opportunities for further debates before the general election.

The hon. Gentleman suggested that “Food 2030” represented an acknowledgement by the Government that we had got it all wrong before. That is not, of course, the case. What “Food 2030” says is that the world has moved on. We have experienced the food price spike of 2008, climate change has been taken more seriously and population change has featured, among other factors. “Food 2030” is the first major food strategy document in, I believe, 60 years, a period that encompasses a good deal of Conservative as well as Labour Administration time.

We have discussed the honesty of country of origin labelling before. As the hon. Gentleman knows, we have supported the recommendations of the pigmeat taskforce, more accurate labelling by retailers of the products on their shelves and the European Commission’s attempts to improve country of origin labelling. We have discussed developments in Europe as well, and, as we know, there has not been a European vote on the issue. Last year, the French suggested compulsory labelling of non-processed

foods, but the suggestion was a bit unclear and woolly. We will continue to support the Commission’s efforts in Europe.

Total UK public spending on food and farming research amounts to about £350 million. I should be interested to know how much the Opposition parties think it ought to be and whether they are committed to a larger sum, but in any event we will increase our spending over the next five years.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the banning of battery cages by 2012. As I think I said at the most recent DEFRA Question Time and will, I suspect, say again on 1 February, we fully support the 2012 ban and will continue to press the Commission on it. We will do what we can to protect the British egg sector against any fall-back by the Commission. As far as we know, there has been no formal application for non-implementation of the ban, and we will work to ensure that it is implemented.

The bronze level of the healthier food mark still requires meat and meat products to meet Red Tractor or equivalent standards, although other products, such as dairy products, fruit and vegetables, have been moved to the “potential” list, because those running the healthier food mark scheme considered the Red Tractor standard to be too complex and costly to implement. A consultation on the Red Tractor healthier food mark will begin shortly, but it is not strictly accurate to say that the scheme has been dropped.

The draft Bill on responsibility and cost-sharing will be published soon, and the advisory group chaired by Rosemary Radcliffe will give its view at the end of the year. We are keen for there to be as much scrutiny as possible, because we recognise the issues that are at stake.

I believe that the Secretary of State has made a written statement about the infected Romanian horses, but if that is not the case I will write to those on both the Opposition Front Benches to ensure that they are aware of the facts. Because the situation arose only this week and is still developing, it is possible that no formal position has yet been outlined.

I noted what the hon. Gentleman said about other Departments and food waste, and I will act on it.

We had a good discussion with the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) about the ombudsmen and costs. We do not believe—

2.16 pm

One and a half hours having elapsed since the commencement of proceedings, the motion lapsed (Standing Order No. 24A).

Sitting suspended (Standing Order No. 20).

Bournemouth Borough Council Bill [Lords]*Consideration of Bill, as amended.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): It will be for the convenience of the House if the amendments relating to the Manchester City Council Bill [Lords] be debated together with those relating to the Bournemouth Borough Council Bill [Lords].

3 pm

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): I beg to move amendment 2.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this, we will take amendments 3, 74, 7, 24, 8, 25, 9, 26, 10 to 12, 27, 13, 14, 28, 15 to 17, 29 to 31 and 18 to 23 to the Bournemouth Borough Council Bill [Lords], and amendments 2, 3 to 5, 34, 9, 26, 10, 37, 11, 28, 12 to 14, 29, 15, 16, 30, 17 to 19, 31 to 33 and 20 to 25 to the Manchester City Council Bill [Lords].

Mr. Chope: It is a pleasure to move amendment 2, which is supported by four hon. Friends. With it, we will discuss 27 other amendments on the Bournemouth Bill and 28 on the Manchester Bill. In this debate, it will become apparent that the amendments go to the heart of the concerns that have been expressed by many people about the wide-ranging content of the Bills and the potential impact on the livelihoods and very survival of pedlars the length and breadth of the country.

Amendment 2 needs to be considered with other amendments, but it is designed to ensure that pedlary and trading are treated as separate activities. For too long, some councils have equated street trading with pedlary and, by extension, rogue and unlawful street trading with lawful pedlary. That is at the root of the problem. That issue is addressed in the detailed amendments to clause 5, which I shall discuss shortly. However, I shall take the amendments sequentially, so I shall start with amendment 3, which would delete clause 4.

I tabled amendment 3 because clause 4 extends the application of the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 to services. For example, as we have discussed during earlier stages, services might include teeth whitening, or applying an artificial tattoo to someone's skin. Since the Bill was drafted back in 2007, however, there has been an important legislative development—the implementation under UK law of the European Union services directive by means of a statutory instrument. I had the honour to chair the Committee that considered the statutory instrument. Under the directive, which came into effect on 31 December last year, pedlars of services only will no longer need a pedlars certificate, and those obtained by pedlars of services before the changes came into effect will continue to apply until they expire.

I tabled amendment 3 to try to draw the Minister on the important issue of the interaction between the services directive and pedlary, and the provisions in the Bill. That point was referred to briefly last week on Third Reading of the Nottingham City Council Bill and the Canterbury City Council Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for Canterbury (Mr. Brazier) said, in a throwaway line, that he thought that the advent of the services directive had made the extension of the Bills to

cover services redundant. Since then, I have received a letter from the agents acting for the promoters of the two Bills before us today stating that they assume that the effect of the services directive interacting with the rules relating to pedlars will be different. However, the whole issue is up in the air. By proposing that we leave out clause 4, I thought that we could try to probe the representatives of the promoters in the Chamber or the Minister on the interaction with the services directive.

The importance of the services directive is that it enables people who are supplying services and resident in other parts of the EU to come to this country and continue supplying those services without inhibition or legal restriction. To carry on activities as a pedlar in the UK, the person concerned needs to obtain a pedlars certificate, which they can from any police authority in the land if they can establish that they are of good character. Importantly, however, they must also establish that they have been resident for some time at a fixed address within the area of the police authority to which they applied for the pedlars certificate.

The provision relating to pedlars is at odds with the services directive, because it is regarded by the EU as an unreasonable restraint on the right of somebody to work wherever they wish within the EU. UK law currently states that one can engage in pedlary only if one is resident and has a fixed abode in the UK; one does not have to be British, but one has to show evidence of residence here. So at the very time that the services directive has been brought into law, we have before us a Bill that purports to extend the scope of pedlary to services. I find that rather confusing. It seems to me that clause 4 is probably redundant.

Much of the stuff that comes from Brussels is pretty impenetrable to people of ordinary intelligence such as Members of Parliament. Perhaps the Minister, with the benefit of legal advice from people who are better remunerated and wiser, will be able to guide us through the interaction of the services directive with pedlary and explain to us whether, in the light of its implementation, he too believes that clause 4 is redundant and superfluous, not to mention rather confusing.

Sir John Butterfill (Bournemouth, West) (Con) *rose*—

Mr. Chope: I am delighted to see that my hon. Friend is going to enlighten me about that.

Sir John Butterfill: Surely leaving out clause 4, which would extend the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1982 to the provision of services in the street, would do the very reverse of what my hon. Friend is suggesting, because there is no residency requirement under that Act. Extending it in that way would be helpful to pedlars, rather than the reverse.

Mr. Chope: I hope that my hon. Friend will be able to explain that point more clearly to me. As for the application of the 1982 Act, my understanding is that Bournemouth borough council is seeking to take more control over people who provide services than it has under existing law. I find it hard to understand how that will be in the best interests of pedlars.

Mr. Tobias Ellwood (Bournemouth, East) (Con): We have had Bills from councils in other areas across the country, which are already in place as Acts and have

been for a number of years—we are in one such area now: London has the exact legislation that we are seeking in Bournemouth—and they are also subject to the 1982 Act, to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) referred. I am not aware—perhaps those on the Front Bench can illuminate this point for me—of any requirement to change legislation in any of those places, whether it be London, Liverpool, Maidstone, Leicester, Medway or Newcastle. All those places have had their own borough council Bills, which is what we are seeking today. All have been able to work with the same legislation, despite the 1982 Act.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that, but I am not sure that he understands my main point, which is that since the 1982 Act was introduced we have had the services directive, which came into effect on 31 December. Although other local Bills might have been enacted with equivalent provisions to those contained in clause 4, I do not think that it is open to Parliament—my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) has different views about this—to bring forward legislation that is inconsistent with a European directive.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury) (Con): Is my hon. Friend therefore saying that since the enactment of the services directive, the measures to which my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Ellwood) referred have become *ultra vires*?

Mr. Chope: I think I am saying that, yes. The implementation of the directive serves as the automatic repeal of those provisions, which is why I cannot understand why, when we are considering a Bill that is not yet on the statute book, we should be seeking to put provisions such as those in clause 4 into law, in *prima facie* breach, in my view, of the services directive.

Mr. Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): May I offer some clarification? We could not place restrictions on doctors coming in from the European Union and offering their services. That has been made clear despite what the General Medical Council might wish to do. Is not that the kind of thing that we are talking about? If the services directive is in force, people have the right to bring their services here, so this restriction would be *ultra vires* under European law.

Mr. Chope: I am delighted that my hon. Friend's interpretation is the same as mine.

The Government are consulting on a document at the moment. It was issued by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills on 6 November 2009, and it is entitled "A joint consultation on modernising Street Trading and Pedlar Legislation, and on draft guidance on the current regime". On page 29, there is a whole series of paragraphs under the heading "Services Directive". Paragraph 113 might be of particular interest to hon. Members, because it states:

"Incidentally, we understand that those local authorities who apply street trading licensing to service providers are required to justify that those regimes operate within the requirements of the Services Directive. If they are unable to do so those authorisation schemes will need to be removed insofar as they apply to service providers."

3.15 pm

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): Is my hon. Friend therefore arguing that a pedlar who is an EU citizen who is stopped in Bournemouth could appeal under the services directive and carry on trading in Bournemouth high street, but that a home-grown English pedlar who could not appeal under the directive could be driven from the streets? Would not that be unfair?

Mr. Chope: It would certainly be unfair, if that were the position. I am not sure that my hon. Friend's interpretation is quite correct, however. The pedlar would have to be offering services, rather than trading, within the terms of the legislation relating to pedlars. If he were offering services, and came under the category of service provider, that would be exactly the sort of jeopardy in which he would be placed.

Paragraph 114 of the consultation report from the Minister's Department states:

"It may be possible to institute a national system of authorisation for service providers within the requirements of the Services Directive although we are conscious that our justification for imposing such a scheme may be challenged in respect of the qualifying criteria. However, we are of the view that attempting to introduce such a system in respect of a small number of pedlars of services only, would not be a proportionate response to any perceived detriment which may result from the situation where no certification or authorisation scheme exists."

That paragraph seems slightly self-contradictory.

Paragraph 115 states that

"the Services Directive applies stricter tests in relation to authorisation schemes in respect of temporary providers of services in the UK to the extent that any scheme which might be capable of applying to established pedlars of services could not apply to temporary pedlars of services visiting the UK."

That relates to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) has just made. The paragraph continues:

"This inconsistency of application would be unfair to established pedlars and would introduce significant enforcement difficulties." So, there is a real issue here.

I know that my good hon. Friends the Members for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Ellwood) and for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) are sceptical about some of the arguments that I deploy on this legislation—both of them have intervened on me on this point—but I hope that we will be able to get an answer from the Minister on this question. It will be relevant not only to the two Bills that we are discussing today, but to the two that we discussed last week, which are now on their way to the other place, as well as to the other two Bills on the Order Paper, which we are not discussing at the moment.

John Thurso (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): I follow the hon. Gentleman's argument on the services directive; I shall wait to see whether it is right or wrong. If the services directive were not in force, would he still wish to strike down this clause, or would he be content with it?

Mr. Chope: In fairness, I have not at any previous stage of our debates on this Bill raised an issue about clause 4. I was alerted to the issue only after reading the Government's consultation paper and having had the privilege of chairing the Committee I mentioned. In fairness to myself, and perhaps to the hon. Gentleman's

[Mr. Chope]

surprise, I would not otherwise have sought to amend clause 4 in respect of pedlars providing services. I hope that that clarifies the matter. It is an issue on which we look forward to hearing the Minister's views so that we can make a judgment. It is implicit in what we have heard so far from my hon. Friends who represent Bournemouth constituencies that the promoters of the Bill believe that it is right to go ahead with clause 4, notwithstanding the advent of the services directive.

I now move on to deal with the large number of amendments that we are debating in tandem with amendment 2. I start with amendment 74, which relates to clause 5. I shall not read out all the words in the amendment, but I will say that those words provide a much better and clearer way of setting out what the Bill's promoters have to some extent been asking for, which is to ensure that pedlars with large trolleys are no longer able to operate within Bournemouth—or the city of Manchester. The amendment would allow pedlars with “a wheeled vehicle with a carrying capacity no greater than one cubic metre”

to continue to operate. It would allow them to continue “trading”, including

“the display or offer of items for sale.”

In other words, it would not alter the definition of pedlary in the existing statutes.

Mr. Leigh: This is the kernel of the matter. There is absolutely no point in driving small-scale pedlars off the street only to have them bothering people door to door. These people will go on trading anywhere anyway. It is better to regulate them on the street in a small-scale way than have them bothering people in their houses.

Mr. Chope: I agree with my hon. Friend, but I am not sure that I would concede that pedlars bother people in their houses. There is a perception these days that many householders do not want to be harassed by people knocking on their doors, seeking their attention or selling goods door to door. Quite a lot put up notices on their front door, saying “No hawkers or pedlars” or refusing delivery of circulars and the like.

However, we know from evidence produced for the Durham university report published about a year ago that in city centres quite a lot of people enjoy being able to engage with pedlars and to purchase goods—usually relatively small-value items—and to do so in the freedom of the open air. These people would not want to be bothered with offers on a door-to-door basis. Some pedlars sell balloons or mini-kites—goods more associated with people on holiday who may have their children with them, people who want to have a bit of fun at not very great expense. It is much easier for pedlars to meet those sorts of people in the streets in the town centre, near the seafront or wherever, rather than have to seek them out by calling door to door.

Reading and Leeds, two of the councils in the group of six bringing forward the Bills, have accepted amendments to clause 5 that are more restrictive than my amendment 74. Their Bills are proceeding on that basis, and their Report stages and Third Readings are coming up shortly. I have included provisions relating to people being able not just to carry goods on their person but in

“a wheeled vehicle with a carrying capacity no greater than one cubic metre pushed or pulled by him.”

That is because the issue was referred to in the Opposed Private Bill Committee, which concluded that clause 5, as originally drafted by the promoters from Bournemouth and Manchester, was too restrictive of the traditional right of pedlars to operate. After listening to the evidence, it proposed amendments which are set out in the minutes of evidence.

At the end of the Committee, it was concluded that the Bills should be amended to take on those concerns. On Wednesday 1 July 2009, at page 63 of the minutes of evidence, the Committee Chairman said, at paragraph 1119:

“Clause 5 is amended as follows...The pedlar trading house to house survives; for those not trading house to house their goods or tools or handicraft must be carried on foot on the person or in a trolley pushed or pulled by the person with a carrying capacity of no more than one cubic metre; they must not stop in one place for more than five minutes”.

Many more detailed constraints followed. The detail, which is now reflected in the revised wording of clause 5, adds nothing that is worth while, and is likely to cause confusion, as it is an attempt to introduce through the back door a redefinition of what a pedlar can do lawfully. It picks pieces out of the common law, puts them in statute, and applies them to the two localities in Bournemouth and Manchester.

Sir John Butterfill: Does my hon. Friend not agree that his proposal in fact extends what pedlars can do under the current legislation? At present, they have to carry such items with them. The introduction of wheeled vehicles of some sort extends, rather than breaches, their existing rights.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend is not correct about that. Under the existing law, they are entitled to take goods with them not only on their person but using equipment. I quote from page 2 of the explanatory memorandum to the Bournemouth Borough Council Bill, which defines a pedlar as

“a person who, without any horse or other beast, travels and trades on foot from town to town carrying to sell or exposing for sale any goods, wares or merchandise or procuring orders for the same, or selling or offering for sale his skill and handicraft”.

3.30 pm

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I want to ensure that I am following the hon. Gentleman's speech carefully. Which amendment is he addressing at the moment?

Mr. Chope: I am addressing amendment No. 74, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The hon. Gentleman seems to be talking about clause 5.

Mr. Chope: Yes.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I assume that the hon. Gentleman is aware that clause 5 is dealt with in the next set of amendments.

Mr. Chope: I was merely trying to respond to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I did not intend to anticipate the debate on a subsequent group of amendments, and I will not be drawn any further down that avenue.

I am trying to explain to my hon. Friend that the wording of amendment No. 74 is not less but more restrictive than the wording of the current law, because under the current law there is no specific limit to the carrying capacity of the vehicle that the pedlar takes with him in order to conduct his business.

Dr. Murrison: As politicians, we know full well how easy it is to expand carrying capacity. Any one of us who has set up a street stall will know that. What concerns local authorities is the problem of clutter and the blocking of ease of access for people going about their normal business. Does my hon. Friend agree that it is important to ensure that from this definition of carrying capacity does not emerge a table or stand of some sort that the pedlar might use? Might not a restriction in that regard make good sense?

Mr. Chope: I agree. That is why I have made the suggestion in amendment No. 74, and that is why, when I discussed these issues with the promoters of the Leeds and Reading Bills, I went even further and conceded—to the chagrin of some pedlars—that, in the particular circumstances of Leeds and Reading, it would be reasonable not to allow the pedlar to have anything with him other than the goods on his person.

The clear rationale set out in the main letter from the chief executive of Manchester city council, and in the separate letter from the leader of the council, which was well circulated—it was sent to a number of councils, encouraging them to ask their local Members of Parliament to participate in today's debate—is that the mischief that the Bills wish to address is that of wheeled vehicles drawn by so-called pedlars which are causing obstructions in town centres.

Obviously I would think that my own amendment was a good one, but it seems to me that amendment No. 74 clearly expresses a way of meeting the intentions of the amendments tabled by members of the Opposed Private Bill Committee without creating a complicated new provision that would offend all the principles of good regulation.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend had me worried a moment ago. He referred to bringing a horse or beast. Would his amendment prevent a pedlar from bringing his horse or his beast into play?

Mr. Chope: Effectively, it would. My hon. Friend is an experienced practitioner of the law, and he knows that if a pedlar had a horse or a beast with him, he could not possibly comply with the terms of amendment 74. However, that is—as lawyers would say—an academic point, rather than one of practical substance. However, that comment might sound rather more critical than I intended to be of my hon. Friend.

Amendment 74 is essentially a new clause, replacing clause 5. Importantly, proposed new sub-paragraph (2B) states:

“For the purposes of sub-paragraph (2A)(b), above ‘trading’ includes the display or offer of items for sale.”

Clause 5 currently does not make that clear, but it is vital that that provision of the pedlars legislation is retained intact.

Many of my other amendments in this group remove the worst inaccuracies or ambiguities from the interpretations that the Bill's promoters have put on the

words of the Opposed Private Bill Committee. They are, therefore, alternative amendments to amendment 74. That amendment effectively completely redrafts clause 5, but each of these other amendments tweaks a part of the clause that gives the wrong impression and would make bad law if unamended.

Amendment 7 would delete the word “only” from clause 5(1)(a). By inserting that word there, for the purposes of the Bill, its promoters narrow the definition of “pedlar” from the existing definition as restated in the 1982 Act, and I do not think that that can be accidental. Amendment 7 would delete the word “only” in respect of trading that is carried out

“by means of visits from house to house”

and so forth.

Amendment 24 seeks clarity. I received strong representations on this matter from pedlars. They think “location” is far too broad a term. The Opposed Private Bill Committee used the word “place” in its recommendations, rather than “location”, but I think the word “position” conveys a much better and more precise definition. A pedlar would then be in a particular position—standing on a square space of a few paving stones, perhaps—rather than in a “location”, which might be regarded as a particular street or a much wider area. I hope that this amendment will find favour with the promoters of the Bill, because it more accurately conveys the intentions of the Opposed Bill Committee and will avoid a lot of argument about what is meant by “location”.

Mr. Bone: I agree with my hon. Friend that this amendment seeks to make an important minor change, which would clarify the Bill enormously. I recall great debates that have taken place when section 106 agreements have said that money should be spent “locally” and that has been defined so widely as to have become something spent in the region. The tighter we can draw the Bill, the better. This amendment is small, but important.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his support for my amendment. He will know that the word “location” appears not only in clause 5, line 20, page 3, but in many other clauses. I shall not recite all those, but the consequential, similar amendments are set out in this group.

Amendment 8 seeks to reflect accurately common law case law on the interpretation of how long it is reasonable for a pedlar to stay in one position when complying with his duties and responsibilities under a pedlar's certificate. There is quite a lot of case law—I shall not refer to the tomes on it—suggesting that anything up to 20 minutes is reasonable for a pedlar to spend in one position and after that the pedlar needs to move on. Clause 5 says that it would not be possible for a pedlar to stay in one position for more than five minutes. That is unduly restrictive, and a 15-minute period would be more reflective of case law. In order to demonstrate the reasonableness of this and other amendments, I have not gone to the extreme of the ambit by proposing, in line with some case law, a 20 minute limit—there is even a case that suggested a stay of up to half an hour or longer. I thought that 15 minutes would be reasonable and proposed it in the hope that it would find favour with the promoters of the Bill.

Dr. Murrison: I have been listening to my hon. Friend's remarks, which make some sense to me. Would it help if he distinguished between a pedlar providing services, notwithstanding what he has said about the services directive, and those providing goods for sale? Providing goods for sale takes little time, whereas providing a service—he mentioned teeth whitening—will take rather more than five minutes. Indeed, one would hope that it would, so perhaps a distinction should be drawn between the two.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention, because he makes a powerful point about having a five-minute time limit on the provision of services by a pedlar. I am no expert in teeth whitening—his medical knowledge probably means that he knows more about what is involved—but I do not think that that service could easily be executed to the right standard in five minutes, so perhaps 15 minutes would be a more reasonable limit. I agree with him that that should apply to services. In order to try to reduce the complexity, we would be better to adopt the same time limit for pedlars providing services as for pedlars who are trading, selling or displaying goods. What would happen if people were providing both teeth whitening and, perhaps, selling toothpaste? They would be both selling and providing services and that could cause problems with enforcement.

3.45 pm

Dr. Murrison: It would, of course, depend on precisely what they were doing—if they were acting as a provider of services, or if they were acting as a pedlar of goods. In the event that they were doing both, the former would clearly take precedence over the latter.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend is absolutely right and I shall not argue with him.

The sad thing is that we are now faced with a situation in which this Bill is now being considered on Report—it has already been through the other place—and the scope for amending it beyond the amendments tabled today is non-existent. I think my hon. Friend, in fairness, is faced with the choice of supporting the provision of five minutes for all pedlars, including pedlars of services, or amendment 8, which would delete the reference to five minutes and insert 15 minutes.

Sir John Butterfill: I am sure that my hon. Friend would agree that five minutes was what the Committee, after a lot of deliberation, thought was reasonable, and that 20 minutes was well beyond what it thought was reasonable. At 20 minutes, the definition starts to become more like that of a street trader than of a pedlar. The essence of a pedlar is that he moves along.

Mr. Chope: I accept what my hon. Friend says. That is why I am not going as far as to suggest 20 minutes, and why I am proposing a 15-minute compromise. Having read the transcript of the proceedings in the Opposed Bill Committee, I doubt whether the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Westbury (Dr. Murrison) about its being very hard to provide some services within five minutes was taken on board at all.

Mr. Leigh: All this is nonsense. Who is going to police all this rubbish of insisting that someone stays for five minutes, seven minutes or 10 minutes? It is much better to have a less restrictive time limit, as my hon. Friend is trying to propose. The principle would be that they have to move on, rather than their being told to move on after five minutes. Who would police it? The police have better things to do.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend is right. The issues of seizure, penalties and enforcement are dealt with later. We must try, in this great Palace of Westminster where we legislate, to introduce a bit of common sense and practicality into the laws that we introduce. If they are effectively unenforceable, we are going to make ourselves even more of a laughing stock than we are already.

Mr. Bone: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving way. He is being very generous. Will he explain a point to the House and to me? In clause 5, proposed new sub-paragraph (2A)(a)(i) states

“at the end of the five minute period, or”—

as (ii) states—

“as soon as he is able after trading ceases, whichever comes later”.

That seems to drive a coach and horses through any time limit. Have I misread it?

Mr. Chope: Basically, that demonstrates how complicated this drafting has become. We are talking about a set of rules that are meant to be easily understood, remembered and complied with by pedlars who have had their certificates issued anywhere in the UK and who come down to Bournemouth and go to Manchester. Will they find it easy to understand these precise constraints, which will be unique to the Bournemouth and Manchester areas if they become law today?

I think that the answer to the question posed by my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Bone) is that a very tight time limit of five minutes may lead to a queue of customers asking, “Hang on a minute, can I buy one of those?”, to which the response will be, “No, because my five minutes are up.”

Unless people are within sight of the town hall clock, it will be quite difficult for them to be cognisant of when they arrived and of how long they can enjoy selling wares to willing customers.

Mr. Leigh: What do people do when their five minutes is up? Do they take one step to the right, or 15 steps? We are in danger of making the law an ass.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend anticipates my amendment 9. Line 28 of page 3 says that after a pedlar has left a location—or, as I would prefer to say, a position—he must move a minimum distance of 200 metres before he can engage in further trading. He will therefore say to customers rushing down the street after him as he walks away, “I can't trade with you now because I have not done my 200 yards”—as I would call the distance. Again, that is absolutely ludicrous—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I understand that the hon. Gentleman is being tempted to move from amendment to amendment. He is doing very well, but it would be

helpful if he would move logically from amendment to amendment. If he deals with amendment 9 now, we will consider it dealt with.

Mr. Chope: I was trying to go logically through the amendments, Mr. Deputy Speaker. We have dealt with amendment 8, which would leave out “five” and insert “fifteen”, but I have not referred to amendment 25, as it is another one that would replace the word “location” with the word “position” and I have already deployed the arguments in that regard.

As you say, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that brings us to amendment 9. For those who are following the debate and have a copy of the Bill, that amendment refers to line 28 of page 3 and reads:

“leave out ‘200’ and insert ‘20’.”

For a pedlar to establish that he has moved, there is no need for him to move 200 metres. I have already said why I do not believe that setting a minimum distance requires such a highly prescriptive form of legislation but, if that is what we must have, my proposal is that the Bill should set the more reasonable distance of 20 rather than 200 metres.

I would be the first to accept that that is an arbitrary judgment on my part, but my 20-metre proposal would still make it clear that a person had moved and could then continue with his transactions.

Mr. Ellwood: I am pleased that my hon. Friend has finally admitted that these are, in essence, wrecking amendments that would change the Bill in its entirety and render it unworkable. My hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough (Mr. Leigh) has said that a person moving one inch could not be policed, but that is exactly what would happen if the distance were to be reduced from 200 metres to 20 metres. How could that possibly be policed? Two hundred metres is a decent distance: with that, and a time limit of five minutes, there would be no doubt about what was happening.

I do not want to test the House’s patience, but the Bill makes it clear that the provisions apply only when trading has ceased. So a person getting his teeth whitened will not have to give up the service halfway through, and the trader will be able to deal with any queue that has formed before moving on. The drafting of the Bill is sound, and I am sorry that my hon. Friend is not giving it the justice that it deserves.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that intervention. Not for the first time, two hon. Members have reached different conclusions about what should be the right form of the legislation. However, clause 5 and the amendments tabled as a result of the deliberations in the Opposed Bill Committee show that the members of that Committee, and now the Bill’s promoters, have tried to encapsulate in statute the case law that has arisen.

There is no evidence to suggest that case law requires a pedlar to move between each set of transactions a distance of 200 metres rather than 20 metres, which is the distance that I suggest in amendment 9. I strongly dissent from my hon. Friend’s suggestion that that is a wrecking amendment. It is not. The amendment has been selected for debate, and it is based upon representations that I have received. I have modified them not only to

make them more reasonable, but to bring them closer than might otherwise have been possible to the concerns expressed.

Mr. Ellwood: With due respect to my hon. Friend and constituency neighbour, is he honestly saying that, in a period of three hours, the introduction of 81 separate amendments is not designed to wreck the Bill?

Mr. Chope: It is absolutely not designed to wreck the Bill; it is designed to improve the Bill.

Mr. Leigh: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Is it in order to put down wrecking amendments?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If an amendment was put down and seen to be a wrecking amendment, it would not be called for debate. However, it will help if the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) lets us know each time he moves from one amendment to another, and help if he keeps ticking along.

Mr. Chope: Absolutely.

Mr. Bone: I am looking with some concern at clause 5(1)(a) and (b). Paragraph (a) refers to “visits from house to house”.

In Wellingborough, houses are often right next door to each other; they are certainly not 200 metres apart. Have I misread that provision? If one employed a 200 metre provision, one could not go from house to house.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend has misread that provision, because it applies to pedlars trading not from house to house, but in the streets. I am sorry to be blunt with him about that.

Dr. Murrison: But the provision would apply, presumably, to the “lucky lavender” seller who peddles her wares—throughout the summer, certainly—on Westminster bridge. She does not move very far and cannot, poor thing, because of all the passing traffic, so it would apply to her, would it not?

Mr. Chope: It most certainly would apply to her, and my hon. Friend raises an important issue, because the Bill’s promoters would argue that that lavender seller is just the sort of person who is outlawed under similar legislation that has been enacted in London. Returning to the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Gainsborough made about enforcement, and notwithstanding the legislation in London, we still see such activity continuing, however. So, even if the intention was to stop a lavender seller operating in Bournemouth town centre, I am not sure that it would be realised in practice. We will turn later to whether it should be possible to seize and hold the lavender seller’s lavender until a fixed penalty has been paid, but we should not anticipate that debate.

Amendment 10 would leave out from clause 5 “in any 12 hour period”

and, taking into account amendment 11, mean that the location that a pedlar occupied with a view to trading would have to be at a minimum distance from any other one that he had so occupied at any time within a period of “two hours”.

[Mr. Chope]

Amendments 10 and 11 would make the provisions more akin to those that apply, for example, to restricted waiting for cars. A lot of waiting restrictions say that someone cannot stay in one particular parking bay for more than, say, half an hour, and they must not return to that same location within two hours. I have yet to come across any parking restriction that says that they cannot come back within 12 hours, because it would be very difficult to enforce that: who is going to stand in a location for 12 hours to see whether the person comes back? I am trying to introduce some common sense into this.

4 pm

Mr. Ellwood: I think that common sense is something that we wandered away from some time ago. My hon. Friend has described a situation where a pedlar can, over any two-hour period, move a maximum distance of about 160 metres. How is that possibly going to be useful from a town centre perspective of controlling street traders and pedlars? This is getting daft.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend has multiplied my 15 minutes by 20 metres. He is saying that in any hour the pedlar would have to move 80 metres, so in two hours he would have to move 160 metres. With the greatest respect, that does not seem unreasonable, because the pedlar is continuing to move around. Obviously, if he does not have any trade in one particular position, he will move more frequently, but if he has quite a lot of trade, then he will do as is suggested, which would be perfectly in order under the current legislation applying to pedlars. I disagree with my hon. Friend.

As currently worded, the provisions mean that a pedlar would not be able to return within a 12-hour period to any place that he has occupied. Taking all the original wording together, that means that he would have to travel 200 metres every five minutes over a 12-hour period. If we multiply that out—I am not so good at mental arithmetic when I am on my feet—it is clear that he would have to travel quite a long way. I suggest that that is unreasonable, particularly when coupled with the requirement that having travelled those distances the person must not return to a location that is less than 5 metres away from any position that he has occupied during the previous 12 hours.

Mr. Ellwood: The Pedlars Act 1871 says that a pedlar “travels and trades on foot and goes from town to town”.

From that, one can deduce that they are on the move fairly regularly. Therefore, it makes sense to provide that a person could move the distance that we are talking about—200 metres—and then move locations over a 12-hour period with a view to trading at a minimum distance of 5 metres away from a position that he has occupied before. That fits with the 1871 Act.

Mr. Chope: With the greatest respect to my hon. Friend, it is for Parliament to legislate and for the judges to interpret that legislation. The interpretation placed on the 1871 Act by successive members of the judiciary is contrary to that of my hon. Friend. I think it is better for us to proceed on the basis that we should try to align these provisions with the existing common law interpretation.

Mr. Leigh: We have the 1871 Act, and my hon. Friend is obviously in touch with the peddling community. If I were a pedlar who had done this for years, I cannot believe that I would think in terms of 200 metres, or whatever. I would think in terms of having, from time to time, to move on, because that is what is bred into me by my community. Are we not being far too prescriptive? Cannot we just go back to the broad interpretation that we have always had under the 1871 Act and common law?

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend makes the plea that we have been making throughout the deliberations on these Bills. The whole issue of what we should do now in the national context will soon be on the Minister’s table, because he has put out a big paper for consultation. We will see from the responses to it what the Government decide to do, but it would be very odd if the House decided to have a different, prescriptive regime for what we mean by “moving on” for the purposes of pedlars operating in Bournemouth and Manchester compared with what judges up and down the land have said is reasonable for pedlars operating in other parts of the country. I am very much with my hon. Friend on that.

I move on to amendment 12, which would leave out lines 34 to 37. The provisions that I have criticised would be less offensive if those lines were left out, because they state that a pedlar

“must not begin so to occupy a location any part of which is nearer than a minimum distance of 50 metres from any part of a location for the time being so occupied by another person”.

That means that a pedlar who had finished his five minutes of trading would not be able to move anywhere else, other than some 200 metres away, if the new position were within 50 metres of another person.

Mr. Leigh: Absurd. Absolutely absurd.

Mr. Chope: It is, and I plead with the sponsors of the Bill to make some concession to common sense. As currently drafted, clause 5(1)(d) does not make any sense at all and is oppressive beyond all measure. The case for leaving it out and getting on without it is extremely strong.

Amendment 13 would leave out, in line 34 on page 3, the words “any part of”. It is an alternative but much less adequate way to mitigate against the worst impact of subsection (1)(d). The amendment would mean that a pedlar

“must not begin so to occupy a location”—

or, in my preferred wording, a position—

“which is nearer than a minimum distance of 50 metres”

from another person. The expression “any part of” gives credence to the concern that I expressed earlier when introducing my amendments to replace the word “location” with the word “position”, which is that the drafters of the Bill have it in mind that a “location” might be quite a wide area. If it were not, they would not need to include the words

“any part of which is nearer than a minimum distance of 50 metres”.

It would be quite easy to measure 50 metres from a spot where one was standing selling flowers or whatever, but from what part of that position or location should that be done? That wording confirms my suspicion and that of pedlars that in using the word “location”, the promoters are trying to introduce a system of measuring not from a particular spot or position but from a wide area.

We must then ask what we mean by that location or area and how to measure the 50 metres minimum distance from the nearest part of it to “any part of” another

“location for the time being so occupied by another person”.

Government draftsmen would find such drafting intolerable in Government legislation—it cannot be good legislation.

I can understand people asking why we must go into such detail—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I say to the hon. Gentleman that the amendment is extremely clearly set out. Presumably he is either for or against it.

Mr. Chope: Yes, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I am very much for the amendment and against the contents of the measure.

Mr. Bone: My hon. Friend is explaining the amendments in great detail. Would it be helpful to the House if on occasion the sponsors of the Bill intervened to say that they accept an amendment? In that way, we could move a bit faster.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sure the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) is very experienced in these matters. Perhaps he could speak to the amendment before the House, and not to how these things are done.

Mr. Chope: Mr. Deputy Speaker, I live in anticipation of getting a helpful response from the Minister that would in due course result in one of my hon. Friends summing up the debate by saying that quite a lot of the amendments have been accepted by the sponsors. I would be the first to raise my hat to the roof in celebration of such common-sense concessions, which I am sure should be made in due course.

I will not discuss amendments 14 and 28, because I have made the case for those in previous discussions. Amendment 15 would mean that the pedlar could not move within a minimum distance of 50 metres of another pedlar, rather than simply “another person”. There must have been an error in the drafting of the Bill, because it is complete nonsense that someone should have to be 50 metres away from any other person. I pray in aid the explanatory memorandum which, in explaining the alterations to the pedlars’ exception in clause 5 and summarising the essential requirements, states that

“no trading must be commenced any nearer than 50 metres from another person trading with the authority of a pedlars’ certificate”.

The explanatory memorandum adds the words

“with the authority of a pedlars’ certificate”,

but that is not in the Bill. I hope that someone will intervene to assure me that there has indeed been a drafting error, because the intent, as expressed in the explanatory memorandum, is that the minimum distance—whether one likes that or not—should be from another pedlar, rather than from “another person”.

4.15 pm

Mr. Leigh: If one is 50 metres from a pedlar, what is all the fuss about? It is not as though high streets are being invaded by a rash of pedlars standing every

5 metres. What does it matter if there is a pedlar every 50 metres or every 100 metres, or indeed only every 45 metres? It is ludicrous.

Mr. Chope: I do not dissent from the use of the word “ludicrous”. The existing wording however provides that the pedlar would not be able to move within 50 metres of anyone. If he has to find a position at least 50 metres from anyone else, people will think that he needs a bath or something—

Mr. Leigh: He probably does!

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend is being unfair. I hope that the sponsors of the Bill will accept that that is an error. That would be a modest but welcome concession.

Clause 5 lays out several things that a person must do “at all times while...trading”

or “otherwise occupying any location”. Amendment 16 would insert the words “acting as a pedlar” after “at all times while”, so that we would not restrict the ambit of the rules and responsibilities relating to pedlars. Acting as a pedlar includes offering one’s goods for sale so that people may look at them and discuss what is available—it might even involve taking an order to be delivered on a subsequent occasion. The amendment would add clarity and precision to the Bill.

Amendment 17 would remove all the restrictions in proposed new sub-paragraph (e), which would help to clarify the Bill. We know what activity is legitimate activity for a pedlar, and to define that activity more narrowly would contradict the express statement of the Opposed Private Bill Committee that nothing it did would amend the definition of pedlar. That was its intention as stated in paragraph 1119 on page 63 of the transcript of day two, which quotes the Chairman as saying:

“We are not attempting to redefine peddler.”

However, there is an attempt to redefine pedlar, which is raising all sorts of concerns and suspicions among pedlars.

Amendments 29 and 30 relate to the point that I made earlier about the benefits of using the words “position” or “positions” rather than “location” and “locations”. The same is true of amendment 31.

Amendment 18 would leave out “bona fide” on page 4, line 4 in clause 5, which instead of referring to customers, talks about bona fide customers. I am not sure that it will be easy for people to find out who is a bona fide customer. The provision states:

“Nothing in sub-paragraph (2A)(b) to (d)...disqualifies any person from occupying a location within a minimum distance for the purpose of trading if...he so occupies it on the request of a bona fide customer”.

Does that mean that the customer has to complete a purchase for the pedlar’s position to be validated? How is any observer of the scene to assess whether the customer is bona fide?

Mr. Leigh: Again, that is a completely subjective test—it is not an objective test. Why does this Parliament have this relentless itch to change, regulate and control? How many complaints against pedlars are there? My information is that on average there is one complaint

[Mr. Leigh]

per authority in this country. Yet we are introducing this new law, which is unasked for, unwanted and will control the ability of people to engage in enterprise.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I encourage the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) to stick to the amendment before the House.

Mr. Chope: I will stick to the amendment, and just note my hon. Friend's remarks.

I am trying, through the amendments, to improve clause 5 and hoping that we will get some assistance from the sponsors.

Mr. Ellwood: I am conscious of progress—or perhaps the lack of it, as we wander through the amendments—and hope that we might see a conclusion today. Given that my hon. Friend has invited the sponsors of the Bill to provide some clarification, I shall explain the reason for the reference to “bona fide”. Hon. Members might like to wander outside their own constituencies to places such as Manchester and Bournemouth, where stooges are used to keep pedlars occupied and so prevent them from moving on as they should. That is the reason for the reference to “bona fide”. If my hon. Friend does not like the Latin “bona fide”, he could easily have suggested “genuine”. However, that is the explanation. It is a reality that stooges are used to prevent movement and deliberately to keep the pedlar in one location.

Mr. Chope: Well, that is the first that I have heard of that suggestion.

Mr. Ellwood: It was made in Committee, actually.

Mr. Chope: Well, in that case, I defer to my hon. Friend's expertise. I stand corrected; it was raised in Committee. I obviously skim-read that bit and did not notice the reference. However, the point that I would make in response is this: who is to decide whether the customer is bona fide or a stooge? There have been, I think, six prosecutions for illegal pedlary in Bournemouth over a two-year period. Proportionally, to include “bona fide” on lines 4 and 11 in relation to a customer is pushing the ambit of the prescription and regulation too far.

Mr. Leigh: Is my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Ellwood) suggesting that I am a stooge trying to keep my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) going in business?

Mr. Chope: I shall not be drawn into that.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. My patience is now being strained.

Mr. Chope: Amendment 19 is similar to amendment 18 in that it would leave out “bona fide” on page 4, line 11. I do not need to address my remarks to that.

Amendment 20 reads:

“leave out from ‘customer’ to end of line 13”,

on page 4. The effect of amendment 20 would be to enable the person to carry on trading from the time that

he commences a transaction involving selling goods to a customer or supplying a service for payment by a customer, because it would leave out the words

“up to the moment when the transaction is completed or aborted”.

Again, that would add a lot of clarity and reduce the restrictions in the Bill. Amendment 20 is perhaps not the most important amendment, but it nevertheless merits serious attention. Amendment 21 would leave out the words “bona fide” from clause 5, on page 4, line 15, although I will not go over that ground again.

Then we come to amendment 22, which would leave out lines 20 to 24 on page 4, removing the requirements relating to measurements of minimum distance. Everyone understands what a minimum distance is and why I am against references to minimum distances, and certainly the short distances referred to in clause 5. Everybody knows how to measure a distance, and we do not need to define it as tightly as the Bill does, which says that the “measurement of minimum distance operates in a straight line except to the extent that...the ground is not level”—

I am slightly confused by what that means—or that the “passage along the line is obstructed by buildings, fixed structures or private property”.

If we are to have any confidence in common sense, surely we do not need the degree of prescription in proposed new paragraph 1(2C)(b) of schedule 4 to the 1982 Act, as set out in clause 5, on lines 20 to 24 of page 4.

The last amendment in this group is amendment 23, which is arguably one of the most important amendments, because it bears directly on the quotation that I gave a moment ago of the Chairman of the Opposed Private Bill Committee, who said that there was no intention on the part of that Committee to redefine the word “pedlar”. It is my submission that clause 5(2) should not say:

“Nothing in subsection (1) shall be taken to extend the range of activities that comprise acting as a pedlar.”

The Bill as drafted restricts the range of activities that comprise acting as a pedlar, compared with the activities set out under the Pedlars Act 1871 and the case law under it. It would be much clearer, and would also reflect more accurately the express intentions of the Chairman and other members of the Opposed Private Bill Committee, if clause 5(2) said that nothing in subsection (1) should be taken to “restrict” the range of activities that comprise acting as a pedlar, which is the complete reverse of what it says now.

The reason why I think that that is important is that there is a lot of suspicion about the motives behind the provisions. There has been a breakdown of trust between the pedlars and the various boroughs whose enforcement officers they believe are harassing them unnecessarily. If the Bill goes forward in a way that, it could be argued, restricts the range of activities that currently comprise acting as a pedlar, not only will that be premature, because we will still be awaiting the report from the Government following the consultation that is taking place, but it will add to the pedlars' frustration and their feeling that they are an oppressed minority. There are only about 3,500 of them up and down the country, and some of us are trying to defend their interests today—and, indeed, to encourage more people to participate in the art and activity of pedlary, which brings so much joy to

so many people in so many parts of the country. I have summarised my amendments and I urge hon. Members to support them.

4.30 pm

Mr. Ellwood: This has been a very long debate. May I place on record my concern that we could have had another 45 minutes, once the previous chunk of business had finished? Instead, the sitting was suspended, which was unhelpful. We could have had more time to debate these matters.

Mr. Bone *rose*—

Mr. Ellwood: I will give way briefly, but we really need to make some progress on the Bill.

Mr. Bone: I do not think that my hon. Friend is quite correct. The three-hour limit would have been opposed if the Government motion had been accepted.

Mr. Ellwood: My hon. Friend is not correct. There was an objection made to our continuing with—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Can we stick to discussing the amendment before the House, and not go into what happened before?

Mr. Ellwood: There is a lot of history behind the Bill. We have debated it more than we have debated most of the Government Bills that have been put through Parliament in this Session. My hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), who initially objected to its being pushed through at a pace with which he was uncomfortable, made it clear that we needed to give it due discussion, and that was accepted. We have now had that discussion, however, and I am concerned that 81 amendments have been tabled at the eleventh hour. I hope that we will be able to bring this matter to a conclusion here today.

We have moved much too far away from the real issue, which is the relationship between street traders and pedlars, both of whom have a legitimate role in society today. Unfortunately, there is a legal blurring in regard to how the two work together, to the extent that local authorities up and down the country are having problems with how to control their town centres. The purpose of the Bill—which follows similar Bills relating to places such as Leicester, Medway and London—is to try to reconcile that difference.

I would be the first to acknowledge that national legislation covering all local councils would be sensible. Unfortunately, we are a long way off achieving that, and the situation in our town centres has created a sense of urgency. We therefore need to push ahead with this legislation. There would not be so many borough councils queuing up to join those that already have the legislation if it were not important. All borough councils face huge financial pressures, and it has cost an awful lot of money to get where we are today. They would not be going down that road unless it were important.

Dr. Murrison: I agree with my hon. Friend entirely. It is a pity that individual local authorities have to pursue these matters in this way. My council, Wiltshire county council, has yet to contact me on this matter, but I know

that these issues arise in the market towns of Wiltshire, and I am anticipating the day when we might have to introduce a similar Bill for my area. Does my hon. Friend agree that there is a hierarchy of disadvantage for those who operate shops, for street traders and for pedlars—in terms of business rates, for example? That creates a competitive disadvantage that needs to be addressed, and in that respect the market needs to be managed. This Bill is part of that process, albeit in relation only to Bournemouth.

Mr. Ellwood: My hon. Friend echoes the importance of pressing ahead with this legislation. We have already had votes in the House on the Bill. Parliament has already spoken on the matter, and I do not want to take up any more of its time. I urge hon. Members to press forward with the Bill and to draw the matter to a conclusion.

Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central) (Lab) *claimed to move the closure (Standing Order No. 36).*

Question put forthwith, That the Question be now put.

The House divided: Ayes 127, Noes 5.

Division No. 54]

[4.35 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane	Green, Damian
Austin, John	Greening, Justine
Baird, Vera	Griffith, Nia
Battle, rh John	Grogan, Mr. John
Bayley, Hugh	Hammond, Stephen
Bellingham, Mr. Henry	Hands, Mr. Greg
Benton, Mr. Joe	Hanson, rh Mr. David
Betts, Mr. Clive	Harris, Dr. Evan
Blackman-Woods, Dr. Roberta	Healey, rh John
Blunt, Mr. Crispin	Heath, Mr. David
Boswell, Mr. Tim	Hendrick, Mr. Mark
Bottomley, Peter	Hendry, Charles
Brennan, Kevin	Heppell, Mr. John
Brokenshire, James	Heyes, David
Brooke, Annette	Hill, rh Keith
Brown, Lyn	Hillier, Meg
Brown, rh Mr. Nicholas	Horwood, Martin
Browne, rh Des	Hoyle, Mr. Lindsay
Burstow, Mr. Paul	Hughes, Simon
Burt, Alistair	Iddon, Dr. Brian
Butler, Ms Dawn	Irranca-Davies, Huw
Chapman, Ben	Jack, rh Mr. Michael
Chaytor, Mr. David	Johnson, Ms Diana R.
Clark, Greg	Jones, Helen
Clwyd, rh Ann	Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Crausby, Mr. David	Keen, Alan
Drew, Mr. David	Kidney, Mr. David
Eagle, Maria	Kumar, Dr. Ashok
Efford, Clive	Linton, Martin
Ellwood, Mr. Tobias	Lloyd, Tony
Engel, Natascha	Love, Mr. Andrew
Etherington, Bill	Lucas, Ian
Farrelly, Paul	Mactaggart, Fiona
Featherstone, Lynne	Mallaber, Judy
Fitzpatrick, Jim	Martlew, Mr. Eric
Foster, Mr. Don	McAvoy, rh Mr. Thomas
Foster, Michael Jabez	McCabe, Steve
<i>(Hastings and Rye)</i>	McCarthy, Kerry
Gardiner, Barry	McFadden, rh Mr. Pat
George, rh Mr. Bruce	McFall, rh John
Gerrard, Mr. Neil	McGovern, Mr. Jim
Gidley, Sandra	McIntosh, Miss Anne

Mclsaac, Shona
Meale, Mr. Alan
Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, rh Edward
Moffatt, Laura
Morden, Jessica
Mullin, Mr. Chris
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Neill, Robert
O'Brien, rh Mr. Mike
O'Hara, Mr. Edward
Olner, Mr. Bill
Penning, Mike
Penrose, John
Pound, Stephen
Randall, Mr. John
Raynsford, rh Mr. Nick
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mr. Mohammad
Selous, Andrew
Skinner, Mr. Dennis

Smith, rh Angela E. (*Basildon*)
Soames, Mr. Nicholas
Soulsby, Sir Peter
Spellar, rh Mr. John
Starkey, Dr. Phyllis
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Thurso, John
Tipping, Paddy
Twigg, Derek
Vara, Mr. Shailesh
Villiers, Mrs. Theresa
Waltho, Lynda
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, Mr. Dave
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, Mr. John
Williams, Mr. Roger
Willott, Jenny
Wright, David

Tellers for the Ayes:
Andrew Miller and
Ms Gisela Stuart

NOES

Field, Mr. Mark
Hollobone, Mr. Philip
Pelling, Mr. Andrew
Steen, Mr. Anthony

Tyrie, Mr. Andrew

Tellers for the Noes:
Mr. Peter Bone and
Mr. Edward Leigh

Question accordingly agreed to.

Question put accordingly, That the amendment be made.

The House proceeded to a Division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. I ask the Serjeant at Arms to investigate the delay in the Aye Lobby.

The House having divided: Ayes 8, Noes 124.

Division No. 55]

[4.47 pm

AYES

Chope, Mr. Christopher
Hollobone, Mr. Philip
Mackay, rh Mr. Andrew
Pelling, Mr. Andrew
Steen, Mr. Anthony
Turner, Mr. Andrew

Tyrie, Mr. Andrew
Walter, Mr. Robert

Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr. Peter Bone and
Mr. Edward Leigh

NOES

Abbott, Ms Diane
Austin, John
Baird, Vera
Battle, rh John
Bayley, Hugh
Bellingham, Mr. Henry
Benton, Mr. Joe
Betts, Mr. Clive
Blackman-Woods, Dr. Roberta
Blunt, Mr. Crispin
Bottomley, Peter
Brooke, Annette
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr. Nicholas
Browne, rh Des
Burstow, Mr. Paul

Burt, Alistair
Butler, Ms Dawn
Butterfill, Sir John
Chapman, Ben
Chaytor, Mr. David
Clark, Greg
Clifton-Brown, Mr. Geoffrey
Clwyd, rh Ann
Crausby, Mr. David
Dowd, Jim
Drew, Mr. David
Eagle, Maria
Efford, Clive
Ellwood, Mr. Tobias
Engel, Natascha
Etherington, Bill

Farrelly, Paul
Featherstone, Lynne
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Foster, Mr. Don
Foster, Michael Jabez
(*Hastings and Rye*)
Gardiner, Barry
George, rh Mr. Bruce
Gerrard, Mr. Neil
Gidley, Sandra
Greening, Justine
Griffith, Nia
Grogan, Mr. John
Hammond, Stephen
Healey, rh John
Heath, Mr. David
Hendrick, Mr. Mark
Hendry, Charles
Heppell, Mr. John
Heyes, David
Hill, rh Keith
Hillier, Meg

Horwood, Martin
Hoyle, Mr. Lindsay
Hughes, Simon
Iddon, Dr. Brian
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Mr. Stewart
Johnson, Ms Diana R.
Jones, Helen
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keen, Alan
Kidney, Mr. David
Laing, Mrs. Eleanor
Linton, Martin
Lloyd, Tony
Love, Mr. Andrew
Lucas, Ian
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mallaber, Judy
McAvoy, rh Mr. Thomas
McCabe, Steve
McCarthy, Kerry
McFadden, rh Mr. Pat
McFall, rh John
McGovern, Mr. Jim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
Mclsaac, Shona
Meale, Mr. Alan

Michael, rh Alun
Miliband, rh Edward
Moffatt, Laura
Mole, Chris
Morden, Jessica
Mullin, Mr. Chris
Murrison, Dr. Andrew
Naysmith, Dr. Doug
Neill, Robert
O'Brien, rh Mr. Mike
O'Hara, Mr. Edward
Olner, Mr. Bill
Penning, Mike
Penrose, John
Pound, Stephen
Randall, Mr. John
Raynsford, rh Mr. Nick
Robertson, Mr. Laurence
Rosindell, Andrew
Russell, Bob
Salter, Martin
Sarwar, Mr. Mohammad
Selous, Andrew
Skinner, Mr. Dennis
Smith, rh Angela E. (*Basildon*)
Soames, Mr. Nicholas
Soulsby, Sir Peter
Spellar, rh Mr. John
Stringer, Graham
Stunell, Andrew
Thomas, Mr. Gareth
Thurso, John
Tipping, Paddy
Twigg, Derek
Vara, Mr. Shailesh
Villiers, Mrs. Theresa
Waltho, Lynda
Watkinson, Angela
Watts, Mr. Dave
Whitehead, Dr. Alan
Whittingdale, Mr. John
Williams, Mr. Roger
Willott, Jenny
Woolas, Mr. Phil
Wright, David

Tellers for the Noes:
Andrew Miller and
Ian Stewart

Question accordingly negated.

Mr. Chope: I beg to move amendment 4.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this it will be convenient to discuss amendments 5 and 6.

Mr. Chope: This is a smaller group of amendments. I hope that the sponsors of the Bill will show a little more respect to the arguments deployed in support of the amendments in this group than they did to those in the last group. People who are looking at the record will be amazed to think that 28 amendments, which took well over an hour and a half to discuss and concerned many Members of the House, received no response from the Government or the official Opposition and no meaningful response from the sponsors before they curtailed the debate. I hope we do not experience that again, because it sends out a very bad message from this House. It

suggests that people who table amendments are never entitled to a response to the arguments they make in support of them.

Sir John Butterfill: I am a little offended on behalf of my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Ellwood) and myself that my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) does not think we replied to the serious points he made. We did not regard some of them as being particularly serious.

Mr. Chope: I am sure that if this Bill reaches the statute book the proof of the pudding will be in the eating and we will see the result in the Bournemouth magistrates court or divisional court. Perhaps the Government will sort it out by introducing some national legislation.

Mr. Leigh: There is a serious matter. In an excellent speech—he gets the Eric Forth award for consistency and accuracy—my hon. Friend made some important points. We should have a convention that at least the Minister should reply to a debate before the closure motion can be moved.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. We are now spending time on the past and on procedure. May I suggest to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) that we move on to the substance of this group of amendments?

Mr. Chope: Absolutely, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Amendment 4 would insert the phrase

“to the area of the Borough defined in subsection (3) below”.

Subsection (3) is provided by another amendment in this group, amendment 5, which defines a specific area of Bournemouth in which the ambit of the provisions of the Bill will apply. That is the area to the south of the Wessex way, and hon. Members on both sides of the House familiar with conferences in Bournemouth will know that that is the extension of the spur road into town. People travelling from London turn left off the spur road to get to the centre of Bournemouth and to the Bournemouth International Centre, where the conferences are held.

The area that I am defining would be confined to the area to the south of the spur road—in other words, it would lie between the spur road and the seaside. Restrictions to the west of that area would apply at Durlay Chine; to the east, they would apply at the Lansdowne and its Meyrick road extension.

Mr. Leigh: We used to have our party conference in Bournemouth, and I much preferred those great days. We would be stopped constantly by people giving us leaflets, but why should they be treated any better or worse than an honest pedlar trying to earn a living?

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend makes a really good point. Leaflets do not have to be sold in order to be issued by pedlars, but perhaps we should have ensured that the people handing them out held pedlars' certificates. I am concerned about this matter because my constituency of Christchurch is so close to Bournemouth—indeed, it is contiguous with it. It is a great inconvenience that we no longer hold Conservative party conferences there.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. I suggest that that is not relevant to the amendments under discussion. We should be concentrating on time and place.

Mr. Chope: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. To deal with the question of location, I shall refer to a conversation that I had with Mr. Mark Smith, Bournemouth's director of tourism. We spoke on Monday of this week, over breakfast at a hotel in Christchurch. The meeting was organised by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Ellwood), although unfortunately he was not able to attend.

Also at the meeting was a Bournemouth councillor, and I raised with Mr. Smith an issue that I had raised at a discussion at Bournemouth town hall some 18 months ago. Bournemouth says that it has a problem with illegal street trading and rogue pedlars in the town centre, so the suggestion was that the provisions of the Bill should be limited to that area and not extend across the whole area of the borough. I gave Mr. Smith the details of the restricted location proposed in the amendment, and he agreed that, to all intents and purpose, that was the core part of Bournemouth's commercial centre.

Mr. Smith accepted that it would be an appropriate area to put in a restriction, but he was worried about making any concessions at this stage. He was also worried about what he described as the displacement effect—the possibility that activity currently taking place in the town centre might be displaced elsewhere.

You may remember, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that that is exactly the same argument as the one that we addressed on Second Reading, when we debated whether the consequence of introducing this legislation in Bournemouth's town centre would be that the activity would be displaced into the borough of Christchurch. My hon. Friend the Member for North Dorset (Mr. Walter) spoke about towns such as Wimborne and Blandford in his constituency, but at that stage it was denied that there would be any displacement effect. Now, however, the argument about possible displacement is being used against my proposal, which is that the Bill should contain a clear definition of the part of Bournemouth to which these restrictions will apply. It is more complicated than it might seem, because different trading regimes already operate in Bournemouth.

That point was borne out by the evidence from the same Mr. Mark Smith, the director of tourism, during the Opposed Private Bill Committee at the end of June and the beginning of July last year. I recall him saying, early on in his evidence, that although the Bill would apply to the whole of Bournemouth, some streets were prohibited streets, some were not, and there were some to which the local authority had not sought the application of the 1982 Act. It does not apply to quite a lot of the streets in Bournemouth.

A question then arose—from a Committee member, I think—about how pedlars going to Bournemouth would know in which streets they could ply their trade. Although the Bill extends to the whole borough of Bournemouth, the whole borough is not subject to the 1982 Act, so pedlary not just from house to house but in the street will be able to continue in parts of the borough. The trouble is, however, as Mr. Smith conceded in his evidence, one will be able to find out the areas where the legislation will apply only by looking on the internet, and that is not a practical proposition for many pedlars. He said

[Mr. Chope]

that the precise boundaries for the operation of the restrictions in Bournemouth should be set out in a leaflet, which they do not yet have in Bournemouth, and made available to all police authorities throughout the country. They would be able to distribute the details to people when they applied for a pedlar's licence, and those individuals would know the parts of Bournemouth in which they were able to exercise their pedlary certificate without getting on the wrong side of the law.

Sir John Butterfill: Surely it is not beyond the wit of any reasonably prudent pedlars to inquire at the town hall whether there are any areas where they are not permitted to ply their trade. I do not see that being particularly onerous; in fact, any prudent person could do so.

Mr. Chope: If my hon. Friend looks at the evidence from the Opposed Private Bill Committee, he will find that he is slightly at odds with the director of tourism for Bournemouth. If that had been the director's view, he would not have suggested that the way to overcome the problem was to distribute leaflets to every police authority in the country.

John Penrose (Weston-super-Mare) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that time may very well solve that problem? The growing ubiquity of personal handheld electronic devices, such as iPhones, BlackBerrys and so on, most of which are capable of surfing the net, would make it much easier—particularly for entrepreneurial people such as pedlars. He and I agree that they are entrepreneurial, and it will be very easy for them in due course to check in real time on the council's website the location of the streets where they are and are not allowed to trade. Such activity may not be ubiquitous quite yet, but in due course I suspect that it will become increasingly easy. Does he agree?

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend addresses somebody who is proud not to have a BlackBerry, so I am not quite sure about the question of ubiquity.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Is the hon. Gentleman telling the House that, therefore, he will be impeded as a pedlar?

Mr. Chope: I hope, Mr. Deputy Speaker, that as a gentleman of good character if I applied for my pedlar's certificate I would be able to get one.

5.15 pm

My hon. Friend makes a fair point. However, the problem is that this information is not available at the moment. If he looks at the Bournemouth council website, he will not be able to find out to which streets in Bournemouth the 1982 Act applies and to which it does not apply. It is a more complex issue. We have not yet got on to the penalties that will come by way of fixed penalty fines or seizures, but the consequences for a pedlar of operating unwittingly in a street in which he should not be operating can be very significant.

Mr. Leigh: My hon. Friend is making an important point that goes right to the heart of what we are talking about. This shows that instead of having these restrictive, bitty borough Bills, we need new national legislation.

These peddling free souls are not the sort of people who go around town halls checking on BlackBerrys—they want to get on with running their traditional little business.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend is absolutely right.

These people will choose a different location for their pedlary on different days of the week. They will go to different towns and different parts of the country, as opposed to somebody who is familiar with their own local territory. That is one of the big distinctions between somebody who is a street trader and somebody who is a pedlar. As Mr. Smith said in giving his evidence, one of the restrictions on being able to get a street trading licence in Bournemouth is that the applicant cannot get one unless they are going to regularly occupy that stall.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. After that little flurry, let us get back to time and place, shall we?

Mr. Chope: The fact that this Bill, if implemented, will not apply to the whole of Bournemouth makes all the stronger the case for saying, "Let's define specifically the part of Bournemouth where there is a problem and set it out in the Bill", so that the situation is as plain as a pikestaff to anybody visiting Bournemouth with a view to carrying on as a pedlar. The council concedes that the area I have described is that where the mischief takes place.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) (Con): In his amendment, is not my hon. Friend setting up a canard in order to shoot it down? If the Bill is to apply at all, would it not be better for it to apply to the whole of the borough? His proposal seeks to define that it should apply only to part of it. In relation to the displacement argument, he would concentrate the amount of peddling activity in certain parts of the borough, which would then become subject to the problem instead of the area that he seeks to exclude. Does he believe in the displacement argument? Does that argument apply in Manchester, where a peddling Bill is in place in certain boroughs but not in others? Is there a displacement problem in that metropolitan area?

Mr. Chope: The jury is out on whether there is a displacement problem. When I raised this issue on Second Reading, I was assured that that was not the case. The Durham university research, with which my hon. Friend is familiar because he managed this brief very ably on the Front Bench during the earlier parts of the proceedings on these Bills—

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I might do it again.

Mr. Chope: Perhaps not today.

What my hon. Friend said then was that the evidence in the Durham report suggested that there were different circumstances in different areas, and that there might well not be a displacement problem, because pedlars wanted to go where they would find the best atmosphere for peddling their wares. It suggested that that might vary at different times of year, depending on what products they were selling and so on. The displacement argument is probably discredited for the purposes of discussing the amendment. That is certainly my view,

and I hope that it is correct. If it is not, we may find that pedlars come to Christchurch borough, which adjoins Bournemouth. If they are lawful pedlars there is no problem, but unlawful pedlars would not be very welcome.

Mr. Ellwood: I do not follow this argument at all. If my hon. Friend has got the area wrong in the amendment, it would require an Act of Parliament to change it. That cannot be right. The amendment would represent the nanny state and Westminster telling a local borough council how to conduct its affairs. He has missed off an area in Boscombe, which is part of my constituency, where pedlars are often found, and an area in Southbourne where there are shops and a village-type centre, so again pedlars would be denied. It does not make sense. We must let Bournemouth borough council operate the system in its area.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend, who unfortunately could not get to the meeting on Monday, even though he set it up, knew then that I was proposing to move this amendment. Instead of our trying to have a meeting of minds on it, there has been a dialogue of the deaf, which is regrettable.

Mr. Ellwood: There would never be a meeting of minds given that my hon. Friend is trying to carve up my constituency and prevent the borough council from doing its job. As a Member of Parliament, he needs to back off from what are rightfully the borough council's operations. I stress again that it would take an Act of Parliament to change an area affected in Bournemouth were the scheme set out in the amendment to be conceived and not work. That cannot be right.

Mr. Chope: With the greatest of respect to my hon. Friend, it can be right, because we are talking about having an Act of Parliament to give a derogation from national legislation. I do not believe that we should have such a derogation except on the strongest possible grounds. Perhaps I can use an analogy to try to persuade my hon. Friend. It is possible for a borough council to designate part of its borough as an "alcohol disorder zone"—I think that that is the expression that is used.

Mr. Ellwood: That is for the council to do.

Mr. Chope: But it has to be done in accordance with national legislation, which sets out that an alcohol disorder zone cannot be set up unless there is evidence that there is a problem. My hon. Friend and I know that only this week in our neighbouring borough of Poole, the borough council decided not to set up an alcohol disorder zone because the councillors took the view that the criteria and requirements were not satisfied. I suggest to him that if we are to have a derogation from national legislation, it should apply only to the parts of the country where there is sufficient evidence to suggest that it is needed.

Mr. Bone: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. We are discussing an unusual process of giving a borough the right to do something that other boroughs in the country cannot do, and it should be restricted to the tightest possible area. If national legislation follows it can of course be extended, but at this stage it should be as tight as possible.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for reinforcing that point.

Mr. Ellwood: I am still baffled as to how an hon. Member from a different part of the area can seek in an amendment to impose something on a constituency that he has nothing to do with. He can put forward the concept, but it should be for the borough council to determine the matter. I pose him a very simple question: how could a pedlar operate in Boscombe, in my patch, under the amendment? I ask him to recognise the folly in what he proposes and withdraw the amendment now.

Mr. Chope: There is no evidence at all of an unlawful street trading problem in Boscombe. I therefore submit that there is no need to apply the measures in the Bill to the area. Boscombe would be relevant only if my hon. Friend accepts the displacement argument, but he has expressly argued against it. Instead, he has tried to satisfy me that there will not be a displacement problem in Christchurch, which I represent, as a result of the Bournemouth provisions. We need to try to keep things as clear and simple as possible.

The area that amendment 5 would define is very similar to the area of the alcohol disorder zone in Bournemouth. It is perhaps regrettable that we have been unable to have a proper dialogue about the details, for reasons I already set out. If we had had that dialogue, we might have been able to change the proposal to allow the area to be altered in particular circumstances. However, as things are, it is not apparent from any documents that are available at the town hall which parts of Bournemouth are subject to the provisions of the 1982 Act and therefore subject to the provisions in the Bill. That is unsatisfactory, because legislation should be clear.

We are also debating the corresponding amendment to the Manchester City Council Bill. I would be the first to admit that my knowledge of the city of Manchester is not as considerable as my knowledge of the town of Bournemouth. Therefore, rather than seeking to define the area in which operations in Manchester could be carried out by reference to streets—obviously, Manchester is an inland area and does not have a big trunk road like the Wessex way in Bournemouth—I thought it better to use a similar calculation to those used in London, namely ones based on so many miles, metres or yards from Trafalgar square.

I have therefore suggested, in the proposed amendment to the Manchester City Council Bill, that there should be a defined area bound by a circle with a 1 mile radius from Albert square. I do not know how well you know Manchester, Mr. Deputy Speaker, but I am advised by the locals that Albert square is very much the heart of Manchester—the town hall is there and it is easy to measure 1 mile from it on a map.

Mr. Bone: I have one small technical question. Amendment 7 uses the distance of 1 mile, but in the rest of the debate, we have been talking in metres. Should the amendment not propose a distance of 1.61 km?

Mr. Chope: No, it definitely should not. We spoke earlier of derogations. Fortunately, we still have the freedom in this country to refer to miles as a standard method of measurement of distance in relation to roads. We do not have to go to the metric mile, which is why I have proposed 1 mile. I hope that that is clear.

[Mr. Chope]

There is a very different situation in Manchester compared—[*Interruption.*] Is my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East making a sedentary comment about four minutes? Does he wish to intervene, or is he threatening me by saying he is going to move a closure motion in four minutes? [*Interruption.*] I see: he is talking about the four-minute mile. It is very difficult to concentrate when there are sedentary interruptions—[*Interruption*—but my hon. Friend is continuing to make them.

It would be sensible to do the same in Manchester as in Bournemouth, because on the evidence put forward by the city council, that is where the problem lies. The area would be clearly defined and it is, after all, important that the law should be clear.

I also contend that these provisions should only be in force when necessary. When I had my initial discussions with Bournemouth council about amendments to the Bill, I made the point that as the problem does not arise 12 months of the year, but only in the summer and around Christmas, it would be sensible to limit the ambit of the Bill to those times.

5.30 pm

Mr. Ellwood: I ask my hon. Friend to withdraw this amendment because it would be mad to impose a time limit. We need control over pedlars' relationship with street traders throughout the year, whether on football match days, new year's eve or new year's day. There are many examples of celebrations and outdoor activities, such as Valentine's day, on which pedlars will want to do their business, and must do it correctly. To limit the Bill to the summer months is out of place and this amendment does not deserve to be anywhere near the Bill.

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend was not at the meeting that I had at the town hall with Bournemouth borough council officers and councillors back in January or February 2008. I raised this issue, and they did not dismiss it in the same way as my hon. Friend has done. They went away to consider it, and they also discussed it with the promoters of similar Bills. It was agreed between them that none of them would give any ground and they would all stand in solidarity, irrespective of the merits of the arguments made.

Mr. Ellwood: As a representative of Bournemouth, I can confirm that this amendment would be very damaging to the town, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) agrees. We need this Bill to work throughout the year, including Valentine's day and mothers' day, and not be focused on just one period. It would be unworkable and cost the borough council even more than at present. I urge my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) to listen to the arguments, not his recollections of previous conversations, and withdraw this amendment.

Mr. Chope: I hear what my hon. Friend says—

Sir John Butterfill: I support everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Ellwood) says. Bournemouth is almost unique in being a 12-month—

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Destination.

Sir John Butterfill: I am grateful to my hon. Friend: that is the word I was looking for. Holidays are taken throughout the year, and the town has expanded into the conference trade in a big way, as well as the language school trade. It operates for 12 months of the year: it is not a resort that closes down after the summer.

Mr. Chope: I hear what my hon. Friends say, but when the director of tourism was asked about this issue in the Opposed Bill Committee he made it clear that there was a problem at particular times of the year, especially in the summer and at Christmas. Now it seems that this is a problem the year round. If that is my hon. Friends' view, I can understand why they are opposed to the amendments.

Sir John Butterfill: Perhaps my hon. Friend misunderstood what he was told by the director of tourism. Certainly we have peak months, but there is a great deal of tourism and business activity the year round. I think perhaps there was a slight misunderstanding between our director of tourism and my hon. Friend.

Mr. Chope: I do not want to risk falling out with my hon. Friends the Members for Bournemouth, East and for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill) over this matter. Of all my concerns, my biggest relates to the Bill itself rather than the months in which it will operate. In the spirit of good will, therefore, I tell them that I will not press amendment 6 to a vote, although I have slightly different views on amendment 5.

Mr. Bone: I have heard the arguments about Bournemouth being a unique case, which I am prepared to accept, and I heard what my hon. Friends have said. However, does my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) think that that also applies to the Manchester Bill, which has an identical clause?

Mr. Chope: It is significant that although we are debating amendments to both Bills, we have not—if my recollection is correct—heard any comments, whether positive or negative, from anybody from Manchester about anything that has been said this afternoon. [*Interruption.*] My hon. Friend says that they moved the closure. Perhaps they did. I missed that point of detail. If that is true, it makes their behaviour so much more cynical.

We can have a perfectly good and healthy public debate about whether we should limit the application of the Bill in Bournemouth to June, July, August, September and December. My hon. Friends have put forward perfectly reasonable arguments saying, "Well, Bournemouth is a busy town the year round, and the problems discussed are problems 24/7"—to use that colloquialism—but we have heard nothing from Manchester Members, as my hon. Friend the Member for Wellingborough (Mr. Bone) mentioned. That suggests that the arguments that I have deployed about limiting the provisions to June, July, August, September and December would be relevant in Manchester, where notoriously—I think one could say—the weather is much inferior to that on the sunny south coast of England.

Indeed, when I was last in Manchester, during the Conservative party conference last year, it was drizzly and raining most of the time. The local people said, "That's par for the course. You're lucky it's not raining more heavily." Obviously, if one has such varying weather conditions—I am trying to provoke a response from some of the Members from Greater Manchester—it will impact significantly upon the ability of pedlars to go about their business, particularly if they are carrying the goods on their person. In dank conditions, there will be many fewer people on the streets. There will be less likelihood, therefore, of pedlars being around in very large numbers and of illegal activity about which a complaint might be made.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I assume that my hon. Friend believes in the importance of the local democratic process and that local councils should have the power to make their own decisions. Why does he not think that it would be better to allow the Bill to go through, albeit with provisions to allow each council to which the Bill applies to make their own democratic decisions about the time and place, rather than having it dictated from the centre in this place?

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend makes a persuasive argument, but the essential difference between these Bills and much local legislation is that most local legislation applies only to local people, whereas these Bills affect people who do not live in a particular locality. They might affect some local people—there is evidence of 200-plus pedlars being certificated and resident in Manchester; probably not all of them are in the city of Manchester, but they are within the Greater Manchester police authority area—but we are talking about a regime that will apply to pedlars whether they are normally resident in Cornwall or Northumbria, and that regime needs to be clear. If we have a different regime for pedlars in every town across the country, I submit that things will be pretty chaotic.

My hon. Friend is great localist, and so am I—in principle—but not when it comes to the application of national legislation. I am sure that he would be the first to concede that even when powers are given to local authorities—for example, to set up alcohol disorder zones—quite strong criteria are applied nationally to ensure no inconsistency of application between one local authority area and another. That is the point that I am trying to get across.

Mr. Leigh: The more I listen to my hon. Friend, the more it occurs to me that the provision that we are discussing is more like a local byelaw governing how people behave in a local park. However, that byelaw would apply to local people, whereas pedlars are nationwide. We would not dream of introducing a Bill to attack chemists or doctors. It is because pedlars are working class and unrepresented—they are a small group without a powerful lobby—that this House believes that it can treat them in this way.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) has been speaking for a considerable proportion of the time available. May I suggest that we confine ourselves to the issues that are the subject of his amendment and not get involved in a wider debate, which we have had on many previous occasions?

Mr. Chope: I certainly do not want to replicate the wider debate, Mr. Deputy Speaker. Let me bring us back to what the amendments do and note that no one from Manchester has raised any objection to the points that I have raised about the Manchester City Council Bill. I urge the House to agree that the specific restriction that I have proposed for the Manchester City Council Bill—that the ambit of the legislation should not extend beyond one mile from the centre of Manchester as defined by Albert square—is probably the strongest argument that I can put forward from among all the amendments. Obviously it would be inappropriate to take up the House's time by voting on more than one amendment in the group. When it comes to the appropriate time, I would therefore seek to have a vote on that amendment to the Manchester City Council Bill, rather than on an amendment to the Bournemouth Borough Council Bill. I hope that my hon. Friends will see that as a reasonable way out of our predicament.

This will be my final comment on this subject, because I know that other people wanted to participate in this debate, but there is an analogy between what we are debating and legislation on shotguns. Shotgun certificates can be obtained from a police authority anywhere in the country, and they have national application. Would this House contemplate a situation where each local authority could legislate for the way in which shotguns could be used or operated in its area, even when the holder of a shotgun had a licence for it that had been issued on a national basis? The answer is that we would not.

5.45 pm

There is always a conflict between what is in the national interest and what is in the local interest. In this case, however, because there is national legislation relating to pedlars and because the pedlars' certificate has national application, it is wrong to say that local will should always prevail, especially if the consequent legislation is unclear, muddled and hard for pedlars to understand.

The latest Government consultation paper states that pedlars are, on the whole, entrepreneurial, and good with—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is not following my guidance. We must come back to the points in question. I thought that he was winding up—

Mr. Chope: I am.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: In that case, may we proceed?

Mr. Chope: I am sorry, Mr. Deputy Speaker. My peroration was going on for longer than it should have done. I said that I would wind up, so I will. I have made my point, and I know that other people want to contribute to this important debate.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Does the hon. Gentleman wish to press this amendment to a vote?

Mr. Chope: I will move that amendment—the amendment that we introduced—formally now. Then, perhaps, later on, when we come to the question of voting, I might seek leave to withdraw it and propose an alternative one.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If the hon. Gentleman wishes to press those amendments that are connected with Bournemouth, perhaps he will clarify that.

Mr. Chope: My understanding was that we were voting on amendments relating to both Bournemouth and Manchester—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. That one is debated now, but would be voted on later, so the hon. Gentleman has to decide. I am prepared to concede that there can be a Division on amendment 7 to the Manchester City Council Bill. We have debated it, but now, in sequence, we have to dispose of amendment 4, which he has proposed. If he wishes to withdraw that, and to move on, we will come to amendment 7 to the Manchester City Council Bill at a later time.

Mr. Chope: I am grateful for that clarification. I had not realised that the proceedings were going to be as elongated as that, Mr. Deputy Speaker. In relation to the vote that we had on the previous group of amendments, relating mainly to clause 5, it seemed from your ruling that it would still be possible to vote on one amendment in that group when we get to the Manchester voting. Is that right?

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I hoped that I had made it clear that it will be possible to have a vote on amendment 7 to the Manchester City Council Bill, which I understand from the hon. Gentleman's words is the one that he wishes to divide the House on. However, we still have to dispose of the amendments in this group. Do I take it that he wishes to withdraw amendment 4?

Mr. Chope: No, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I will not withdraw amendment 4. I will seek to press amendment 4 to the vote, but not the other amendments.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: I must say to the hon. Gentleman that amendment 4 is the paving amendment for the two other amendments connected with Bournemouth. If I may respectfully say so, it would not be very logical for him not to press amendments 5 and 6—for which amendment 4 is the paving amendment—if his interest is in having a substantive vote on amendment 7 to the Manchester City Council Bill.

Mr. Chope: My understanding is that, unless I propose an amendment, it will not be possible for the debate to continue. An amendment needs to be proposed—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Yes, if the hon. Gentleman wishes the debate on amendment 4 to continue.

Mr. Chope *indicated assent.*

Mr. Deputy Speaker: The Question is, That the amendment be made. I call Mr. Peter Bone.

Mr. Bone: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I intend to be brief, as we have already gone into many of the subjects in great detail.

My concern about the amendments is that they relate to a private Bill that will

“seek rights and powers over and above those sanctioned by public acts or the common law”.

We are not debating a Bill that has been proposed by the Government; we are debating matters that relate to specific areas and are above the normal law. In my view, we must draw the provision as tightly—[*Interruption.*] I hear a sedentary comment that it is law in London, but what we are talking about today is Bournemouth and Manchester. If we are to do this properly, we should draw the provisions as tightly as possible. Amendment 7 relates to Bournemouth and there are similar amendments on Manchester; they relate to particular areas and minimise the extent to which the Bills exceed national law, which must be to the good. I have heard no arguments to the effect that the Manchester area is not defined. I certainly encourage my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) to press his amendment to the vote.

We have heard different arguments about Bournemouth. I am prepared to concede that they may apply because of the 24/7 culture of the whole borough of Bournemouth, so that that area should be included. I will not support the amendment on Bournemouth but I will support the one on Manchester. As for the amendment dealing with the period over which the Bill will apply, there is a compelling argument for the House to draw the legislation as tightly as possible in order to stop infringing the rights of pedlars. That amendment makes a lot of common sense, so I will support it as well.

Mr. Leigh: I rise to support amendments 5 and 6. In a sense, the House of Commons is beginning to make itself look rather ridiculous, if it is getting down to the level of detail of whether peddling should take place in the wider Bournemouth area or in the area bounded by Wessex way to the north, the sea to the south and Durley Chine to the west. I am not as familiar with Bournemouth as I should be, but this underlines the point I tried to make earlier—that it is probably a mistake for the House to get down to this level of detail. It would be much better to have a broadly based Bill to regulate peddling and ensure that pedlars operate generally in the way they are traditionally supposed to operate.

I accept that there may be a problem nationally in that the nature of peddling is changing and the old-fashioned traditional pedlar with whom we are familiar is perhaps being replaced by a species of person who might come from abroad and who might try to displace urban traders. As I have said, I accept that there may be a problem with that nationally, but if that is true, the Government need to get their act together and bring in a national Bill.

Here we are talking about a level of detail applying to pedlars that determines whether or not they can trade in a particular location. These are people who move around the entire country. Questions were raised earlier about whether these people do or do not have enough local knowledge, whether they use their BlackBerry, whether they go to the town hall or whether leaflets are issued nationally. That shows some of the problems that will be imposed on these people.

Generally speaking, it is bad for the House to create more and more prescriptive rules and regulations that make it more and more difficult to be law abiding. Why

do we assume that these people are not law abiding? Why do we assume that they do not want to carry on their traditional trade? Why are we telling them that it is perfectly lawful to trade in a certain area of Bournemouth, but not in another area of Bournemouth.

If we move on to amendment 6, it becomes even more absurd, as it deals with times of the year, making it very difficult to know what is going on. Our debate about place and time, led so ably by my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), is an important one: it is not just a narrow issue; it goes to the heart of the Bill. To what extent are we prepared to start interfering with what has traditionally been seen as a lawful activity? If the number of complaints were huge, I would accept that there was a problem. However, the information I have received is that one authority complains once a month. That is hardly a great issue that should be debated on the Floor of the House.

I wish that we were not discussing the Bill at all, but my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch is trying to restrict the area of Bournemouth to which it applies. Apart from him and my hon. Friends the Members for Bournemouth, East (Mr. Ellwood) and for Bournemouth, West (Sir John Butterfill), I doubt that anyone in the Chamber, including you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, is familiar in any detail with what constitutes the area bounded by Wessex way, the sea to the south and so on. Why are we debating it? We must take the word of my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch that the area is a sensible one to define.

Mr. Chope: Will my hon. Friend accept that the director of tourism agreed in our meeting on Monday that the area was *prima facie* a good one to define?

Mr. Leigh: I believe what my hon. Friend tells me, but if the area in question is the best one, why is it not in the original Bill? We all know what would happen if a vote took place—Members who were not familiar in any shape or form with Bournemouth would be told by the Whips that they should get the Bill through and pile into the Lobby.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. This is very interesting, but it has nothing to do with the amendment.

Mr. Leigh: Of course I take your strictures, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

To conclude, if the Bill is to be imposed, let us ensure that its provisions do as little damage to the peddling community as possible. Let us support my hon. Friend's amendment, which would at least restrict the area to the town centre, so that we do not force peddlars out of business in the wider area.

Mr. Chope: I am conscious that we have not had a substantive contribution to the debate from my hon. Friends the Members for Bournemouth, West and for Bournemouth, East, other than through useful interventions. We have had no discussion whatever in relation to Manchester city council. On day two of the Opposed Private Bill Committee, Superintendent Lee made it clear in his evidence that the problem in Manchester is confined to places such as Albert square and Piccadilly, and that it is limited to times such as the Christmas

lights switch-on, which is one of the big events of the year in Manchester. If the Bill passes unamended in relation to time and location, its ambit will cover every month of the year and every street in the city of Manchester, the case for which has not been made.

The wider the ambit of such restrictive legislation, the more difficult it is to have a sensible enforcement regime.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman has been given the opportunity to wind up, not to repeat his previous speech. It would be helpful to the House if he made his intention clear.

Mr. Chope: I will—

Mr. Leigh: Will my hon. Friend reply to my point, as he is perfectly entitled to do, in his winding-up remarks? It is difficult for us who are not familiar in any detail with Bournemouth to come to a conclusion on whether the area for peddling should be bounded by Wessex way to the north and the sea to the south. How can we have such local knowledge?

Mr. Chope: My hon. Friend is right. How can we have the local knowledge? Pedlars up and down the country are in the self-same position, because they want some certainty. They want to know which parts of the boroughs—

6 pm

The debate stood adjourned (Standing Order No. 9(3)).

Debate to be resumed on Thursday 28 January at 3 pm.

MANCHESTER CITY COUNCIL BILL [LORDS]

Bill to be considered on Thursday 28 January at 3 pm.

LEEDS CITY COUNCIL BILL

Bill to be considered on Thursday 28 January at 3 pm.

READING BOROUGH COUNCIL BILL

Bill to be considered on Thursday 28 January at 3 pm.

Sir John Butterfill: On a point of order, Mr. Deputy Speaker. There was a problem during the Division on the closure motion. I was one of those who were looking after the situation, and I went into the toilets to ensure that no one was left in there before we closed the procedure with the Tellers. When I came out—having found no one in there—the Clerks were still in their places, but one of my colleagues had gone through and said “All out”, which meant that the Tellers did not have an opportunity to record accurately that I was still going through. The Clerks say that only you, Mr. Deputy Speaker, can ensure that my name is included as one of those who voted in the Division.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: If that is in my power, I so order, but in any event the hon. Gentleman has made it absolutely clear to the House and those who follow our affairs what his intention was. I think the conclusion that we can draw is that it pays to be fleet of foot.

Prostate Cancer (Abiraterone)

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

6.2 pm

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): I am pleased to have secured an Adjournment debate on the diagnosis of prostate cancer and trials of the drug abiraterone.

Ten thousand men die of prostate cancer every year. A welcome recent development was an advertisement on television by Bob Monkhouse. His wife, now regrettably deceased herself, kindly allowed the use of images of her late husband talking about prostate cancer while walking around a graveyard. Having spoken to quite a few people about the advertisement, I know that it is remembered because it was so effective.

I very much hope that in future, when the Government put out public broadcast advertisements, a little more imagination is used, and lessons can be learned from the Bob Monkhouse video. It is important to ensure that people remember the issues rather than thinking “It is just another Government advert, yet more Labour spin”, and forgetting about it. If we are going to spend this money, we ought to think imaginatively so that we can build on the Bob Monkhouse advertisement in a way that resonates.

I have called this debate because a constituent of mine, Mr. Roger Walker of Shrewsbury, suffers from prostate cancer. Earlier this evening, I sent the Minister a copy of a very emotional letter that I had received from Mr. Walker. I hope that, if the Minister has not yet received the letter, he will take time to have a look at what my constituent has written to me about the extraordinary suffering that he has undergone as a result of not having prostate cancer diagnosed effectively when he first sought help.

My constituent decided to see his local general practitioner because he was going to the toilet far more often than was normal, and his brother, who at the time was dying of prostate cancer, had informed him that that was a symptom. Very regrettably, his brother subsequently died. His father has also died of prostate cancer, as has his uncle. Therefore, there is a history of the men in the Walker family being affected by prostate cancer.

Mr. Walker went to see his GP, but he was not given a screening test, despite informing the practice that his brother, father and uncle had all died, or were dying, of prostate cancer. Nor was he given a prostate-specific antigen—PSA. However, such was the perseverance of Mr. Walker—he is a strong, powerful and persuasive man, who makes his point very well—that he doggedly kept going back to the medical practice until he was finally granted a PSA. He was diagnosed with prostate cancer at the Royal Shrewsbury hospital. That diagnosis, however, came 10 and a half months after his initial approach to the doctor, and that 10 and a half months has had a great impact, as it would have on anybody living with a disease such as prostate cancer without being diagnosed. That leads to huge complications, and any other medication and available treatments were, of course, not used in that period.

I am not criticising in any way any of the NHS staff in Shrewsbury—either people in the medical practice or anybody who dealt with Mr. Walker. I am very proud of

the NHS staff in Shropshire; we have very good staff. If there have been individual problems in respect of individual doctors or others who dealt with Mr. Walker, however, that will be addressed by the General Medical Council. My purpose is to let the Minister know what happened to my constituent, and to highlight his case to him.

What would I like the Minister to do? An article was printed in the *Daily Mail* on 8 July, including an interview with the leading researcher, Dr. Johann de Bono from the Royal Marsden hospital. The title of the article was: “The prostate cancer ‘wonder pill’ set to save thousands every year”. It stated that there had been

“a dramatic breakthrough against a lethal form of prostate cancer.”

Mr. Walker read the article and it gave him significant hope. It said:

“Trials of a new pill have shown that it can shrink tumours in up to 80 per cent. of cases, and end the need for damaging chemotherapy and radiotherapy...Abiraterone is now being used in a 1,200-patient international study, including at ten sites across the UK. If it is licensed as expected in 2011, it will have to await approval by the rationing watchdog NICE before it is made freely available across the NHS.”

I do not want Mr. Walker, my constituent who has been through so much pain, to have to wait for the drug to be licensed in 2011 and then for it to be approved by the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence. I very much hope that he will be allowed to be one of the people in the United Kingdom who is involved in this international study, and be given the drug abiraterone so that his life can be prolonged.

I have written to Dr. de Bono about this, and he wrote back to me saying that he will consider Mr. Walker's case only if he is referred. I therefore want to let the Minister know that I have today written to the chief executive of the Royal Shrewsbury hospital, asking for Mr. Walker's referral appointment, which is not due until the end of February, to be brought forward. He can then be seen as quickly as possible at the hospital and be referred as quickly as possible to Dr. de Bono at the Royal Marsden hospital, so that he can be considered for the drug abiraterone.

An interesting point is made in the article, to which I would like the Minister to respond. It states that Dr. de Bono

“describes prostate cancer as the ‘Cinderella cancer’ because it receives just a quarter of the funding of breast cancer”.

Interestingly, in the UK the same number of people die from prostate cancer as from breast cancer, but prostate cancer research receives only £10 million per annum, whereas breast cancer research received £40 million last year. I am rather concerned about that big difference.

In the time left available to me, I want to make a few points that were passed on to me by the Prostate Cancer Charity, which has kindly provided me with a briefing paper for this debate. It informs me that the United Kingdom National Screening Committee is reviewing an introduction of a national prostate cancer screening programme later this year. This eminent charity says the following:

“Recent research has found that screening for prostate cancer using the PSA test can reduce the number of deaths from the disease by 20 per cent. However, the authors of this study also stated that a national screening programme would lead to a significant level of over-diagnosis of ‘harmless’ prostate cancers. This means that current evidence does not appear to show that a

national screening programme for prostate cancer, using the PSA test, could achieve an acceptable balance between benefit (through lives saved) and harm (though over-diagnosis and false positive and false negative results).”

I would very much like to know the Minister’s attitude to the National Screening Committee’s reviewing and to the point made by the charity.

I feel passionately and very much agree with this point from the charity:

“The Prostate Cancer Charity does not currently support the introduction of PSA-based national prostate cancer screening programme. However, the Charity strongly supports the right of every man over the age of 50 years—and younger men at higher risk of prostate cancer—to make an informed choice about whether he should have a PSA test.”

That is very important, and I would like the Minister to confirm that anybody in the United Kingdom who is over that age or who has a history of prostate cancer in the family, as my constituent had, should be able to go to their doctor and demand a PSA test because of their concerns, particularly if they are showing early symptoms.

The Department of Health policy states that all men are entitled to make an informed decision about whether they should have the PSA test. Currently, information about the PSA test is delivered to men through the prostate cancer risk management programme—PCRMP. Under the current implementation of the PCRMP, for men to receive balanced information about the PSA test from their GP they must first be aware of prostate cancer and the PSA test, and then request to see their GP for further advice. That is the main crux of what I wish to put to the Minister and of what the Prostate Cancer Charity wishes to say.

Recent research by the charity has found that

“around 50 per cent. of 50-70 year old men are not aware of the PSA test”.

That refers to my point about the need for effective advertising. That figure of 50 per cent. is incredible, so I very much hope that through my having this Adjournment debate and my local media taking up the issue in Shropshire, my Salopian constituents will begin to find out more about the PSA test.

The charity also found that

“awareness of the PSA test is lower among men from lower socio-economic groups”

and that

“82 per cent. of GPs were not aware of the PCRMP”.

Finally,

“20 per cent. of GPs did not think that asymptomatic men should have access to the PSA test.”

That is of great concern to me. I do not understand—I hope that the Minister can give me an answer—how a GP could be against a PSA test if their patient was showing signs of prostate cancer. I am not a medical man, but it seems highly logical that they would always support a PSA test. Perhaps the Minister can enlighten me on that. Those findings highlight the broad lack of awareness about the PSA test as well as the barriers that some informed men might face when requesting a test from their GP.

It has been a great pleasure for me to be able to highlight the risk of prostate cancer and to play a small part in trying to highlight the terrible issues that surround this appalling disease and illness. This is one of those occasions as a Back Bencher when one realises just how

worth while this job is—when one can highlight a constituent’s suffering on their behalf and try to cut through the red tape in some way by raising it with the Minister.

I feel passionately about Mr. Walker’s case and want to do something to help him. He is a grandfather with five beautiful grandchildren and I hope that by raising this issue I can ask the Minister, although he is a very busy man, to help me and my office as we try to support Mr. Walker through these difficult times.

6.16 pm

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Mike O’Brien): May I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham (Daniel Kawczynski) on securing this debate? I can think of few things more important than our fight against cancer, and that is why we have put in place the national two-week targets for people to be able to see a cancer specialist. It is also why we recently announced that we need to ensure that cancer diagnosis tests are completed within one week. We want to ensure that these improvements in cancer health are put in place quickly.

This terrible and insidious disease will touch most of our lives at some point—through members of our family, because we know someone who has cancer or because we battle it ourselves. The hon. Gentleman asked what action the NHS is taking to ensure that cancer patients are given the early diagnosis and treatment that are so vital in dealing with the disease, but before I talk about that perhaps I can first address his concerns for his constituent, Roger Walker. The hon. Gentleman rightly drew attention to the Bob Monkhouse advert, which I, too, thought was extremely effective. People do remember it.

I was very sorry to hear that Mr. Walker has been diagnosed with prostate cancer. I have not had his letter yet, but I shall certainly read it, as the hon. Gentleman requests. I understand that Mr. Walker’s brother, father and uncle died from this disease. We know that this particular cancer can cluster in families, with about 5 to 10 per cent. of cases thought to have a substantial inherited component. At present, there are no definitive guidelines for screening in such high-risk families because of the uncertainties about the effectiveness of testing and treatment, which was mentioned by the hon. Gentleman. However, the leaflet that GPs give to patients who are concerned about prostate cancer clearly states:

“The risk is greater for men who have a family history of prostate cancer”.

Bearing in mind Mr. Walker’s family history and the importance of early diagnosis to successful treatment, I can understand his concern at not being offered the prostate-specific antigen, or PSA, test by his former GP at the earliest opportunity.

On 16 July 2007, Mr. Walker registered a complaint with the General Medical Council about his then GP’s failure to make a timely referral and diagnosis of the cancer. I understand that after looking at the patient notes, the GMC closed the case with no further action as it considered that

“on the basis of the evidence available, there was no realistic prospect of proving his GP’s fitness to practise was impaired to a degree which would warrant action on his registration.”

[Mr. Mike O'Brien]

On 19 May 2008, Mr. Walker provided the GMC with further evidence, leading to the reopening of his case. An investigation is ongoing and I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will appreciate that neither he nor I can comment further on that.

The hon. Gentleman also asked me to consider Mr. Walker's request to participate in the ongoing trials of abiraterone. Such matters are not for Ministers: quite rightly, they are not political decisions and so are beyond Ministers' influence. Whether a person is appropriate for trials of a particular drug is a wholly clinical decision, and I am told that subjects are selected according to the strict eligibility criteria that are set to test a drug's safety and efficacy.

In other words, a group is selected for the testing of a particular drug, but unfortunately, some people do not meet the criteria. I am advised that it appears that Mr. Walker is one of those who do not meet the criteria, but the hon. Gentleman has written to the chairman of his PCT and I hope that the matter will be examined and an appropriate decision taken. Mr. Walker is dealing with a multidisciplinary team at Shrewsbury and Telford hospital, and I am told that the team will be looking at alternative clinical trials that may be more suitable for his condition.

I turn now to the other matters raised by the hon. Member for Shrewsbury and Atcham. Everyone involved in cancer care is dedicated to improving outcomes for people with cancer. The goal of the Government's 2007 cancer reform strategy is to deliver cancer care outcomes that are among the best in the world.

In 2008-09, the Health Secretary spent more than £5 billion on cancer services in England, and that is more than 5 per cent. of all NHS spending. Spending on cancer services has increased by more than a third over the past five financial years. There are now around 1,500 multidisciplinary cancer teams working to improve the delivery of treatment and care for cancer patients. The result has been that mortality rates for cancer fell by almost one fifth between 1996 and 2008, which means that every year there are more than 9,000 people walking around who previously would have died.

Today, on average, 95 per cent. of people see a specialist within two weeks of referral for suspected cancer. In Mr. Walker's local hospital, the Shrewsbury and Telford hospital, the rate is even higher, at 99.5 per cent. That is a very good rate and, since April last year, all patients undergoing treatment for cancer, the effects of cancer or the effects of cancer treatment are entitled to free prescriptions.

In 2000, the Government published the NHS prostate cancer programme, in which we set out our commitment to improve prostate cancer services. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that we need to continue to work on prostate cancer, as it is an area in which a lot of improvement is still needed. By improving the early detection and diagnosis of prostate cancer, by improving the treatment and care that patients receive, and by enhancing research into the disease, our aim was to ensure that we could assist those men who may be at risk.

Early diagnosis is an important part of effective treatment for prostate cancer. From next year, and over the following five years, we will roll out diagnostic tests

that can confirm or exclude cancer within a week. We believe that faster access to diagnostic tests, alongside work on early detection, will help save up to 10,000 lives a year. Screening is therefore an important tool in early diagnosis, and that is why we have developed world-class screening programmes for breast, bowel and cervical cancers. Although there is currently no automatic national screening programme for prostate cancer, we remain committed to introducing new screening programmes as and when they are proven to be both clinically and cost effective.

Research published last March in the *New England Journal of Medicine* has shown for the first time that screening for prostate cancer can reduce the death rate by 20 per cent. However, it also showed that more than 1,410 men needed to be screened to save one life—and that 48 of those would end up being treated unnecessarily, with all the side effects that that can cause. There are therefore problems to do with screening that we really need to resolve before any test is introduced on a national basis, because treating 48 people unnecessarily to save one life would pose significant difficulties. We have asked the UK National Screening Committee to review this evidence and to make a recommendation on prostate cancer screening by the autumn of this year.

As part of our prostate cancer programme, we have established the prostate cancer risk management programme, to which the hon. Gentleman referred. This ensures that men considering a prostate-specific antigen test are given the information that they need about it. For a while a PSA test can help with diagnosis, but it is not perfect. Some men with prostate cancer do not have raised PSA levels, and, depending on the cut-off level used, two thirds of men with raised PSA levels do not have prostate cancer, so the test is not perfect. It can lead to false-positive and false-negative results, and that is why PSA tests divide opinion among GPs and, indeed, other clinicians. Some are concerned about them because of those issues, and the PSA test cannot distinguish between men with slow-growing prostate cancer, which may have no effect on a man's natural lifespan, and those who have a more aggressive disease.

The hon. Gentleman asked about choice. In 2010 all GPs in England were sent a pack of materials to give their patients the information that they need to make an informed choice about the PSA test. Our policy, as he rightly says, is that if a patient wants a test, after considering the benefits, limitations and risks associated with it, they should receive one on the NHS. Based on an evaluation of the ongoing prostate cancer risk management programme, a revised information pack was sent to GPs in July 2009, six months ago. In August the chief medical officer then wrote to all GPs to remind them that their patients should be given access to PSA tests in accordance with the PCRMP.

A lot of information is thrown at GPs, so we need constantly to remind them to do various things, because we ask them to do so many. The hon. Gentleman is right that, sometimes, feedback from polls states that some GPs do not know about the test. It does not mean that they have not been told; it may mean that they have been told but, given the sheer volume of information that they are sent, have forgotten it or do not have it at the forefront of their mind.

It was recognised that some GPs are unaware either of the original pack or of their patients' right to a PSA test, so an action plan to engage GPs better has been

developed. There has already been a trade media launch and a webcast, and GPs now have the PCRMP materials on their IT systems, helping them better to support their patients. Other plans to remind them include a roadshow for GPs and a peer-reviewed paper in the *British Medical Journal*. The campaign to alert men to prostate cancer is therefore enormously important, and I welcome the stories that have appeared in the *Daily Mail*. That work is valuable in alerting men and getting them to go to their GP if they have problems, and reminding GPs that men should be given the PSA test. Such campaigns can save the lives of many men, so I welcome the work of the *Daily Mail*. Whether the drug that we have discussed is a “wonder pill” is another matter, but we will see what the outcome is of the clinical trials.

Once diagnosed, patients are entitled to receive the best possible care on the NHS. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence has published a series of improving outcomes guidance covering all major cancer tumours, including urological cancers such as prostate cancer. It recommended the way in which primary care trusts and cancer networks should organise cancer services to ensure the best outcomes, and the national cancer action team monitors progress against those plans. In 2008, NICE also published new guidelines on the diagnosis and treatment of prostate cancer, and they recommended good practice based on the best available evidence and professional opinion.

However good our treatment today, we must always strive for more, as the hon. Gentleman rightly said. We can still continue to do better. The Government are among the largest funders of cancer research, along with the industry and the cancer research charities. Through the Medical Research Council and the National Institute for Health Research, we fund about £250 million of cancer research every year. The vast majority of this money supports clinical trials and research undertaken by our partners in the public and charitable sectors. We are very proud of our record of excellence in health research and of what its results mean for people not only in the UK but around the whole world. Britain is one of the leaders in cancer research. The Government are determined to continue to do whatever we can in the fight against cancer: it is an enormously high priority for us. Our excellent record of high investment and high ambition is saving more lives today. We have a long way to go in the fight against cancer, but we must, and will, strive to do more.

Finally, I wish Mr. Walker well in his continuing treatment and hope that it brings with it some success.

Question put and agreed to.

6.30 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 21 January 2010

[MR. JOE BENTON *in the Chair*]

Violence Against Women

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(Mr. Heppell.)

2.30 pm

The Solicitor-General (Vera Baird): Thank you, Mr. Benton. It is nice to see the Front-Bench teams from the Equality Bill reassembled for one appearance only.

We take violence against women seriously in all its forms. We all have a responsibility, along with the Government, to tackle violence against women and girls within our families and communities, at our places of work or study and in society at large. The Government have developed a number of linked national action plans on domestic violence, which includes tackling female genital mutilation, forced marriage and evil crimes committed in the name of honour; sexual assault and rape; prostitution; and human trafficking. We want to increase reporting and conviction rates, ensure that victims are supported, improve the criminal justice response and maximise prevention.

The largest ever cross-governmental public consultation on tackling violence against women and girls was launched by the former Home Secretary, my right hon. Friend the Member for Redditch (Jacqui Smith). During 2009, it received more than 10,000 responses, which informed the cross-governmental violence against women and girls strategy that we published in November.

The Department of Health has launched a taskforce led by Professor Alberti to consider the health aspects of violence against women. It aims to identify what is the current national health service response to violence against women and girls in terms of prevention and treatment, and to consider what more needs to be done. Part of that work is specifically to look at sexual violence against women and children. We expect the report next month.

The work I am describing puts into a higher gear the work the Government have done over the past decade, which has transformed the debate on violence against women. A comprehensive search of *Hansard* shows that the issue was very rarely mentioned by the last Tory Government. If one looks beyond the debates in the Chamber to debates on Bills, as I have done, one sees that Labour Front Benchers tried to amend Tory criminal justice Bills to get rid of the ability to cross-examine women on their sexual history and proposed support for domestic violence victims, but found their proposals blocked. Meanwhile, an epidemic of violence against women was being suffered privately.

The advent of 100 Labour women MPs in 1997 meant that the issue was taken on and run with. It has been taken on seriously, strongly and continuously by Ministers, male and female, ever since and there has been step-by-step improvement. Importantly, we have worked closely with the third sector, where there is great

understanding of the subject—for example, Women's Aid has 35 years' wisdom. We have passed good legislation such as the Sexual Offences Act 2003 and the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004.

As a consequence of the steps we have taken, domestic homicide rates are lower now than they have been for the past decade. I used to make speeches on violence against women in which I said that between two and three women a week are killed through domestic violence. Happily, that statistic has changed, although it is still far too high. On average, just over one woman is now killed each week.

Mr. Brooks Newmark (Braintree) (Con): As the Minister knows, I take an interest in this problem. The evidence I have seen shows that the average length of sentences has fallen dramatically from 90.5 months in 2003—a year she mentioned—to 81.2 months in 2006. Can she explain that?

The Solicitor-General: Sentences for what?

Mr. Newmark: Sexual violence.

The Solicitor-General: Sentencing is imposed by the judiciary, not the Government. I do not think that those figures are correct. Rape sentencing was set down by the Millberry case about five or six years ago. It stated that the starting point for a rape case involving one rape is five years, increasing for aggravating factors, such as there being more than one victim or a campaign of rape. Life sentences and indefinite sentences are frequently imposed, for example in the case of Worboys. I do not accept that those figures are correct, but judges have the discretion to deal with each case.

We now have 700 specially trained independent domestic violence advisers nationally. That is a totally new sort of support person. From complaint to court, and if necessary beyond, they stand beside and befriend a domestic violence complainant and ensure that they are sustained through the pressures of a court case. They can help them with things such as benefits advice; home change, which may be required depending on where the violence happened; the impact on their relationship; and child care. They try to take those burdens off a woman so that she knows that if she is suffering domestic violence, she can make a complaint and have a friend beside her from start to finish.

There are 200 multi-agency risk assessment conferences, which protect high-risk victims and their children. Areas where they exist see a 50 per cent. cut in repeat victimisation of women. They have helped 29,000 victims of domestic abuse. Obviously, work has started to go round over the years that women will be supported, so women increasingly come forward. Support brings support.

I was proud yesterday to attend the Una Padel award ceremony at King's college London, where Survivors of Domestic Abuse, a volunteer organisation from Redcar, won an award for its work. It is run by young victims of domestic violence who saw the work done by Women's Aid locally and discovered that they could help people who were trying to get out of violent relationships by talking to them, sharing their experiences and giving support. It is cheering that it is young women who are doing that.

[*The Solicitor-General*]

There are 127 specialist domestic violence courts in which all parties, from magistrates to prosecutors and the police, are trained to understand the dynamics of domestic violence. That is a fundamental part of our effort to deal with domestic violence and to improve the support that is available. Prosecution rates have doubled since the introduction of those courts and the average is now 72.5 per cent. Conviction rates are going up.

We know that 750,000 children in the UK witness domestic violence. We have produced a toolkit, which since last September has been distributed to all front-line professionals to whom it is relevant. The toolkit contains risk assessments and safety planning tools designed to support vulnerable children and young people in situations of domestic violence.

We will more than double the number of sexual assault referral centres by March 2011, and there will be at least one in each of the 43 criminal justice areas in England and Wales. Such centres bring together in one place all the relevant legal and medical agencies and departments. A victim may go there on her own, with the police or with her family, or she can telephone the centre and somebody will go to get her. She will get the Rolls Royce treatment and be supported from the beginning with the intention of sustaining her through any court case and in overcoming the trauma she has suffered. If she wants to report the assault, a specialist officer will come out.

We have announced funding of £1.6 million to enhance existing sexual assault referral centres and to create new ones. There will be further funding to extend the network of independent sexual violence advisers. Like independent domestic violence advisers, they are befrienders who support a victim from start to finish, but these advisers specialise in sexual violence.

Those services are available to male or female victims. Of course, most of the aspects I mention will focus on women—this is a debate about violence against women—but I ought to put in that footnote at this point.

Lynda Waltho (Stourbridge) (Lab): I welcome that list of new initiatives, which I know are working in many parts of the country. However, services are patchy: for example, anyone who comes from Stourbridge or Dudley and needs to get to a sexual assault referral centre has to travel to Walsall, which is quite a distance. Evidence has to be kept as uncontaminated as possible, and I know women who have had to travel in a van, sitting on newspaper, so that they can be examined once they have arrived at Walsall. That is quite a journey. The multi-agency risk assessment conference system is very good but, in Dudley where provision is patchy, victims have to suffer three or four incidents of domestic violence before they are put into that system. It adds insult to injury that they have to wait until they are beaten up again for that to happen.

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend makes a good point. It is important to preserve evidence and I am sure doing that can be quite uncomfortable on a long journey. As I said, we are enhancing the network of sexual assault referral centres, and the target is to have one in each criminal justice area, because those are defined areas that work cohesively together. There should not

be an absolute barrier against the travel that is implicit. People in my constituency would have to go from east Cleveland and travel quite a distance through the countryside to the sexual assault referral centre in Middlesbrough. However, the police or whoever was dealing with the case would facilitate that.

In my constituency and presumably in that of my hon. Friend, there is a system whereby a trusted female cab driver is sent out to fetch the woman and take her to the sexual assault referral centre. Those centres have a lot of technical equipment and are highly staffed, so I do not suppose it will ever be practical to have one in every neighbourhood. However, she makes a strong point about ensuring that there is a proper distribution. The MARAC system is intended for repeat offenders. Of course, as my hon. Friend says, it is very odd to have to wait for someone to become a repeat offender before someone steps in. However, the assistance of an independent domestic violence adviser will be provided after one incident.

Lynda Waltho: That is the theory of how it should work and it is what I supported when I voted for the legislation, but that does not happen in Dudley. The services are patchy. Sandwell, which is next door, has a better system. There is a better buy-in of the local authority and all the agencies, but there are only two counsellors and one primary care trust-funded counsellor available for 20 hours a week, and, in the words of one worker, “If you can get into that, you’re lucky.” Essentially, someone needs to wait until they have been mucked about four times before they are put into the MARAC system. It is not that the people providing help do not want to do it; the problem is there is a population of around 320,000 in the Dudley area and literally thousands of women are unsupported in relation to this problem.

The Solicitor-General: Independent domestic violence advisers are, of course, not counsellors; they are primary workers who will provide support from the start, and they are usually from local rape crisis centre or Women’s Aid centre. If there is a domestic violence court in my hon. Friend’s area, which there must be, there are IDVAs attached to it and they need to be utilised properly. I do not know what her local authority is like in terms of match funding or funding—she has given a thumbs down—but the difficulty is that we send out money to local authorities for these services with indicators required for their performance and they spend the money as they should, but they do not always provide the service that she is seeking.

That is a real difficulty, and it cuts across the whole question of central versus local funding. I cannot decide from Westminster how many IDVAs there should be in Sandwell. That must be done by the local authority. Of course, there is a lot of Home Office funding for IDVAs and independent sexual violence advisers, but there needs to be some funding from the local authorities, too. My hon. Friend will know about the map of gaps, which shows where the gaps are with the intention—driven by the Equality and Human Rights Commission—of making those local authorities that are not match funding do so in the future. We are doing what we can, but my hon. Friend’s point is well made.

Inside Government, we have a cross-criminal justice system rape performance group and all police forces in all Crown Prosecution Service areas are checked against a series of indicators. Of course, for some years, there

has been sexual offences training for senior police officers and advocates prosecuting rape cases. Some primary training for all front-line officers is also in process, so that hopefully no one will get anything but a totally sympathetic reception when they make a complaint.

The Baroness Stern review on rape was commissioned because we thought that the consultation on violence against women that I mentioned, which was behind the strategy, was not deeply enough representative of what was going on in rape cases. It is probably extremely difficult for people to talk about such things, so we have asked Baroness Stern to take an in-depth look. We have asked her to examine the responses of all the public authorities to rape complaints; to consider how more victims can be encouraged to report; to explore ways in which the attrition rate—the fall out between reporting and getting to court—can be reduced; to consider how to increase the conviction rate fairly; to identify how to increase victim and witness confidence and satisfaction; and to explore public and professional attitudes to rape to see how they impact on criminal justice outcomes.

Although I will primarily talk about justice issues, there is a whole tranche of the violence against women strategy, which I imagine will be buttressed by Baroness Stern, that says we need to do a good deal of public opinion work. It is just as important to protect and punish when such crimes happen as it is to prevent them in the first place. For that, we need to mobilise those members of the public who are not already on board. Baroness Stern will make some recommendations very shortly.

Turning briefly to the Crown Prosecution Service, over which the Law Officers have superintendence, those involved are pioneers. We believe that we have the first public prosecution service to integrate all forms of violence against women, according to the UN definition, into a strategy and action plan that relates work in this area to wider gender equality. That is consistent with the CPS's vision to become a world-class prosecution service. The CPS intends to improve prosecution performance by introducing a new indicator on violence against women, which includes targets for successful outcomes in relation to domestic violence, rape and sexual offences.

There have been good increases in rape prosecutions. The figure of 6.5 per cent. for convictions for rapes that are reported is much better than it was a couple of years ago, when it was 5.2 per cent. The figure is indeed small, but it is from report right through to court. When the stage of a charge is reached, the conviction rate is 59 per cent. and, and it is rising. I am not aware of any other offence that we count from complaint to court, so it is hard to compare that 6 per cent. with anything. The figure does sound small and I feel that it is, but once we get to the charging stage, there is a conviction rate of 59 per cent. In relation to domestic violence, we have exceeded the target of 72 per cent. Baroness Stern will consider the area between complaint and charge to see what goes wrong.

From the launch of the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 up to last December, 107 forced marriage protection orders have been issued. From January to August last year, the forced marriage unit received 1,063 calls of one sort or another to enlist its services, which is an increase of 25 per cent. over the past year. We believe that the message is beginning to

get out that forced marriage is unlawful and that it can be stopped. Of course, a range of people can help somebody who is a victim or who is about to become a victim to take action in court. We made civil action available because it was clear from the research done—not by us but by an independent trust—that if forced marriage were made criminal immediately, it would stop a lot of victims taking action, because they would not be prepared to criminalise members of their family.

In 2006 we established the UK Human Trafficking Centre, a multi-agency organisation centrally co-ordinating intelligence and operations on trafficking. Tackling human trafficking is now core police business, and every force should have the capacity to deal with trafficking within their area.

Prostitution is another element of violence against women. For some time we have had exit strategies in place to assist women to leave prostitution. They often come into prostitution very young or for reasons connected to their vulnerability. We have prosecuted pimps for many years, and there have been police campaigns on street prostitution for many years. Last year we conducted a review of demand in prostitution, which is linked closely to trafficking, but it is not only about trafficked women, and we concluded that it should be a criminal offence to pay for sex with someone who has been subject to exploitative conduct. That is now a crime, and there will be training for police and the CPS to ensure that it is used.

We have tackled newspapers that advertise prostitution by asking the Newspaper Society to tighten its guidelines, which it has done. The number of advertisements referring to, for example, “fresh foreign girls available every week” has diminished enormously. Tackling the trafficking element has been an effective part of the action we have taken. Personally, I am interested in looking at whether we should make it unlawful to put such an advertisement in a newspaper, as it is in Ireland, and we will look at that legislation to see whether it would help here.

The points I have raised are headlines. I hope that we have a good debate and that we hear fresh ideas, because the Government are keen, as I have said, to shift up a gear in all we are doing on violence against women. We think that we now have an effective multi-agency response and have implemented an effective approach to victims and survivors, and we will do more. We have an ambitious programme to make our community a safer place for all and, in particular, to end violence against women.

2.52 pm

Mr. Mark Harper (Forest of Dean) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Benton. As the Minister said, and as I am sure all Members present will agree, this is an important subject, and I am pleased that the Government have chosen it for this afternoon's Westminster Hall debate. There is a good turnout, with colleagues from across the political spectrum wishing to contribute to the debate.

Violence against women remains serious and prevalent: 3 million women in the UK experience violence each year, and victims span a range of backgrounds, races, religions and socio-economic backgrounds. Different forms of violence can be linked and do not necessarily occur in isolation. There are, of course, enormous human costs, and enormous financial costs, too.

[Mr. Mark Harper]

I listened to what the Minister said about a cross-Government strategy, which is welcome. She will know that in 2007, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) called for a cross-Government strategy for ending violence against women. In December 2008 we published our own strategy paper, “Ending Violence Against Women”, which was a cross-departmental strategy. That is exactly the type of approach that must be followed. Indeed, WOMANKIND Worldwide, an organisation that works across the world and also does some work in UK schools on violence against women, commented on the publication of our strategy paper, stating:

“This is a real breakthrough. If implemented, the strategy would have wide-reaching repercussions for all government departments. The Conservatives have taken on board WOMANKIND’S advice to prioritise prevention through educating young people—and this approach has set the bar for the upcoming Labour strategy. We hope that the Government will include these commitments and take them further.”

That organisation is doing work in UK schools to challenge violence and provide some of the education that the Minister touched on, and that sort of education in schools is very necessary. She referred to changing public opinion. One statistic of concern that I noted in a 2006 ICM poll is that 40 per cent. of young men thought that it was acceptable for a boy to expect to have sex with a girl if she was “very flirtatious”. Surprisingly, 16 per cent. of girls agreed with that sentiment. Clearly, preventive and educational work in schools is, as she said, extremely important.

In the foreword to our 2008 strategy paper, the shadow Minister for Women, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May), stated:

“Our vision is for a society in which no woman has to live in fear of violence.”

The key point in the document is that we need an integrated strategy across all Departments, not just in the criminal justice arena. That was about dealing with prevention, as well as the consequences; it was about working with schools, the police, health-care professionals and the voluntary sector on preventive measures that prevent violence from occurring in the first place. When it occurs, we must back the services that support and provide advice to women.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): I totally agree with what the hon. Gentleman is saying, particularly in relation to the shocking statistics about the proportion of young people who seem to think that sex is to be expected if a girl’s behaviour is flirtatious. Does he agree that that is why it is important that proper sex and relationship education be made a statutory requirement in schools—to give young people the confidence to say no and respect the rights of others? Schools or parents would then not be allowed to opt out of it, on behalf of their children. It is absolutely essential that all children have that kind of education.

Mr. Harper: I thank the hon. Lady for helpfully raising that point. In our strategy paper, we have stated that the specific teaching of sexual consent in schools is important. Indeed, we are relaxed about the Government’s proposal to include that part of sex and relationship education in a statutory curriculum. Some aspects of

sex and relationship education should be taught in accordance with the ethos of the school, but everyone should be taught about sexual consent, so that the issues are made clear to both boys and girls.

I will not try your patience, Mr. Benton, by reading out vast chunks of the strategy paper, but I will give an indication of its flavour and scope. It covers several commitments on prevention and front-line services. It is worth noting in that respect that we want to establish a standard for contracts with voluntary-sector organisations, so that they are given funding for at least three years. That was also adopted in the strategy that the Government published at the end of last year.

On sentencing, my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr. Newmark) will perhaps be interested to note that we want to scrap the early release of prisoners on end-of-custody licence schemes, which are of particular concern in domestic violence cases. We also want to legislate to end automatic release halfway through an offender’s sentence.

Another proposal included in our strategy paper has fortunately already come to pass. We highlighted the fact that women who escape from violence to a refuge frequently rely on benefits to pay for their stay, and we said that we would introduce a three-month grace period, during which women housed in refuges following domestic violence would not be required to seek work to qualify for jobseeker’s allowance. The Government adopted that measure in the Welfare Reform Act 2009.

Our document also covers proposals on rape and sexual violence, and deals with female genital mutilation, forced marriage, stalking, trafficking and honour-based violence—like the Minister, I do not like using that phrase, as there is nothing honourable about it. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) will touch on those subjects if he is successful in catching your eye, Mr. Benton.

The Minister highlighted the fact that the Government conducted a consultation on their cross-Government strategy last year and got a significant response. They published that strategy at the end of the year, and the fact that they adopted it is welcome. The Minister was right to say that the Government have adopted several measures on the issue in their 12 years in government, but it is fair to say that, until they published their strategy, they had disproportionately focused on the criminal justice system. That is not just my view; the cross-party Home Affairs Committee stated in its report that

“the Government’s response to domestic violence...remains disproportionately focused on criminal justice responses at the expense of prevention.”

It is good that that imbalance has been put right.

I want to draw out some of our specific proposals around prevention. As I said in response to the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson), prevention must begin with education, and schools are obviously one of the areas that we need to look at. There is clear scope, within the work that schools do, for a greater emphasis on the issue of violence against women. As I said and am happy to confirm, we want to ensure that pupils in schools are taught the importance of sexual consent. We want to encourage schools to use the voluntary sector. They should use some of the organisations that support women who suffer from domestic violence—

they were mentioned by the Minister—to develop lesson plans, so that the issues can be discussed with young people.

Another proposal that we hope will be helpful, in terms of prevention, is our plan to establish a UK border agency that will better police our borders. That would be helpful in dealing with people-trafficking.

I have a question for the Minister on public-sector commissioning. She highlighted the fact that the Conservative and Liberal Democrat Front Benchers are well experienced on issues to do with the Equality Bill. I would be interested to know whether a matter that has been drawn to our attention has been raised with the Government. Many women's organisations, such as women's refuges, say that they are experiencing a funding cut, as public-sector funders—both local authorities and central Government—are saying that services have to cater for men and women equally in order to tick the equality box. The Minister said that many of the services do indeed deal with both genders, but it is also true—I think that she highlighted this as well—that women are disproportionately the victims of violence: 85 per cent. of domestic violence victims are women. Local and central Government must be confident in funding women-only services, where that is appropriate.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): On that matter, has the hon. Gentleman spoken to the Conservative local authorities that are making the exact argument about which he complains, and that are discriminating against groups? The most obvious example in the area that I represent is Southall Black Sisters. Ealing local authority had to be taken to court by that organisation. That revealed the fact that the authority was interpreting the law incorrectly in making the kind of claims that he says local authorities should not make.

Mr. Harper: The hon. Lady supports the point that I am making. I am highlighting the fact that a number of local authorities are giving that reason for doing things. I raised the matter so that I could ask the Minister whether it had been raised with her, and whether the Government had therefore issued any guidance, or thought about issuing guidance, to make the position clear. Having sat through the many days of debate on the Equality Bill, which rolls forward existing legislation and makes new proposals, I do not think that the law precludes organisations from doing what the hon. Lady suggests and what I have mentioned. It would be helpful if that could be clarified.

The Solicitor-General: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising the issue, and I hope that he will explain to Tory local authorities, as we have to Labour ones, that there is absolutely no bar. What he describes is the complete opposite of what the gender equality duty represents. It has been in force since 2006—it is not part of the new Bill—and it means that services need to be provided for women. Overwhelmingly, as he has acknowledged, the violence that we are talking about is against women; it occurs relatively lightly against men. Of course local authorities need to provide services for the men who need it, but, overwhelmingly, the services need to be specifically for, and almost certainly run by, women, because women do not want to escape from a man and have to talk to another man about it. We are

keen for that message to be sent down all possible party lines, and any other kinds of lines.

Mr. Harper: I am grateful to the Minister for that clarification. Given that the gender equality duty is subsumed in the public-sector equality duty, as are one or two other duties, it may be helpful, when the regulations are put together and the guidance that goes with them is drafted, to address the point specifically, in terms, so that there cannot be any doubt about the matter. The subject has now been raised in this debate.

One of the reasons why our strategy document—and, indeed, the Government's—looked across the whole of Government was that, as the End Violence Against Women campaign found, most Departments

“have not...seen the links between their policies and their impact on violence against women.”

That is one of the reasons why we want to ensure, as part of our strategy, that there is a single Minister responsible for overseeing progress, across Departments, in taking co-ordinated action on violence against women.

I have already touched briefly on the issue of stabilising the funding base by ensuring that funding for rape crisis centres is moved to a stable, three-year funding cycle. I know from some of the announcements that the Minister for Women and Equality has made that there has been progress on that.

I shall make a couple of specific local points, Mr. Benton, just to give a bit of local flavour, and then draw my remarks to a close. Coincidentally, a few weeks ago—not that long ago—in my county of Gloucestershire, there was a report on BBC Radio Gloucestershire by reporter Faye Hatcher, who had been speaking to Gail Meecham, the manager at the Gloucestershire rape crisis centre. She highlighted some positive news and some less positive news. The positive news was that the sexual assault referral centre, which was opened in October 2008, had been having some success, but the knock-on effect of that success was that referrals to the centre were up 25 per cent. in that one year. That was obviously putting a great deal of pressure on the staff, and made their work challenging.

It was also highlighted—this is worth saying, and I know that the Minister will welcome it—that the centre has a close working relationship with the Gloucestershire constabulary, who take the issue seriously. Their recently retired chief constable, Tim Brain, was involved with the Association of Chief Police Officers on several issues in this area. He was the ACPO lead on prostitution, and was very heavily involved in combating trafficking. I suspect that that is partly why Gloucestershire has a good record on the subject.

Finally on local authorities, I want to put on record that Boris Johnson, the Mayor of London, is providing £1.4 million to establish three new rape crisis centres in partnership with several London local authorities, and he is continuing the funding for the existing centre in Croydon. The four centres, when up and running, will serve the north, south, east and west of London, and I understand that one will be opening in Ealing in the spring.

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman perhaps has not seen early-day motion 438, which states that the Mayor of London pledged in 2008

[*The Solicitor-General*]

“to set up four new rape crisis centres in addition to the existing centre in Croydon at... £2.23 million”.

It goes on to complain that, in fact, he has broken his word. I believe that it is signed cross-party.

Mr. Harper: The hon. and learned Lady reads out an early-day motion that is not accurate. The Mayor of London is opening the same number of rape crisis centres that he promised. It is true that he is doing it for less money than originally intended, but I would have thought that in the current public finance climate, achieving manifesto commitments at lower cost and with better value for money would, frankly, be welcomed by the public. Governments also ought to welcome it. In this era of tight public finances, given the appalling mess that the party that wins the election will inherit from the Government, we need to ensure that we can protect front-line services and deliver them at lower cost for the people who need them.

In conclusion, we look forward to an interesting debate. There is great interest on both sides of the House. The Minister said that we are talking about an important area of policy, and indeed we are. However, a more joined-up strategy across Departments would help us to combat the problem in future years.

3.9 pm

Lynne Featherstone (Hornsey and Wood Green) (LD): May I say how pleased I am to make a speech under your chairmanship this afternoon, Mr. Benton? As everyone on both sides of the Chamber agrees, this is an extremely important debate. It never ceases to shock me when I look at the statistics that women in this day and age are still so far from equality and still have such a long road to travel. The result is that they suffer violence on a number of levels.

The scale and complexity of the problem is vast, and we have heard some of the statistics. Three million women in Britain experience rape, domestic violence, stalking or other violence, while many millions more are dealing with abuse that they experienced in the past and many incidents are not reported at all. The British crime survey says that 45 per cent. of women will be a victim of domestic violence, sexual victimisation or stalking at least once in their lifetime—that is nearly half of all women. In its publication, “Justice for Rape Victims”, the Fawcett society says:

“Every 34 minutes a rape is reported to the police in the United Kingdom.”

As we all know, thousands of women do not come forward, for all sorts of reasons.

Violence against women cannot be put in a neat box. We have talked about different sorts of violence, such as domestic violence, rape, sexual assault and human trafficking, but I sometimes wonder whether we will ever get to some of the reasons and the imbalances in life that give men—it is generally men—the idea that it is okay to behave towards women in a way that is not acceptable by any measure of a civilised society.

There are a lot of issues around power and control, and they quite often revolve around money. The economic inequality that women face means that it is often impossible for them to get away from a situation because they fear

that they will have nothing to exist on. Although there are refuges and centres for those who suffer the worst domestic violence, women often put up with it for so long that things reach a critical point and they cannot get away.

The Solicitor-General and the hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr. Harper) mentioned mandatory pay audits. They were the one measure in the Equality Bill that would have brought about a vast step change in equal pay, and it is a great shame that pay audits have been left voluntary. Should there be a change of Government, I fear that mandatory audits might never come to pass and that parity and equality will be set back.

Jo Swinson: My hon. Friend is making an excellent point. Does she share my frustration when I see women in my constituency who, sadly, suffer domestic violence and are forced to go into a refuge? In some cases, that is the best solution, but in others, it is not. However, these women do not have the option of staying in the family home with their children. All too often, the man can stay there, while the lives of the children and the woman are entirely disrupted because they suddenly do not have proper accommodation. It is a huge injustice that the perpetrator of the crime and the violence can effectively get off scot-free, while the lives of the woman and the children are disrupted.

Lynne Featherstone: My hon. Friend makes an excellent intervention. The logic is upside down. In an ideal world, the woman and the children should stay in situ, and the man should be excised.

The Solicitor-General: I agree wholeheartedly. I have even known of situations in which animal welfare bodies—this is commendable—have set up refuges for pets because the women will not leave without them. The woman can take her kids, but she cannot take the dog, and the man is threatening to cut its throat or throw it out of the car on the motorway if the woman and the kids go. If we have got to the stage where we need those refuges, the right thing to do is obviously to keep the dogs, kids and woman in and put the man out.

Lynne Featherstone: I thank the Solicitor-General for that. It would be really interesting to discuss the possibility of using the law to injunct the man and leave the woman in situ. However, the fear that the man would break the injunction or get to the woman has always meant that she has gone to a place of safety. I would be interested to hear what the Solicitor-General thinks might be done in that regard, because the logic is upside down. The best thing for the children and the woman would be to be left in situ, where they have some security and where they know the location and the neighbours and have all the things that give someone a life, rather than to have to flee and live in secret and in hiding.

Lynda Waltho: Is that not the point of the domestic violence protection notices, or the go notices, or have I got that wrong? I thought that they were supposed to protect the woman and her children and, effectively, to evict the perpetrator.

Lynne Featherstone: I thank the hon. Lady for that intervention. I agree, but women’s fear in these situations cannot always be overcome by the measures available to them. Often, it is not enough to give women a feeling of

safety for the law simply to say that they should stay somewhere and that no one will be allowed to come near them. However, some analysis would be helpful.

Another issue is education, and as hon. Members have said, sex and relationships education is important. I am going to mention some ideas at the end of my speech—I was pleased that the Solicitor-General said that she would welcome ideas—but perhaps I can mention one now. There is an issue about fathers and role models. In America, they have something called “Dads and Donuts”, in which schools invite men in to talk to their offspring on their own. Where families are in conflict, or where there is an injunction or trouble, the men often disappear altogether. Dealing with the issues that arise is not all about the law; it is often about education and trying to imbue people with the responsibility to hand on good behaviour, not bad behaviour, to their offspring.

Domestic violence is the thing that comes to people’s minds most often when we talk about these issues. I do not have up-to-date figures on domestic violence, so perhaps the Solicitor-General can help me. The last figures that I was able to find are from 2004, when Walby and Allen said:

“In any one year, there are 13 million separate incidents of physical violence or threats of violence against women from partners or former partners”,

which is a horrific figure. They also said:

“Domestic violence accounts for between 16 per cent. and one quarter of all recorded violent crime.”

Hon. Members have mentioned the “no recourse to public funds” rule. Southall Black Sisters estimates that 600 women a year with insecure immigration status face violence from a spouse. Women who come to me in my surgery in Hornsey and Wood Green are often on a spousal visa and have nowhere to go. I am therefore pleased that the Government recently announced the pilot of the Sojourner project to help women with no recourse to public funds. I welcome this opportunity to ask the Solicitor-General for an update on how the project is going. Do the Government have any initial statistics on the number of women who have accessed the programme? What plans does the Home Office have to make it permanent and available to all women? There is huge anxiety about the fact that it will last only three months. By the time that we have advertised it and got people to take it up, it may already be over.

I also wondered—I have not been able to get any statistics on this so far—how many women in each constituency or borough are turned away from refuges because they have no recourse to public funds and are not eligible under the terms governing the normal availability of refuges. I would be grateful if the Solicitor-General could elucidate that.

As the Solicitor-General said, it is not just women, but children who suffer as a result of domestic violence. Some 750,000 children a year witness domestic violence, and children who live with it are at an increased risk of behavioural problems, emotional trauma and mental health difficulties later in life. I am sure that hon. Members on both sides of the House are looking for ways in which we can cope with such a vast issue, which involves numbers so huge as to be almost unimaginable; and ways to find the resource to tackle all aspects of the problem, and work with children so that they have counselling and appropriate support.

We have heard about some of the very good work that is being done on rape and sexual assault. I want to quote the views of Katherine Rake, the director of the Fawcett Society—or rather, she is not, is she? She has gone from there. My researcher is toast. I cannot remember the lady’s name; my apologies. Nevertheless, the view is that women face a postcode lottery when reporting rape to the police.

Mr. Newmark: On that subject, I am obsessed with statistics, as the Solicitor-General realises—and I am sure she will get back to me on a statistic I have given her, which I think came from her office—but it is still the case that only 15 per cent. of serious sexual assaults on women are reported. Notwithstanding the fact that she said that the figure for reported assaults resulting in a conviction has gone up from 5.2 per cent. to 6.5 per cent., that is still a pretty appalling result. Does the hon. Lady agree that we still need to address that issue, encourage women to report assaults more, and ensure an improvement in the conviction rate?

Lynne Featherstone: The hon. Gentleman makes an excellent point. I think that the Solicitor-General agrees that we must encourage women to come forward and report rape, and that our success, such as it is, is minimal in relation to the scale of the challenge. However, I am willing to give him some statistics on conviction rates, in return for his, to show how they vary across the country. In England and Wales, the average conviction rate is 7 per cent. The highest rate is in Cleveland, at 18.1 per cent.

The Solicitor-General: Who is the MP?

Lynne Featherstone: That is cause and effect.

That is a rate of just under one in five. The lowest rate is in Dorset, with 1.6 per cent., where only one in 60 reported rapes leads to conviction. The Metropolitan Police Authority rate is 8.2 per cent. and of 12 police force areas, more than one in four had a rape conviction rate of less than 5 per cent. in 2007. I think that that demonstrates the hon. Gentleman’s point that there is a huge challenge to get women to come forward. How on earth, when the number of rapes hovers around the 12,000 mark and the conviction rate is still so low, do we persuade women that it is worth their coming forward when it is so traumatic to do so?

The hon. Member for Stourbridge (Lynda Waltho) described the discomfort for women who have to travel and protect the evidence about something so intimate, private and personal, which they would really do not want to do. I cannot imagine how a woman does that, when the first instinct would be to cleanse herself. One of the most difficult situations a woman may face must be the time lag to allow for examination before being able to cleanse that appalling crime from her. Resource is not infinite, and it is a matter of how fast and how much we can improve the conviction rate, and improve facilities.

Mr. Newmark: It goes back to the point that I made to the Solicitor-General, who I hope will correct me when she replies. I suspect that a disincentive to reporting by women is explained in the evidence that I gave her, which is set out in *Hansard* of 31 January 2008, at

[*Mr. Newmark*]

column 574W. The evidence shows that in England and Wales, the length of rape sentences seems to have been going down from 90.5 months in 2000, which is seven and a half years, to 81.2 months in 2006, which is 6.7 years. If the evidence is that over time the punishment, when it happens, becomes less—and that seems to be the trend—a woman will not feel encouraged to report anything.

Lynne Featherstone: I take the hon. Gentleman's point, but a far more critical issue is the conviction rate. The differential between seven and nine years is a point, but not the point.

Mr. Harper: This raises an interesting point, which the Solicitor-General touched on in her remarks, about the conviction rate following charge, which she said was 59 per cent., and the conviction rate compared with the rate of original reporting of an offence. I think that the Solicitor-General said—I am sure that she will respond on this point in her winding-up speech—that Baroness Stern's review is examining exactly that issue of what happens between the reporting of a rape and the decision whether to charge, and what factors are involved.

I think that the Solicitor-General said that it was only in the context of this offence that there was a tendency to consider the statistics on report and conviction; in most other crimes the statistics used were those relating to charge and conviction. I raise that matter because I do not want women who read the debate to be put off by the percentage of reported rapes that lead to conviction, when the figures for conviction following charge are more encouraging. We shall await Baroness Stern's report to find out in detail what happens in the time between, and to see whether the situation can be improved, although it is important to stick to the principle of fairness in the criminal justice system, which the Minister touched on, as well as Baroness Stern's terms of reference. We shall await the report with interest.

Lynne Featherstone: Yes, I do not want to discourage women in any way. It is important that women come forward when they have been raped, to report it. Baroness Stern's report will be of the utmost importance, because of the difficulty of bringing a charge.

Mr. Newmark: I just wanted to back up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Forest of Dean (Mr. Harper). He asked about the reasons, and there is one area that we should perhaps look at more closely. One of the main reasons shown in the recent Crown Prosecution Service report, "Violence Against Women", is non-attendance. There seems to be an increase in the frequency with which women do not turn up. In 2005-06, the figure was 1,593, but it that has gone up to 2,226. We need to consider the reasons for women not attending court, and what may be putting them off.

Lynne Featherstone: I suspect that it is not rocket science, and that they need a great deal of support to come to that point in court. There is a raft of reasons, and I expect that they are not difficult to understand.

The other problem with the conviction rate, and even with the charge rate, is that it perpetuates a cycle in which men feel that they probably will not be caught, and will not pay the price, at the other end of the process, for having advanced their desires—because someone was flirtatious, which I believe was something cited in the survey raised by the hon. Member for Forest of Dean.

I want to talk now about the trafficking of women. Home Office research found that up to 1,420 women were trafficked into the UK for sexual exploitation in 1998. That figure was based solely on reported cases. Trafficking in people is understood by the police and organisations that work with victims to be increasing exponentially, because it is extremely profitable, with high demand and little capital outlay, and it is a growing industry, unfortunately. The Metropolitan police estimate that trafficked women forced into prostitution in London see between 20 and 30 men a day.

I believe that the POPPY project is the only dedicated safe house providing specialist support for victims of trafficking. Recent funding by the Government of £3.7 million has led to two new shelters, in Cardiff and Sheffield, I believe, giving another 54 refuge places. However, the need is still greater, and I am greatly concerned about the proposed closure of the Met specialist trafficking unit, which is the only such specialist unit in the country. In my view, this area of work is not something that easily can or should be joined with clubs and vice, and it is particularly difficult and time-consuming.

Why is this happening? As I said, there is a great lack of equality in this country. Women still are, in many situations, not masters of their own destiny and do not have any financial power, or any power, with which to write the script for their own lives. The current level of support for victims is better than it was, but the costs to this country of violence against women, as I understand it from various people who have briefed me, are as follows: the NHS spends about £1.2 billion a year for physical injuries and £176 million for mental health support, yet there is no specialist investment in this kind of NHS service.

The Solicitor-General said that nine more sexual assault referral centres are in development, which is welcome, because they are specialist centres. POPPY, of course, works with trafficked women. The sheer volume and the nature of the statistics speak for themselves. Hon. Members from all parties are trying to grapple with that problem to work out how we can get the resource and permanent support from all the Departments that need to be involved. An integrated, co-ordinated strategy is the only way forward. Only a comprehensive policy that tackles the problem on every front will have a chance of success.

The Solicitor-General asked for ideas, and I am here to offer her a few from the Liberal Democrats. In this respect, our policies include providing more rape crisis centres—up to 15—providing services such as individual counselling, support groups and advocacy; 10 new sexual assault referral centres; early intervention with education by rolling out classes about rights and fair treatment in relationships; working in schools with organisations such as Relate to break the cycle of children growing up in violent relationships; improving systems to report abuse by providing better, more supportive systems in schools and social services, such as those involving health visitors and midwives.

Last night I attended Haringey's overview and scrutiny committee on health and was concerned to discover that there has been a severe reduction in the regularity of visits by health visitors. Although those visits have more to do with birth and developmental checks, the health visitor is the family's and the woman's friend. A health visitor is crucial in this regard, because a woman can talk to her, perhaps without the man present.

We Liberal Democrats want to ensure that women living in refuges can continue to work so that they can stay economically empowered to some degree. We found that only one in 10 of the support services were targeted specifically at ethnic minority women. Issues to do with culture, practice and language make that a specialist subject. We want to provide all women with access to services tackling violence against women, regardless of their immigration status, thereby helping those with no recourse to public funds.

We want to provide a freephone trafficking hotline, allowing women who have been trafficked and are working, or anyone else, to report concerns. This is going to sound terrible, but I went into a local massage parlour in Crouch End, because there was a complaint about the frontage. I thought at first that it was about what was going on inside, but the complaint was about the frontage, which was dirty, boarded up and grubby. The only way to find out about that was to go inside, find out the name and address of the owner and write to them. Inside were two bedraggled, tired, ill-looking girls who were a bit shocked when I walked in, but they eventually trusted me enough to let me in. Their English was not brilliant. I do not know if they were trafficked. I checked the licence and saw that it had run out, although the owner reapplied and succeeded in getting one.

One Lib Dem women's policy is that every licensed massage parlour should have to display a multi-language sign with a phone number for an emergency line for the women working there to call, because they have no contact with the outside world. If such a thing were part of the licensing agreement, that might be a route in. I accept that that is hardly the answer, nevertheless it is a minor but important point. Another of our policies is to end the increasing criminalisation of non-coercive prostitution and increase efforts to help those who wish to exit to do so and find a pathway out of the industry.

I have mentioned mandatory pay audits. Things will not improve until women have some financial parity, know their rights and have the ability and strength to fight against situations in which they find themselves. For them, it seems impossible to get away from such situations, so that in the end their only recourse is to run. I am sure that hon. Members from all parties would wish to improve matters, across all the Departments involved, in respect of all those issues that still keep women subjected to a level of violence that is unacceptable in this day and age. I look forward to hearing contributions to this debate from hon. Members from all parties.

3.35 pm

Mr. Bruce George (Walsall, South) (Lab): If I said that I was delighted to attend this debate, it would be a gross understatement. The number of debates on this subject has been pretty low over the years. In a way, I am delighted that the Government initiated this debate,

but I would have much preferred a Member of Parliament to have done so, because we are the ones who are supposed to be scrutinising, commenting and offering our advice, and that has not happened particularly well.

I do not know if any members of the Select Committee on Home Affairs are present, but there are not too many of them if that is so. I am disappointed, because that Committee that produced one of the few reports of violence in the family—most of it on one aspect.

I do not wish to spend too much time on history, but history is important. A couple of hon. Members present go back a long way on the staff side—not of the present Government but the last one—and almost as long as several of us have been here in the House.

Mr. Greenway: The hon. Gentleman mentions the Home Affairs Committee. I am interested in this issue as a member of that Committee in the 1987-92 Session. We produced its first report on domestic violence in many years and a lot of progress has been made from those recommendations. He is right, however: I too thought that many more colleagues would have attended today.

Mr. George: I do not want to trump the hon. Gentleman, but I want to talk about the first Select Committee dealing with this matter, before the modern, new Select Committee system was established. In 1975, I tabled a question and, for my pains, I was put on the Select Committee on Violence in the Family—an experience that I found truly amazing. In five months we held 23 meetings, heard evidence from eight Ministers—most of them pretty useless—received memorandums from 50 individuals and groups and heard evidence from a High Court judge, which was pretty unusual. We worked hard and finished that inquiry, which created quite a stir. Then we moved on to violence against children in the family, following the terrible death of Maria Colwell.

We saw, in those early days, the relationship between two major aspects of policy. I am pleased to see that, as time has gone on, there has been a greater awareness that one cannot regard a single area of policy as divorced from so many other areas of policy. There has to be a degree of integration, not just co-operation. Where is the dividing line between violence in the family and violence against women? The mistake we made in our report was calling it, "Violence in the family". As time has gone on, ever more violence has taken place outside marriage and that matter is now being dealt with far better.

We produced pretty influential reports. We received one letter from an irate constituent of somebody or other who complained and asked, "Why are you focusing entirely on violence against females? My wife is violent and she's beating me up regularly, so please include in your analysis a little bit about violence the other way round." With the passage of time, that is becoming rather more common. We started the ball rolling, and that was important.

I shall show the attitude at that time, before the present enlightened era. In our first report we said:

"a general impression must be recorded at the outset. We have been disappointed and alarmed by the ignorance and the apparent apathy of some Government Departments and individual Ministers towards the extent of marital violence. Hardly any worthwhile research into either causes or remedies has been"

[Mr. Bruce George]

provided. Responsibility is diversified

“between many Government Departments. No fewer than seven” appeared before us. Our report concluded:

“Only in a very few of these Departments does the problem of marital violence receive anything other than a very low priority either in terms of manpower or financial resources.”

I do not think the situation is remotely like that now; if I said that it was, I would be punched on the nose, and deservedly so. With the benefit of hindsight, we can see that there have been substantial changes.

Our report made a number of recommendations, and I hope that the Minister will consider them. We are still waiting for some of them to be implemented, which is par for the course for Select Committee reports. We recommended that more work be done in schools to break the cycle of violence—that recommendation was made almost 30 years ago. We said other things which may have become inappropriate with the passage of time, but some of our proposals remain relevant. Most members of the Committee are now dead, and I am sure that the civil servants are, but perhaps someone should read those two reports. They show that it was not the new system in 1989 that inaugurated competent Select Committees.

The absence so far of any discussion of the world outside is evidence of our indifference to the fact that other countries have domestic violence problems. Some have fewer problems and some infinitely more. I looked to see what international organisations have taken the lead and whether their words, resolutions and documents are relevant. They include the United Nations, the European Union, the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly. There has been an enormous output of recommendations and rules—almost treaties—imploring people and insisting that Governments do more. Many have, and have been inspirational, but probably half the countries in the world could not give a toss what any such document contains, especially those where violence and warfare are occurring and where rape is almost seen as a perk—a supplement to the low income paid to those who fight. Laws are not enforced, and there may not even be any laws to be enforced. We should see our major problems in perspective. I hope that more influence can be projected into those countries that are totally indifferent to implement the legal treaties they have signed, at least to some extent. Domestic violence is international; it always has been and I fear that it will remain so for a long time, unless more influence can be exerted on countries to eliminate any freedom that men, whether soldiers or civilians, feel they have to commit it. Thankfully, some countries are bucking that trend.

We have not spoken much about percentages, because we all know that they are pretty worthless. I hope that you will not rule me out of order, Mr. Benton, but in a moment of frivolity, although this is not a frivolous matter, I worked out that if 4 per cent. of males commit acts of violence in the family, 23 Members of Parliament—in the past, of course; no-one here would be guilty of that abhorrent activity—and 7.5 women would have done so. I am not a statistician, but someone may be able to have a stab at providing figures to show

that it is feasible that Members of Parliament, former MPs or prospective parliamentary candidates may have a few shadows that they want to hide. That is how close the problem is. It is not a problem of class, nationality or residence here; it is a problem that exists and we have not done enough about it, although much more is being done.

Fast-forwarding from 1975 to the present, there has been a massive outpouring of literature from novelists, serious writers, non-governmental organisations and think-tanks. Although some people may disagree, the issues are debated more, and more people are aware of them. There has been a huge increase in NGO co-operation, and it is immensely valuable. Departments are not as ignorant of the issues as they used to be. Instead of having no Minister responsible for the matter, we now have a large group of Ministers from different Departments. Although some outsiders would dissent from my view that there is more sophistication among civil servants, the evidence in 1975 was laughable.

When we had the follow-on investigation into violence against children, Barbara Castle was the Minister. She was venerated, but she was more of a big ideas person and her knowledge of detail was slight. It was profoundly disappointing to see one of my icons perform so miserably and badly. She was given a bad time by the then Chairman, Willie Hamilton. I jumped in to rescue her four times, and I was irritated when I read her autobiography to see that the abusive words that she had intended for the Chairman were directed at me. Unfortunately, she had expired, so I could not obtain retribution for the terrible slur.

There have been directives from the Government, and the wonderful Library briefing gives a summary of the steps that the Government have undertaken to protect people from domestic violence since 1997. It is a long list. Some hon. Members may say that it is one thing to pass laws and to publish documents, but where is the beef? The evidence is reasonably strong, and my view is that the Government's endeavours have been valiant and largely successful, but others disagree.

Looking through the literature, the Select Committee on Home Affairs was partly supportive and partly critical. NGOs and Victim Support were critical—one would expect that from an NGO—but also complimentary. Refuge was welcoming but disappointed. The Minister commented on one, but I do not have time to list the complaints. A report to which I hope the Minister will respond is from the NGO End Violence Against Women, and was launched by Mr. Phillips. The Minister defended the Government's view. There were some powerful arguments and my hon. and learned Friend rehearsed them.

The map produced was almost entirely blank. According to the criteria, there were 13 cities and towns involved, including my home town of Walsall, but the report did not say what was going on elsewhere. If someone is lucky enough to live in my area, there is an excellent service. If they are not, however, they will have to travel a long way—if they are from Scotland, it will be an excessively long day. Looking at the map and the blanks, I was amazed at how many big cities are bereft of what the organisation would consider to be a minimal provision. There have been criticisms, but it is important to recognise that enormous reforms have been made.

The last part of my presentation is about my constituency. I have been critical of much that does or does not go on in my constituency which, alongside that of my hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, North (Mr. Winnick), has a pretty high poverty rate. I do not suggest that the poorer someone is, the more likely they are to thump their spouse. However, I am pleased that there is a good service in my constituency. It is getting better, and in my view it is the epicentre of a set of fairly integrated structures. When the Minister visits other areas looking for best practice, I hope that she will come to my area and visit the Walsall Domestic Violence Forum, which is absolutely superb.

In fairness to the local authority, there is a network of structures that includes voluntary organisations, elements of the health service, the police and an excellent public protection unit—the list is long. Those are brought together into a framework that makes co-operation relatively easy. I have been to almost all of those organisations, and to the refuges—I am sorry if I have left any out—and I have been deeply impressed. My hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Lynda Waltho) looks green with envy, but her constituency attracts all our people to its shopping precincts, so it benefits in both ways.

In its annual report, the Domestic Violence Forum states:

“We have a number of dedicated services to provide support, advice and information to people experiencing domestic abuse. These include two 24 hour help-lines to meet the needs of service-users from a diverse community. These services are widely promoted via regular advertising in local media and the distribution of leaflets to a wide range of places accessed by the public including; medical surgeries and centres, police stations, housing and social care offices, community and leisure centres etc. We also provide various modules of training in domestic abuse and related issues. This serves to raise awareness of professional and community members, allowing them to respond appropriately and effectively to their service users. Walsall Domestic Violence Forum brings together professionals from across the range of organisations working with people affected by domestic abuse. These include representatives from police, probation, social care, housing, health and voluntary sector (Victim Support, Relate, Citizens Advice Bureau etc). This multi-agency partnership has now produced a second three-year strategy to reduce domestic abuse having successfully met, or exceeded, all targets as set in the initial strategy produced in 2000. Our Crisis Intervention Service is in place to reduce sickness and distress in victims of domestic abuse following an incident.”

It has 60 trained and experienced staff who do incredibly good work, so there is a relatively good side to the situation—it is something that we do well. If anybody has listened to the debate or reads about it, I would willingly pass on material to show what a good operation is.

The people who lead the forum are scintillating. I have helped them on a number of occasions and defended them from those on the council who do not have the same attitude towards that sort of service. The organisation is able to earn money by providing classes, and it has received money from the national lottery in the past. The Equality and Human Rights Commission has helped, and the organisation also provides services for social services. When money comes in, the Government push a large sum the way of related organisations in many parts of the country. However, what irritates me—and I would welcome a comment or a letter from the Minister on this—is that because the Government want to

decentralise decision making, the decision on how that money is spent is left to the local authority. Therefore, the money is not ring-fenced as it should be, but is at the mercy of the council. Some of those people are decent, but others—and in the past, officers of the local authority—have been decidedly unhelpful.

Lynda Waltho: Is my right hon. Friend as worried as I am, representing a west midlands constituency, that Dudley council has just published its budget proposals which involve the loss of about 1,000 jobs and cuts to all sorts of departments in a drive to have the lowest council tax in the black country, no doubt vying with my right hon. Friend's local authority? Many services fear that they will be cut first. Unfortunately, and particularly with Tory Dudley council, such cuts are always made at the vulnerable end, in services to elderly people, very young people or, as in this case, aid for women.

Mr. George: I share my hon. Friend's views. I have tried not to be too partisan because this should not be a partisan political issue. Protecting the lives of a vast number of constituents and non-constituents should be top of the list. I understand why a local authority that is strapped for cash might think, “Are we going to spend the money on closed-circuit television or anti-drugs policy and so on?” It is difficult. The local authority is arguing, “Look at all the money that this organisation has got, and all the women who work for nothing.” Three years ago, that organisation received £150,000, but that has gradually diminished and it is now hoping for £75,000. If we cut its income from the local authority, that will mean that it is being punished for its success.

Most of my hon. Friends will not have the luxury of such a good service, but even though it is good, there are a vast number of women—and some men—who need assistance. I am not suggesting that people are washing their hands by providing less funding than they should. There was a debate in the council last week, and the resolution was incredibly moderate. It was not meant to inflame, but it was rejected. I know that money is tight, but such causes are important. The great advantage to the council of that wonderful organisation is that its wage rates are lower than those for local authority personnel. The people involved are largely women. When the money is cut below the level of their capability, those who are not being paid will not desert. They will hang on in there, because they do not want to turn people away. That is so commendable. I am proud of them: they are searching for work at a time when most people are trying to diminish the work that they do because they are having difficulty in coping with the increase.

I will not bore hon. Members, but I know, because I have seen all the statistics, of the increase in violence against spouses in the past 12 months. That has taken place for patently obvious reasons. When there is strife and people go out to celebrate or not celebrate their lifestyle, the women face it when they get back. In the past, it might have been seen as part of the normal cycle of marriage that the woman gets hammered every weekend. In some people's cases, that has not changed.

I am not criticising my local authority to a great extent. I say to the Minister that a slight diversion en route to the north might be worth while. Do not let the

[*Mr. Bruce George*]

Walsall Domestic Violence Forum be written out as an afterthought. The local authority is functioning reasonably well and among all the statutory authorities, central Government, local government and the non-governmental organisations, there is a degree of integration. I do not want it to expand to an absurd level, as though it is the finest bureaucracy in the world, but in this sphere, it is well led by women, as opposed to a pretty appalling guy in the local authority previously. Things are going really well. However, Walsall should not think that because things are going well, we can now let up. I am sorry for the others, but I am paid to represent my own constituency and I want to protect it at a time when funding is very difficult.

I am sorry that I have gone on for so long. I visit the Walsall Domestic Violence Forum every two months. My assistant is the deputy chairman. I fight for the organisation and assist it and I am pleased to do that. Not all men are male chauvinist pigs. I must say that a slight majority of men have attended this debate, but as women are hopelessly outnumbered in Parliament, I am sure that they will tell me that in reality they are the more numerous.

4.3 pm

Mr. John Greenway (Ryedale) (Con): Like the right hon. Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), I welcome the debate. It is on a very important subject and, like him, I am disappointed that more hon. Members are not present. I want to take the opportunity to draw attention to the work of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and, in particular, its migration committee, to which the right hon. Gentleman referred.

Only four weeks ago, I took part in a two-day seminar in Paris on migration and violence against women. That was a joint event, structured by the Inter-Parliamentary Union and the Parliamentary Assembly and our migration committee, with strong input and support from the United Nations committee on the elimination of discrimination against women—CEDAW—of which our Government are a member.

I begin by reflecting on my time in the police more than 40 years ago. In those days, there was a general presumption that the issue was not a police matter. I would not go quite so far as to say, in the way that the right hon. Gentleman did, that women had to “face it”, but to the extent that there was training, it said that, unless the violence was extremely serious, it was best to keep out; the attitude was “Let the people sort it out themselves.”

Fiona Mactaggart: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the recent Independent Police Complaints Commission report on John Worboys, the serial rapist in London, implies that that attitude still exists in the police, even among some specialist police officers?

Mr. Greenway: That may be true. It is not the conclusion that I drew from the IPCC report. What I drew from that was the sense that there had been a clear dereliction of duty on the part of the officers involved. There were inquiries that they could and should have followed up. However, I share the hon. Lady's disgust at what happened to the 40 or so women who were subsequently assaulted

and raped by Worboys. It was not one of the best days in the Metropolitan police's history, and I share some of the shame.

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman is generous for giving way so early in his speech. My lesson from that is a slightly ironic one: I doubt whether, in the days when he was in the police, those officers would have been disciplined at all for not taking sufficient notice of women complaining, as opposed to not taking sufficient notice of a black cab driver saying that he was not guilty.

The other point that I want to raise with the hon. Gentleman is that it is increasingly important that we should emphasise the extent to which rape is becoming ever more clearly a serial offence. Many rapists are serial offenders. Women should be encouraged to see the issue in that light, and police should see it in that light, so that everyone collaborates to ensure that it is not just the individual who is at stake. She, and the police, should understand that there is a duty for the future.

Mr. Greenway: I am glad that I gave way to the hon. and learned Lady, because I agree with her completely, but I want to move on and make a lot of other points.

I sensed that even in my time in the police—I left at Christmas 1969—attitudes were beginning to change. There was a sense in which it was simply not acceptable for women to be beaten up and abused by men, even within the family. When I came to the House in 1987, I was put on the Home Affairs Committee, in my first Parliament, as I said in an intervention on the right hon. Member for Walsall, South. Under the chairmanship of Sir John Wheeler, we produced a detailed report on domestic violence. Many of our recommendations became policy, and I think that we changed opinion, even among parliamentarians, on the fact that the subject needed greater focus and impetus from Government.

I particularly remember visiting places of safety, refuges. The hon. and learned Lady referred to the fact that such places are now a central pillar of policy; I welcome that. We must restate strongly this afternoon that violence against women in all its forms is unacceptable, and there can be no possible excuse. It is a very grave violation of human rights, and cultural relativism should not be invoked to justify the actions of some men.

The Council of Europe as a whole dedicated three years, from 2006 to 2008, to a campaign aimed at combating violence against women across all 47 member countries. The campaign highlighted the need to protect victims, to prosecute offenders and to prevent violence. There is even a handbook for parliamentarians, a key feature of which is to remind parliamentarians in all countries that all women living within their territories should have access to law, should have relevant victim protection and should have rehabilitation facilities available to them.

In both the committee on equal opportunities for women and men and the migration committee, work on that issue is ongoing. It is never off the agenda. One report is followed by another. We have just completed a report, adopted by the Assembly in September, entitled “Migrant women: at particular risk from domestic violence”. After the part-session next week in Strasbourg, I expect to begin a report on the rights of women migrant workers. I shall come to that in a moment.

The right hon. Member for Walsall, South, is right to say that although many recommendations are made, many reports have been written and many great ideas have been promulgated, not all of them have been taken up with the enthusiasm one would have liked. However, I would caution him that many aspects of the subject have been taken up by the Government. When we keep pushing at the door, attitudes begin to change.

The focus for the migration committee, understandably, is on migrant women and discrimination on grounds of gender and origin. Half of migrants are women, and they are at particular risk of violence. They are often confronted with language barriers, insecurity of status, family pressures, religious and cultural attitudes, and isolation with limited access to help. Psychological violence and exploitation are also often encountered in the workplace. Women are given jobs of drudgery.

There is also sexual exploitation; and, of course, there is sexual human trafficking, to which others have referred. According to the latest figure available to our committee, the industry of trafficking women for sexual exploitation is currently worth £32 billion across the whole of Europe; that includes not only the EU, but eastern European countries outside it. That is a shocking figure. It shows the scale of what confronts us. Other forms of violence against migrant women include so-called honour crimes, female genital mutilation—the Government rightly legislated on that recently—forced marriages, and rape, including rape within families and communities.

The Parliamentary Assembly migration committee has long called for a Council of Europe convention on violence against women. We need to embrace action on all the aspects that I mentioned, and I am glad that there is now general agreement that the convention should be taken forward. I hope that the Government will be extremely active, through the CDMG—the intergovernmental migration committee—in making that a reality.

As I said, the needs of migrant women are especially important. We should not underestimate the real gravity of the problem. Migrant women often originate from countries where there is a strong patriarchal family structure, in which cultural and religious conventions often treat women and girls adversely. Women are often resigned to violence and abuse, especially if it is the tradition in their host country.

Other features of the experiences of migrant women can have a very negative impact. Divorce and separation can result in the women having no status. The bad experience of migration itself, which puts families under pressure, especially if they are in an irregular situation, can be the cause of violence against the woman in the home. Women feel a great sense of shame, often based on tradition, when it comes to reporting what has happened to them. Their rights are seldom understood. Women with no individual migrant status are frightened to seek help.

As regards people in migrant and multi-ethnic communities, even in our own country, talk of prevention is futile unless efforts are made to integrate those women into their communities. That is a route towards inclusion, which reduces isolation and the risk of violence. Migrant women may have young children who were born in the host country who have no status themselves, and who suffer violence. Migrants with irregular status live constantly in fear of deportation.

I am glad that the convention on trafficking, which the Government now enthusiastically support, is firmly understood. I say to the right hon. Member for Walsall, South, that that is an example of the Council of Europe at work. I remember that three, or three and a half, years ago we pushed hard for that convention. The original response, not only from the Government but from our parties and the body politic, was, “Ah, yes, but this will just attract more of them to this country”—all the usual responses. The perceived wisdom now is that these women deserve help and support. We continue to change attitudes. Lack of access to interpretation or language training is also a frequent difficulty.

On women who are concerned or frightened about reporting because of their status, our understanding is that the United Kingdom domestic violence rule of 2002 has enabled abused women to stay here in their own right on production of evidence. It is most important that such measures be supported, approved and adopted, and that we see the consolidation of such measures in other countries.

Women need empowerment. We need to consolidate their role in society. I could give many examples. When travelling in Europe on Parliamentary Assembly business, I have been in countries where one can sense that the women are treated very badly and have little status. It is different in other places. I was in Azerbaijan in May visiting refugees, although they are in-country displaced people from Nagorno-Karabakh. I was allowed to see the matriarch there; she was a powerful woman. Much of the problem is cultural, but there is much that we could do in taking a lead.

To make progress will require a significant improvement in the status of migrant women. Eventually, we will have to recognise that women need a status independent of their spouse. I accept that these are challenging concepts, but I believe that we must take primarily a human rights approach to change. That is the key to political action and the vehicle to overcoming cultural and religious barriers. Human rights primacy means that violence is not acceptable in any way. The rights of the perpetrator must never supersede the rights of women to protection from violence, but we know of instances, particularly in other countries, where that has not always been the case.

We can never overstress the importance of transnational dialogue and the development and implementation of international instruments and conventions. I accept that that may be a subject for another day, but there is considerable room for improvement. Legal instruments must translate into a guarantee of protected rights for women. We must make more of our membership of CEDAW. As a country, we should take a bigger role and a bigger lead in the various UN and Council of Europe committees. We have made much progress in this country, and I sense that our experience could be invaluable to women in other countries.

I return to the generality of the subject. Much progress has been made in the past 40 or 50 years, but there is much more to do. Yes, of course we need a strong criminal justice system. However, attitudinal change is not yet complete. In particular, among the younger generation, there does not seem to be the attitude that we want across that whole generation. That aspect, too, was referred to earlier. It is not acceptable to abuse or exploit women with impunity.

[*Mr. Greenway*]

One of my colleagues on the Council of Europe, Mr. Mendes Bota from Portugal, will chair the equal opportunities committee, and I hope to become chairman of the migration committee next week, when all the chairmanships change. He made a telling point. He said that the trouble may be that all our efforts to deal with the problem of violence against women are reactive—that everything we do is largely reactive. The priority should be education. He said that, at the pre-primary level, in many elements of society there is no mutual respect. We need to change that attitude, culture and behaviour and focus on what is socially responsible and acceptable. If we can resolve the issue for future generations through attitudinal change, there will be a huge prize, in terms of health, family breakdown figures and social and economic costs.

Furthermore, more men need to be involved in pursuing the subject. I was delighted to see that at one point there were five men participating in this debate. There are still four of us, and I am not including the Whip and you, Mr. Benton, in the Chair. We need genuine equality—not equality as an end in itself, but equality that reflects a society that is based entirely on mutual respect.

4.20 pm

Lynda Waltho (Stourbridge) (Lab): I am grateful for the opportunity to speak in this debate on violence against women. I want to concentrate on domestic violence, which is an issue that I was involved with when I was a student, helping out at a refuge in Stoke-on-Trent, and then later as a teacher and MP. I am delighted to see so many Members here, given the low-level Whip on the rest of the business today, as it shows how many of us are dedicated to addressing this most vile of crimes and to improving the dire circumstances in which so many women and children find themselves.

We are all aware of the horrifying statistics. Although two lives a week is the often quoted figure, it is nice—if that is the right word—to be able to say that it is around one death a week, which reflects some improvement, but it needs to be zero. We all have to remember that domestic violence accounts for about a quarter of all recorded violent crime in England and Wales. Statistics such as that remind us how vital, long overdue and desperately needed Government action to tackle this issue has been.

I am proud to have been able to vote on some of the legislation. Although I welcome the new measures and the funding to support victims, it is by no means an indication that we can rest on our laurels. Legislation to punish offenders and support victims—although welcome—is not enough. The root causes of violence in the home must be addressed, and as the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) said, the general attitude towards domestic violence must be changed in the community. We still need to do work within the legal profession and, sadly, within the police force.

Late last year, I had the experience of hosting Hollywood star Reese Witherspoon on her visit to the House of Commons. She was representing Avon Cosmetics in its international campaign to eliminate domestic violence, which was also backed by Refuge. It is an interesting concept because many Avon representatives go into

women's homes, and it is seen to be a way of connecting with women and informing them. Moreover, it is a place in which women can meet, which is a good place to start. It also offers a safe way for women to confide in others or receive advice. I am happy to continue to support that programme.

During the event, I had the privilege of meeting the accomplished journalist, Wendy Turner Webster. She eloquently and movingly spoke about the effects of domestic violence on her own life. She is an intelligent, articulate and bright woman, but she still felt trapped in a situation about which she could do nothing. I could see that the experience was still painful to her. She described the destruction of her character during the many years of her first marriage.

Tragically, Wendy Turner Webster's story is echoed day in, day out in each of our constituencies, which is why the measures that we have introduced must not be undermined by intermittent funding or local cuts to vital support services. We must be aware that, despite the great advances, provision is still patchy in places. More worryingly, there is a lack of co-ordination across the services, so victims may experience a postcode lottery when they try to access help.

I want to illustrate the pathway that a domestic violence victim in Stourbridge may have to walk. If she is brave enough to report her situation or somebody does so on her behalf, she may, if she is lucky, get referred to one of the two workers who are based at Dudley Victim Support unit. We have a population of about 320,000 in the Dudley borough, but there are only two designated workers. The primary care trust employs one person, who effectively mans a telephone and does a bit of counselling, for 20 hours a week. One worker from Sandwell Women's Aid, with whom I have worked, said of the service, "Good luck if you can get an answer," not because the workers are lazy or turning people away, but because they physically cannot attend to the women who are trying to get help. Quite simply, they are overwhelmed. They have to prioritise victims, and it is only those who have suffered repeated incidents that go forward to the MARAC system. If we need to wait for three or four batterings before we can help someone, thousands of women will experience their first, second and third beating without being helped. I find that very distressing.

When I have come across cases, I often find that I take the details home with me. It is only with the assistance of the Walsall SARC group and Sandwell Women's Aid, which is in the neighbouring authority, that we can sometimes get things done. Some victims are lucky and manage to get in touch with Sandwell Women's Aid in the neighbouring borough, but they are few and far between. The focus on domestic violence in Dudley is poor. The Solicitor-General was invited to the midlands, and it is right that she should go and see the wonderful service that Walsall offers, but she should then come and see us, because there is quite a comparison to make.

Interestingly, the status of domestic violence within the local crime and disorder reduction partnership is quite low and is dangerously close to being non-compliant with things such as gender duty and the cross-Government action plan. Councillor Judy Foster, who is vice-chair of the West Midlands police authority, said:

“Though recent figures show that Dudley has a low crime rate compared to the rest of the West Midlands the figures for domestic violence are surprisingly high...and...prosecutions are low”

To add insult literally to injury, victims of domestic violence are not given sufficient priority for rehousing.

To cite a case, a lady whom I will call Miss T suffered years of violence from her partner that stopped only when he was convicted and sentenced for rape and a beating in their own home so severe that she suffered a stroke as well as broken bones and ruptured organs. She first came to see me at the end of 2007. Despite pleading and attempts to work with the local authority to rehouse her, she has been forced to live all that time in the same home, which holds such traumatic memories for her that she cannot even go upstairs to the room where it happened and lives in half the house. To use her words when she last came to see me, “Mrs. Waltho, if you had an accident in your car in which you were seriously injured, would you keep returning to the scene?” That is what she must do every day.

She has also been forced to enter Dudley’s online bidding programme for a new home. She never gets to the top of the list, because officially she is adequately housed, but of course the authority managed without a problem to house her partner when he came out of jail. That is how dire the situation can be when things do not connect. The Minister must agree that that is not right.

We need to be vigilant about the wider package of support available—or, in this case, not available—to victims. We need to do all that we can to ensure that the good work done in the area is not undermined by a lack of cohesion between the wider authority services or, even worse, funding cuts. The workers at Sandwell Women’s Aid do a great job, but much of their time is taken up by applying constantly for new pots of money, negotiating contracts and services and their service agreement. They need to be freed up to do the work that they were trained to do.

We must also be aware that the views of the public—and still, sadly, some in the legal profession—need to be questioned. My local paper, the *Stourbridge News*, reported on a particularly nasty domestic violence case:

“An emotional plea from a Stourbridge domestic abuse victim spared her partner from jail for a brutal attack. Jon Bennett, from The Broadway, head butted and repeatedly punched Natalie Wilkes, the mother of his three children, after returning home drunk on the night she expected to be taken out to celebrate her birthday. The 33-year-old also armed himself with a bread knife after dragging her downstairs at their home and threatened to kill her...Judge Michael Dudley told Wilkes he was only able to allow him to keep his freedom because of what he described as a ‘compelling’ letter from his partner asking him for mercy. The Judge said: ‘I am able to do this because of the compelling letter written by your partner in which she makes it clear she wants to make a go of the relationship. It will resume in the course of time if you are sensible and I sincerely hope and trust that you keep out of trouble.’...Edward Soulsby, prosecuting, told the court that Bennett also broke Miss Wilkes’ mobile telephone against a wall, smashed the house phone and broke a fish tank flooding their home with water. The couple had lived together for seven years and they have three daughters aged five and two and a baby who was just one month old at the time”.

It is hard to imagine that such actions could not lead to an immediate custodial sentence. I find it difficult to reconcile all the measures that we have put in place with what comes out at the end. There is much work to do

with all the other support services to make things work properly for victims of abuse.

The Solicitor-General: That is a telling story. One thing that one would want to know is why she decided to write the letter. Who knows? Did anybody consider that important question?

Lynda Waltho: Indeed. I think that that is obvious. I had hoped that that everybody would come to that conclusion, because that is the one that I came to. If she lacks support, it is possible that she was coerced by the family or even her partner into writing it. Without resources behind her, she would never proceed. It is about knitting together, or the whole thing could fall down. It is certainly falling down in Dudley. That is not to say that there are not lots of people and organisations working, but they do not seem to be pulling together properly. There are so many holes that women can fall down along the pathway.

Only seven years ago, in 2003, just 46 per cent. of domestic violence convictions resulted in a custodial sentence. By 2007, according to the national crime survey, it had risen to 72 per cent. It is getting better overall, but it is not working as well as it can or should in Dudley.

4.35 pm

Sitting suspended for Divisions in the House.

4.56 pm

On resuming—

Mr. Joe Benton (in the Chair): Just to clarify, we will now continue until 5.51 pm.

Lynda Waltho: I was talking about the increase in custodial sentences. That increase is, in no small part, because of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 and the various initiatives that have followed. The chief executive of Refuge, Sandra Horley, has said:

“The new legislation gives a clear and strong message to perpetrators and society at large that domestic violence is both unacceptable and criminal.”

The measures in that Act were the genesis of many of the pragmatic steps that the Government have proposed, including the introduction of the domestic violence courts—the Minister referred to those earlier—independent advocacy, the multi-agency risk assessment conferences and a real focus nationally on the issue.

Characteristically, it seems that the Government are responding to further advice from victims and experts alike to enact legislation that offers enhanced protection from domestic violence. That has involved true heroes of the domestic violence movement, such as Sara Ward from Sandwell Women’s Aid, who is responsible for supporting victims of domestic and sexual violence in my constituency, albeit not in Sandwell.

Recent measures should be welcomed by all parties. As we mentioned earlier, the domestic violence protection notices—or “go” notices—offer a protection for domestic violence from forced eviction at the hands of the perpetrator, which is something we should applaud. However, I understand that some victims feel that is not a safe enough vehicle to protect them at home.

[Lynda Waltho]

The “go” notices will provide a previously unrealised protection for spousal victims of domestic violence, but I hope that the Minister will be able to offer some reassurances that they will protect not just the spouses, who are among the most prominent victims of domestic, but the hidden victims of domestic violence: the children.

The Home Office defines domestic violence as

“Any incident of threatening behaviour, violence or abuse (psychological, physical, sexual, financial or emotional) between adults who are or have been intimate partners or family members, regardless of gender or sexuality.”

That is undoubtedly the case, but I am sure the Government will want to do more to ensure that the impact on the children of those adults is considered in any measures. The Government have also committed to holding an annual debate on domestic violence—a move that is welcomed by leading domestic violence charities. Such moves have come from listening to the real experts in that difficult field, those who suffer from domestic violence and those who have to deal with it.

I would be grateful to hear from my hon. and learned Friend what further steps the Government will take to ensure that victims and stakeholders in the third sector who operate in that sphere will continue to play a leading role in developing Government policy on the topic, and perhaps even have an enhanced role. Surely, it is by proving that we value and can work in successful partnership with such experts in the prevention of domestic violence that we will make real progress in the fight against it. We must see where we can learn from their expertise and match their desire to fight domestic violence by using the will and machinery of Government.

I know that many right hon. and hon. Members have valid contributions to make, but before ending my speech I would like to underline an issue that is extremely important to constituents I have talked with, campaigners and domestic violence charities: sustainable funding. I have spoken many times in the House and will continue to do so about the pressing need for sustainable funding for those groups to provide help for victims, particularly of sexual crimes. Although I am unable to speak at length on that matter today, it is important stress how that situation is mirrored in the cause of fighting domestic violence. I would be grateful for reassurances from the Government that, as soon as possible, funding for domestic violence will be ring-fenced and sustained in the long term.

C.S. Lewis said:

“We all want progress, but if you’re on the wrong road, progress may mean doing an about-turn”.

Today there is no need for the Government to do an about-turn, because they are, I am convinced, going in the right direction on the long road to eradicating domestic violence. However, we can always do more, and I hope that the Government will bring forward further legislation that will enable us to do so.

It is well known in this place that there is a void in spending plans and no clarification on where cuts might fall, particularly from the Opposition—apparently that is matched by a void in coherent policy on how they would tackle domestic violence. A date-ordered search on their website reveals that the last time they published any strategy was in 2008, as the hon. Member for Forest

of Dean (Mr. Harper) revealed, which was 13 months ago. He indicated that many of their strategy’s suggestions have become Government policy, so I think that women all over the country have the right to ask, “What next?” The gap seems a clear demonstration of how the Opposition might let the issue of domestic violence lie again. I hope that my hon. and learned Friend the Solicitor-General can demonstrate how the Government will do the opposite and continue to be tireless in their fight against domestic violence and, wherever possible, preserve and protect the funding with which to do so.

5.3 pm

Mr. Andrew Pelling (Croydon, Central) (Ind): I would be grateful for your guidance, Mr. Benton, on when Members are to give way for those on the Front Benches to make their final contributions.

It is apt that we hold this debate in the wake of the Second Reading of the Crime and Security Bill on Monday and the most welcome review of the family justice system announced yesterday by written statement. Ministers are to be congratulated on those two initiatives, the latter of which is an example of joined-up Government from two Departments. The statement from the two Secretaries of State is evidence of the wider repercussions that violence against women can have, particularly in the domestic context. It is on those aspects of domestic violence that I wish to focus my remarks.

When considering what support must be in place for victims of domestic violence, it is necessary to understand the pervasive nature of the crime for the victims. Victims are forced to carry their abuse with them. It is impossible to escape. Abuse happens in the home, in public and at work, and it stalks the victim throughout the day, whether the perpetrator is absent or not. The abuse does not end when the violence stops, but continues as a psychological torment. Depressive illness frequently follows. There is a fear of others’ questions, of letting the carefully constructed semblance of normality slip and of the consequences of allowing the secret out. Then there is the ever-present fear, whether alone or in a crowd, of returning home to the abuser, perhaps an abuser who abuses in front of the children.

It is also true that abuse might not be limited to one assailant, but be perpetrated by several of the victim’s close relatives, and perhaps against the victim’s other close family members as well. Recourse to police intervention can come after an extended period of domestic violence. The perpetrator might come from a family environment where violence and intimidation in the home is one of the primary means of communication. That problem hints at the need for a broad menu of public policy solutions involving early intervention and support for all parties involved, and that is something I want to emphasise in my short speech, bearing in mind that another important contributor to the debate is yet to speak.

We need to accelerate the timing of intervention. It can be distressing for a family to see a relative exhibiting regressive tantrum-like behaviour normally exhibited in younger children. That can involve self-abuse, public exhibitionist self-abasement and public violence to fellow family members. That can cause trauma for partners and extended family members such that that they too are victims. Dr. Keren Skegg has done good work in that area.

Before taking recourse to the authorities, the victim of domestic violence might have faced a daily litany of violent abuse, physical force, false imprisonment, denial of funds for food for both them and their children, intimidation, threats to family pets, which the Minister mentioned, physical injury from the use of domestic items or even traumatisation through the erratic misuse of road vehicles to physically intimidate. The paucity of means of violence and abuse are frighteningly extensive, and ease of recourse to support for women who want to care for those whom they love, but at whose hands they suffer, is a much-needed reform. There is much that is done well in Europe in that regard, but I will probably not have time to detail that in my contribution.

A presumption in the family justice system to break up and separate families might need to be challenged by funding early support and intervention before court action becomes inevitable. In that circumstances, I praise the Government's upcoming review of the family justice system and refer to the valuable Adjournment debate held yesterday evening, in which I declared my frequent use of the family justice system. That debate was secured by the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Mr. Kilfoyle), who raised the vital issue of the abuse and overuse of ex parte family court proceedings, often on a Friday afternoon, and often on behalf of male applicants. I was pleased that the Under-Secretary of State for Justice, the hon. Member for Lewisham, East (Bridget Prentice), said that she would consider whether the concern about ex parte application misuse could be included in the Government's welcome family justice system review. We must remember that violent partners in family justice system cases can abuse that system to continue their intimidatory behaviour and use the public domain for inappropriate defenestration.

I would also like to highlight the excellent work of the Centre for Social Justice in seeking support for bolstering families subject to domestic violence, which in itself can exhibit intimidation within the extended family. Violence within lesbian, gay, bisexual and transsexual relationships also needs to be considered in the debate, and I would like to place on record the excellent work I have learned about through my attendance at monthly Croydon LGBT meetings with the Croydon police about that serious concern. That is an initiative of the Croydon police that should be studied and followed.

The proposed "go" orders in the Crime and Security Bill are vital. The need for their introduction is urgent, but I believe that it should not fall on the police to order; instead, there should be proper investment in the court system to allow for immediate recourse to 24-hour courts. I would prefer the term "time-out orders" rather than "to go orders". It is a better term, which would encourage more frequent use and, most importantly, earlier recourse to the facility. Earlier and frequent use of time-out orders would save lives and save families.

I am cognisant that there is another Member who has more to contribute than I do to this debate, so I will not have time to talk about good practice in Europe. However, it should be noted how the support that is given to both sides of a dispute means in many ways that families can be protected.

In conclusion—perhaps it is an exaggeration to say "conclusion"—I would like to spend a little time on two issues that were raised by the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Lynne Featherstone). I have raised in

this Chamber before my concern about victims of domestic abuse being denied services because they are not entitled to public funds in what is a sad and serious legal anomaly. Of course, the Solicitor-General will say that it is a matter for the courts. It is right and proper that what might be termed social benefits are not available, but support at public expense in the course of upholding the British tradition of justice is a separate issue. Police officers would not pass by on the other side of the street if they observed a person being assaulted whom they knew to be without the right to remain, so why should it be acceptable to consign a victim to the same fate within the confines of what might loosely be termed their home? A distinction must be made between public money used in connection with crime and justice, and the sort of social services benefits that are properly the thrust of the legal finding.

The qualification must be that entering into the support system should not have an immediate effect on the victim's immigration status. That is a separate issue, and while their new familial status is undoubtedly of importance, it would be unfortunate if people were attracted to making accusations of abuse from anything other than genuine concern.

I would also like to refer to the Metropolitan Police Service human trafficking team pilot, which is being closed down. I was so pleased to hear what the Solicitor-General had to say about advertising: I agree that local newspapers should abstain from the type of advertising that assists the human trafficking business. It is of great regret to me that the *Croydon Advertiser* has not followed the example of the *Croydon Guardian* in removing such adverts, regardless of the amount of money that they bring in.

The process that was agreed at the beginning for funding the pilot—to reduce the 50 per cent. of the Home Office funding during this financial year and to have no funding next year—compromises an important unit. I previously had an answer in the main Chamber from the Leader of the House that the problem will now be dealt with by the vice unit in the police service, but I believe that it is important to have a dedicated service. As the Solicitor-General will know, I do not wear any political badge here so, in quoting the Mayor of London's letter to me I am not trying to make a partisan point. However, I would like to quote it in concluding my speech, because it poses a question which the Solicitor-General may have time to answer in winding up the debate.

Boris Johnson stated:

"It is very disappointing that the Home Office will not be providing the MPS with any further additional funding to tackle human trafficking, particularly given the anticipated increase in trafficking leading up to the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. Your support"—

the letter is to me—

"in raising this issue with other parliamentary colleagues would be most appreciated."

I have fulfilled the Mayor's request. I very much look forward to what I am sure will be a significant contribution to the debate by the next speaker.

5.14 pm

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): I thank the hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Pelling) for his generous remarks. I speak as the chair of the all-party

[Fiona Mactaggart]

group on prostitution and the global sex trade, and as a secretary of the all-party group on domestic violence, and I am the only person in this Chamber at the moment who was able to participate in yesterday's debate on trafficking. I think that there is some important read-across between that debate and this one.

I believe that everyone who has contributed to this debate agrees that tackling violence against women is of massive importance in reducing violent crime, and that we must focus on it in a way that was not sufficiently done in ancient years. My right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George), led us back to those ancient years, and we remember the victims of those times.

I was honoured this year to be given an Emma Humphreys award for the work that I have done in tackling prostitution. The award recognises organisations and individuals who work to tackle violence against women. I had the privilege of winning it because of my work to ensure that men who pay for sex from women who have been forced to prostitute themselves are criminalised, and I would like to honour the Solicitor-General for contributing to that work. I believe that it makes an important contribution.

The Government's strategy is great, but let us be clear: we have done a lot but there is a lot left to do. I want to focus on the "left to do". Hon. Members have focused on prevention. I share the view that education is a critical part of prevention, but we need to start before people are born. One of the most important ways to prevent domestic violence is for every pregnant woman to be asked at antenatal appointments whether she has ever been a victim of domestic violence. The *Daily Mail* and others will claim that that is nanny-stating, but there is compelling evidence that a woman is more likely to reveal her status as a victim at that time than at any other. One can then put in place the kind of support procedures that she needs to protect herself and her future child from domestic violence. I strongly urge the Solicitor-General to speak with her colleagues in the Department of Health to ensure that that becomes the norm rather than the exception. Such action is taken in my area, but not in many others.

I also urge the Solicitor-General to ensure that section 14 of the Policing and Crime Act 2009, which criminalises men who pay for sex, stops being the secret piece of law that it is at present. We must have proper publicity in every male lavatory and so on asking, "Are you certain that someone who you are thinking of paying for sex has chosen to do it? If you have any reason not to know, you will be prosecuted." I do not think that there has been sufficient publicity about that.

I would like to echo remarks by other Members about the valuable Sojourner pilot project for women who are subject to immigration control and are victims of domestic violence. My anxiety is that it provides for only eight weeks' support, and in many cases, frankly, there is not competent legal immigration advice available to women during that period. One of the simple ways that the Solicitor-General could make a real difference to the effectiveness of the pilot is by guaranteeing good-quality legal advice for that group of women at that point. I hope that that the pilot project will be extended.

There is another issue that I would like to raise in respect of the interaction between immigration law and violence against women. In my constituency there is a young woman who has temporary immigration status because she was admitted in conjunction with her mother. She had two years' stay in the first instance, which will lead to settlement if her mother's marriage, which one imagines has been going on for some 18 years because that is how old the daughter is, persists during those two years. Her father is trying to force her to marry her cousin in Bangladesh and she is being protected by the forced marriage unit, but there is no mechanism to sort out her immigration status. She has no income, but to get settlement she has to pay a fee although she has no access to money for that. The bending of the rules put in place for victims of domestic violence is not available for women in her position. Frankly, the Home Office is doing its normal Home Office stupid in this case.

I urge the Solicitor-General to take up that case and raise with the Home Office the need for victims of violence to receive not only legal advice, but the kind of resources that women often do not have. They do not have money that is needed to make the Home Office do the things that they need. The response that people receive is: "Oh, this is not a proper application, because it was not accompanied by the fee that we require. It's therefore an improper application and we're therefore bound to refuse it in law." That is what I mean by Home Office stupid. If the Solicitor-General intervened, we might get a little less of that.

I have spoken frequently about rape conviction rates. I praise the Solicitor-General's police force in Cleveland, which has the best conviction rates in the country because it has a decent strategy on a range of sexual violence issues, including prostitution. However, in some ways, I was disappointed by her explanation of how rape conviction rates are counted. In most cases of rape, although not in every case, the victim is able to identify the perpetrator. That is true in, say, street robbery, but not true in many areas of crime, such as burglary, car crime, and so on. It is therefore logical to count the statistics in that way.

I am afraid that I was depressed by the Independent Police Complaints Commission report into Warboys, because it showed that still there persists, even among specialist police officers, insufficient sensitivity to the experience of the victim of rape and an insufficient determination to treat rape as a major violent crime that must be investigated. I hope that the Solicitor-General will ensure that that attitude leads to penalties for those who were responsible for that case and that such attitudes are driven out of the force.

I am really looking forward to the Stern report. Vivien Stern is an excellent woman and I am sure that she will do a good job. However, one thing that other hon. and right hon. Members have discussed—and it is true—is the importance of supporting rape victims to enable them to go through the court procedure to get a conviction. In that regard, independent sexual violence advisers are critical. I represent an area that has one of the 27 domestic violence courts, which make a real difference, but I have noticed a trend for the police to scoop up the money for ISVAs. I am anxious about that, because it is better to have an independent sexual violence adviser who is from the voluntary sector and separate from the police. I urge the Solicitor-General to

try to find mechanisms to stop this trend, which does not recognise the brilliance that the voluntary sector is capable of—the police can be brilliant in other ways—and which is often lacking in other sectors.

The brilliance of the voluntary sector is not sufficiently recognised in commissioning refuges. I am deeply concerned that some local authorities are putting out to tender refuge provision in their area, with contracts being won by big housing associations that offer a 9 to 5 answer, and a service in which men supervise women, but in which there are no mechanisms in place to ensure that the great vision of those women who created the refuge system is protected. I urge the Solicitor-General to speak to colleagues to ensure that the significant contribution of the voluntary sector, is properly protected, not just with words but by putting in place mechanisms that prevent such local authority stupid commissioning of services.

Finally, I should like to mention the case of *Rancheva*, recently decided by the European Court of Human Rights. She was a young woman who went from Russia to Cyprus on an artiste's visa to perform in what she believed was burlesque or something like that. She tried to leave the club within three days of arrival—it is clear that it was, in effect, a club for sexual exploitation—and days later she was found dead beneath the balcony of her flat. The judgment in that case included the following statement:

“The Court considers that the spectrum of safeguards set out in national legislation must be adequate to ensure the practical and effective protection of the rights of victims or potential victims of trafficking. Accordingly, in addition to criminal law measures”

directed at

“traffickers, article 4 requires member States to put in place adequate measures regulating businesses often used as a cover for human trafficking.”

The Solicitor-General mentioned voluntary efforts to reduce the number of advertisements in local newspapers. That court judgment gives our Government a responsibility to prevent the acceptance of such advertisements by law, because it says clearly:

“Article 4 requires member States to put in place adequate measures regulating businesses often used as a cover for human trafficking”.

There are no regulations preventing such advertisements, which are used as a cover for trafficking.

Lynne Featherstone: I am mystified, given the number of advertisements in the back of local papers that are clearly to do with trafficking, as to why the police do not follow up those telephone numbers, track them down and use them. Yes, such adverts should be banned, but the police say that they do not have the manpower to track those numbers down.

Fiona Mactaggart: In her speech, the hon. Lady mentioned the Metropolitan police trafficking unit. She is right to be concerned that that specialist expertise is due to be lost. In fact, as soon as this debate ends, along with other Members of Parliament from all parties, I will be speaking with Commander Cressida Dick of the Metropolitan police, trying to persuade her to reverse that decision. The reason why that decision is so important is connected to the reason why local police forces are not prosecuting in such cases: they do not really know how to and it is outwith their competence.

The inadequacy of policing this issue is a little bit like the inadequacy of police responding to rape victims in years gone by. Hon. Members may recall a television portrayal of Thames Valley police many years ago and how they treated a rape victim. The public were really shocked by how that victim was treated. As a Member of Parliament who represents Thames valley, I should say that that is not the usual experience. At that time, the police did not have the expertise and did not understand the extent to which this is a cover for massive organised crime.

Local police forces do not get it. I am anxious about the merging of the trafficking unit with the vice and clubs unit, which is more concerned, in my experience, with public order and less concerned with serious and organised crime, because it will mean that a resource that was beginning to educate police forces around the country about ways of tackling and policing this will be lost. I do not believe that this is merely a matter of Government funding, because the Government only ever offered the start-up funding for that unit. It is due to a combination of factors, including the Metropolitan police choosing not to be the national resource that we fund them to be. If the Metropolitan police refuse to act as a national resource to other police forces, why do Thames Valley police not get some of that money and do it? Why do Cleveland police, who have a better record than other police forces, although they are a tiny police force, get some money and do it? We should penalise the Metropolitan police for their inadequacy in this regard.

5.30 pm

The Solicitor-General: This has been a good debate, with some welcome and powerful contributions. I shall try to take on some of the issues that were raised, but I am happy to take interventions if that will help.

The hon. Member for Forest of Dean (Mr. Harper) referred to the need for sustainable funding. We have resolved to try to make the funding of the support sector for women who suffer violence compliant with the compact, and that is what we need to do. My hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge (Lynda Waltho) referred to people whose qualifications, experience and expertise was in supporting women, not in making bids for claims, although help is available for such claims, and money has gone into supporting bodies, such as Rape Crisis and the Survivors Trust, to capacity-build for that job. None the less, if people have come into an organisation intending that their role should be to support women, it is not second nature for them to make regular applications for funding.

In the past two years, the Government Equalities Office has provided emergency funding and, indeed, on both occasions had a sort of Government whip-round to make sure that rape crisis centres and other organisations did not close. It appreciated the need for better funding in the longer term, and has driven the agenda. The Alberti review of health, to which I shall turn in a moment because of comments about health sector services, will say quite a bit about commissioning. I am thinking particularly about services in SARCs and who should commission. For example, forensic medical officers are probably better coming from the core health service and being commissioned in that way. There is a bit of an analogy with the prison medical service moving over.

[*The Solicitor-General*]

I am not predicting that that is what Alberti will say, but at the moment, forensic medical examiners have a number of tasks, and it sounds as if they should be well qualified to deal with rape complainants, and many of them will be. However, they may arrive to examine a rape complainant in the middle of night, having certified dead a victim of a road traffic accident, then seeing someone who is coming out of heroin addiction to decide whether they are fit to be interviewed at a police station, then perhaps looking at the injuries of three people who have been in a fight in a pub to see how they are and writing that down. They may not have an opportunity to specialise, and may not be particularly sympathetic to everything to which we want them to be sympathetic.

Instead of having that random-ish model, there are seeds in the Department of Health for adding a qualification so that as doctors continue their education, they can obtain a qualification in dealing specifically with sexual offending. The intention is to move the agenda along to ensure that sympathy and expertise are offered to complainants not only at the outset, but when the cases continue to court so that top-class evidence can be given in court about the nature of injuries. I think that elements of sustainability will come from a number of quarters.

The hon. Member for Forest of Dean said that there is criticism of the fact that there is disproportionate emphasis on the criminal justice system. It is easy, looking back, to think that that is right, but it was critical to establish the fact that domestic violence is a crime, and that rape is a crime to be taken seriously, and to put the whole business of violence against women up front in the criminal justice system, because that was not there before. The criminal justice system sends out the message to delinquent men that such violence is a crime with which the authorities will deal, and that offenders will go to prison. It also counts numbers, so that we can see the nature and extent of the problem. Coupled with the British crime survey, it also shows the deficiencies in coverage. Women who have campaigned for 30 years have done a great job in putting it high on the criminal justice agenda. I do not regret one bit that that was our focus.

Funding must be sustained in the sector, but it is right to consider changing attitudes. We have the signals in place. We are saying that the state is against that violence. It is doing all that it can, and I shall come on to the ideas that have been mentioned on which we can press forward. My hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) is right in saying that there is still much to do. However, the state is making a clear statement, and when public attitudes are lagging behind, we must bring them with us. We must do a good job in personal, social and health education, which will be compulsory in schools. We have put stuff in there about domestic violence, how women can deal with unwanted sexual attention, how young men can read signals from young women, and whether they are implementing unwanted sexual attention. We must help with public opinion—and there is no doubt that we must move to prevention—but it is important to establish in the criminal justice system the fact that violence against women is wrong. I think that those were the major points made by the hon. Member for Forest of Dean.

I return to the early-day motion, which has three signatories from colleagues from London who are closely in touch with the domestic violence and rape crisis sectors in their areas and have received expressions of bitter disappointment at what the Mayor of London offered after his consultation. He invited me to go to it, and I did with some optimism, but it has not come forward with anything. The issue is not about measuring funding because of the recession; it has simply not come forward with what he promised. My hon. Friend the Member for Slough disclosed the fact that the Mayor masqueraded behind the suggestion that the police specialist unit was closing because of Home Office funding. He tried to blame the Government, when it is well known that he has a large influence—probably too much—that he should exercise in this case over the Metropolitan police to try to persuade them to take their responsibilities more seriously. He should also take his responsibilities in that regard more seriously. I am talking about a contender for the Tory party leadership, so we should take what he does seriously, and note his shortcomings in this area.

Mr. Pelling: I am grateful for the Minister's comments about the trafficking unit, because funding was guaranteed for only two years. Does she accept that the unit is important, and would it be possible to keep an open mind on whether additional resources might come from the Government to allow the project to continue?

The Solicitor-General: I am confident that my hon. Friend the Member for Slough will make powerful representations when she leaves the Chamber tonight. I am pleased that she will talk to Cressida Dick, who was a member of the Commission on Women and the Criminal Justice System when I chaired it, and who is very sympathetic to the issue of violence against women. That approach will be helpful.

The intention, as with all new areas of activity, was that core funding would be provided for a couple of years to put the matter into the middle business of policing. It should then be taken on part and parcel, and should not require supplementary funding from outside. The funding was intended to get it in there, but it remains a hot issue and I acknowledge that. We should, at the very least, keep an open mind on whether there is a danger of expertise being lost.

I am not as depressed as the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Lynne Featherstone)—I know that, because we had a quick word about this during the suspension for the Divisions—about moving responsibility to the vice squad. I understand that it deals much more with raiding clubs, public order, and so on, but it has an understanding of the nature of prostitution, and it deals with brothels, so it can understand the help that needs to be given to women who are imprisoned in that sort of work.

The hon. Lady talked about the need to get the man out in a domestic violence situation, and not to get the woman, the children, the dog and the cat out. I agree that “go” orders in the Crime and Security Bill will probably be immensely helpful in that regard, but the real point is the conceptual shift. Clearly, in the past there has been the notion that we must rescue the woman quickly and get her out. The man is there, he is a hazard and the police cannot stay there all the time as

he might come back. In a way, we have gone on with that cast of mind. Even without “go” orders—I am not saying that they are of no use, far from it—there are powers of arrest for common assault, which could be just a threat when someone is close enough to carry it out. People can now be arrested in almost all domestic violence situations if the policeman senses that it is a genuine case, as it frequently will be.

A person can be arrested, taken away and put on bail with the condition that they do not go back, or be remanded in custody if they do go back. In a way, the powers are already there, and however they fill the gaps that are perceived to exist in the current framework, the “go” orders certainly ought to influence that perspective. Let us swap things around and make it the norm for the police to think, “What do we do with him?” and not, “What do we do with her?” I agree with that completely.

There are also injunctions to remove the man and keep him away, and there are now restraining orders that can be put on to the back of criminal proceedings. As the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green knows, a restraining order is a sort of county court injunction in the criminal court, and it can be applied where there is a conviction for a criminal offence by a perpetrator of domestic violence. Furthermore, such an order could be applied in cases of acquittal should the judge perceive that there is a continuing risk to the woman on the balance of probabilities. We are not talking about locking people up under restraining orders if they are absolutely not guilty. However, if they are not guilty but the nature of the case leads the judge to feel satisfied that, on the balance of probabilities, there continues to be a threat even if someone has not been convicted of a crime, the judge would be entitled to place a restraining order on them, which could include keeping them out of the house.

That is not a new power, but it has only newly been enforced. It needs to be used and strongly advertised to the magistracy. It was very badly reported in the press. I recall an article in *The Observer* in which a journalist suggested that this was, as he put it, yet another example of the Government’s illiberality. Of course, that is not what it is. It is about making it simpler for women who need the protection of an ongoing injunction not to have to go to the county court and start completely fresh proceedings when they have spent the day in the magistrates court. Their witnesses and the policeman would not have to go twice either, and that is the purpose of the power. We must ensure that it is used.

The hon. Lady also discussed the fact that there is no recourse to public funds. She is aware of the pilot scheme. This is not the first pilot scheme—there was something called the last-resort fund run by Women’s Aid. Before I was a Minister, I pressed for that scheme from the then Minister at the Home Office. Somehow it did not quite click or work entirely correctly. I do not know where the fault lay, if indeed it could be allocated—that is between Woman’s Aid and the Home Office. However, the effect of that pilot was to speed up the process when women show signs of domestic violence, so as to get them an immigration status of their own. It was also about widening the ambit of evidence that the Home Office will accept for domestic violence so it was not only formal affidavits, but all sort of evidence from anywhere. That was helpful and I hope that this new pilot scheme—which has a better structure than the last

scheme—will show the importance of that funding and be carried on. It is being piloted mostly because the last scheme was not a great success. It needs to be tried out.

I cannot tell the hon. Lady how many people are ejected from refuges in each constituency because of cost. I suspect that what happens is that refuges take people on even when they cannot get benefits, and use their core funding. That is not so helpful and the figures may or may not help if I can get hold of them, although I will try to do that.

It was very good and a delight—if I can put it that way and not seek to categorise my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South (Mr. George) and the hon. Member for Ryedale (Mr. Greenway) as senior men with an enormous amount of experience—to see them supporting the agenda in such a powerful way. They forcefully brought to our attention the international dimension of violence against women, and I am glad that they appear to work together on that international agenda. As the hon. Member for Ryedale said, the Government are enthusiastic supporters of the convention against trafficking, and I was pleased to hear him praise the 2002 process, which I have just mentioned, to improve the position of immigrant women in this country.

I was pleased that my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South is proud of the services dealing with violence against women that are offered in his constituency, but sad that those in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge are less good. That is a problem. The popular mood is, probably rightly, for us to decentralise funding and have indicators as to how the money should be spent in local authorities. However, we then get the great disparities pointed to by my right hon. Friend the Member for Walsall, South and my hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge. We must look at more sustainability for funding those organisations.

The “Map of Gaps” to which my right hon. Friend referred by End Violence Against Women is a fine piece of work. The Equality and Human Rights Commission will use the gender equality duty to take proceedings against those local authorities that do not provide appropriate services. Trevor Phillips has written to those local authorities that are failing, and I have written to the MPs who represent them, asking them to go in and speak to those local authorities and tell them that they have to do more. The idea behind the “Map of Gaps” has been taken up as heartily as we could wish.

Mr. Bruce George: Will the Minister tell us how many letters she wrote?

The Solicitor-General: What happened is that the commission wrote and said, “You’re accused”, as it were. A number of authorities wrote back and said, “No, we share services—that address is not in Walsall or whatever. You are wrong”. We ended up with 18 local authorities, I think, and I have written to all of them.

Fiona Mactaggart: The point is that we have local authorities piggy-backing on neighbouring local authorities. East Berkshire Women’s Aid is well funded by Slough borough council, but appallingly funded by South Buckinghamshire council, Maidenhead and others. The Minister should look behind the excuses.

The Solicitor-General: Of course, End Violence Against Women will do another “Map of Gaps”. If we have been conned by local authorities that are doing that kind of stuff, it will look at the map again. Every time the map is published, a body of knowledge is built up that can be used next time round.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stourbridge makes a strong set of sterling points. She suggests further steps for us take and asks me what we will do. We will take on as much of the content of the debate as we can. As I say, we are at a stage at which the violence against women strategy has drawn in cross-governmental involvement that is more wide-reaching than we have ever managed before. It is time for us to up the whole thing a gear.

The hon. Member for Croydon, Central (Mr. Pelling) painted a compelling picture. He obviously has a good understanding of the ever-present nature of domestic violence. He was also keen on the “go” orders and is as glad as I am that the family justice system will be looked at. I was pleased to hear him welcome our intended further restriction on newspaper advertising for prostitutes. The law in Ireland seems capable of being transferred across, although there is probably more to add, as it does not cover the internet and we would want it to do that. A well-known website called “punternet” has been mentioned, where not only are prostitutes offered for sale, but there are comments about how they have performed. We want to close that down as quickly as we possibly can.

My hon. Friend the Member for Slough is a doughty campaigner. It was very good to see that she got an Emma Humphreys prize this year. Emma Humphreys

was a client of mine on appeal. She killed her violent partner who was a pimp and who had pimped her when she was 16 years old. When she was 17, she went to prison for life for murder. Ten years later, we managed to get her released as a manslaughter case, using a number of defences that I will not set out here. She died about a year after she came out of custody, still only 28. She has contributed, through that defence, to many developments in domestic violence legislation. The Policing and Crime Act 2009, which has just come into force, has in it many elements of the case that she gave rise to, so my hon. Friend was greatly honoured—and rightly honoured—to receive that award.

I shall end as quickly as I can, in about half a minute, by saying that work with the third sector is our hallmark. However, we must do more. We have a formal stakeholder group around the inter-ministerial group on trafficking. Perhaps we should do the same with rape and domestic violence. Let me say with my very last words that rape is a serial offence. Let us all please keep saying that. That is the single most important conceptual shift that has started to emerge this year. It can have the effect both of helping juries and courts to understand the nature of what is going on before them and of encouraging women to continue to report. I am most grateful for all the contributions made today, all of which we will try to take forward.

Question put and agreed to.

5.50 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 21 January 2010

DEFENCE

Afghanistan Roulement

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Bob Ainsworth):

In his statement to the House on 30 November 2009, *Official Report*, column 835, the Prime Minister announced the UK's conventional military forces in Afghanistan comprise 9,500 personnel. That will be maintained with the next roulement of UK forces in Afghanistan, due to take place in April 2010. Headquarters, 6 (UK) Division will remain as Headquarters, Regional Command (South) but the current lead formation in Helmand, 11 (Light) Brigade, will be replaced by 4th Mechanized Brigade, which will command the majority of the units serving in Afghanistan. The forces deploying include:

Headquarters, 6 (UK) Division
 4th Mechanised Brigade Headquarters and Signal Squadron (204)
 Elements of 52 Infantry Brigade Headquarters and Signal Squadron (258)
 Headquarters, 101 Logistic Brigade
 Headquarters, 102 Logistic Brigade
 Elements of 845 Naval Air Squadron
 Elements of 846 Naval Air Squadron
 Elements of 857 Naval Air Squadron
 40 Commando Royal Marines
 The Royal Dragoon Guards
 The Queen's Royal Lancers
 4th Regiment Royal Artillery
 21 Engineer Regiment
 1st Battalion The Scots Guards
 The Royal Scots Borderers, 1st Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland
 1st Battalion The Duke of Lancaster's Regiment
 1st Battalion The Mercian Regiment
 1st Battalion The Royal Gurkha Rifles
 3 Medical Regiment
 34 Field Hospital
 1 Close Support Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
 101 Force Support Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
 Elements of 3rd Regiment Royal Horse Artillery
 Elements of 5th Regiment Royal Artillery
 Elements of 16th Regiment Royal Artillery
 Elements of 32nd Regiment Royal Artillery
 Elements of 39th Regiment Royal Artillery
 Elements of 47th Regiment Royal Artillery
 Elements of 33 Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal)
 Elements of 39 Engineer Regiment (Air Support)
 Elements of 42 Engineer Regiment (Geographic)

Elements of 170 (Infrastructure Support) Engineer Group
 Elements of 2 Signal Regiment
 Elements of 10th Signal Regiment
 Elements of 14th Signals Regiment (Electronic Warfare)
 Elements of 16 Signal Regiment
 Elements of 21st Signal Regiment (Air Support)
 Elements of 5th Battalion The Rifles
 Elements of 1 Regiment, Army Air Corps
 Elements of 4 Regiment, Army Air Corps
 Elements of 9 Regiment, Army Air Corps
 Elements of 6 Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 Elements of 7 Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 Elements of 8 Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 Elements of 11 Explosive Ordnance Disposal Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 Elements of 12 Logistic Support Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 Elements of 17 Port and Maritime Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 Elements of 23 Pioneer Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 Elements of 24 Postal Courier and Movement Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 Elements of 27 Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 Elements of 29 Postal Courier and Movement Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps
 Elements of 5th Regiment Royal Military Police
 101 Provost Company Royal Military Police
 150 Provost Company Royal Military Police
 Elements of 105 Military Working Dog Support Unit
 Elements of 1 Military Intelligence Brigade
 Elements of the Military Stabilisation Support Group
 Elements of The Honourable Artillery Company
 Elements of 100 Regiment Royal Artillery (Volunteers)
 Elements of 101 Regiment Royal Artillery (Volunteers)
 Elements of 104 Regiment Royal Artillery (Volunteers)
 Elements of 106 Regiment Royal Artillery (Volunteers)
 Elements of 101 Engineer Regiment (Explosive Ordnance Disposal) (Volunteers)
 Elements of 6th Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland (Volunteers)
 Elements of 4th Battalion The Duke Of Lancaster's Regiment (King's, Lancashire and Border) (Volunteers)
 Elements of The London Regiment (Volunteers)
 Elements of 150 Transport Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps (Volunteers)
 Elements of 159 Supply Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps (Volunteers)
 Elements of 160 Transport Regiment, The Royal Logistic Corps (Volunteers)
 Elements of 148 Expeditionary Force Institute Squadron (Volunteers), The Royal Logistic Corps
 Number 1 Royal Air Force, Force Protection Wing Headquarters
 Number 3 Royal Air Force, Force Protection Wing Headquarters
 Number 4 Royal Air Force, Force Protection Wing Headquarters
 Number 5 Royal Air Force, Force Protection Wing Headquarters
 Elements of Number 2 Royal Air Force Police Wing
 Elements of Number 3 Royal Air Force Police Wing
 2 Squadron, Royal Air Force Regiment
 51 Squadron, Royal Air Force Regiment
 Elements of 1 Squadron, Royal Air Force Regiment
 Elements of 3 Squadron, Royal Air Force Regiment
 2 Squadron, Royal Air Force

9 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 13 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 14 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 5 (Army Co-Operation) Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 18 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 24 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 27 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 28 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 30 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 78 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of the Tactical Supply Wing, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 1 Air Mobility Wing, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 1 Air Control Centre, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 90 Signals Unit, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 2 (Mechanical Transport) Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 5001 Squadron, Royal Air Force
 Elements of 3 Mobile Catering Squadron
 Elements of Tactical Medical Wing
 Elements of 1 (Expeditionary Logistics) Squadron
 Elements of 93 (Expeditionary Armaments) Squadron
 Elements of Tactical Imagery Wing

Volunteer and regular members of the reserve forces will continue to deploy to Afghanistan as part of our integrated force package, and we expect to issue around 700 call-out notices to fill some 600 posts. On completion of their mobilisation procedures, the reservists will undertake a period of training and, where applicable, integration with their respective receiving units. The majority will serve on operations for six or so months. As part of this commitment, we expect up to 17 members of the sponsored reserves to be in theatre at any one time.

I shall make a further statement on the units we expect to serve under 4th Mechanized Brigade's planned replacement formation, 16 Air Assault Brigade, nearer the time of their deployment.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture Council

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Hilary Benn): The Minister responsible for marine and the natural environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Ogmore (Huw Irranca-Davies) and the Minister responsible for food, farming and environment, my hon. Friend the Member for Poplar and Canning Town (Jim Fitzpatrick) represented the United Kingdom at the Agriculture and Fisheries Council in Brussels on 20 November. Richard Lochhead MSP and Michelle Gildernew MLA also attended. Due to the European Council, Agriculture and Fisheries Council was shortened to one day, with the majority of agriculture business now being taken in December.

On agriculture, the Council approved Poland's state aid application enabling farmers to purchase agricultural land. The UK, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Estonia, Spain, Netherlands, Austria, Germany all abstained, agreeing with the Commission that the application was not justified, and on the overriding of state aid rules, but stopped

short of blocking the application. Latvia and Hungary would now bring similar applications for approval at the December Agriculture Council.

There was a brief discussion to clarify member states' voting intentions with regard to the authorisation of GM maize for use in the EU. There was no qualified majority in favour of the authorisation and the proposal will now revert to Commission competence and be adopted.

A number of issues were raised under any other agriculture business. Belgium and France requested that export refunds for the fresh and frozen pigmeat be reactivated. Only the UK and Malta expressed dissatisfaction with the use of such market management measures. The Commission sympathised with the request but also did not agree with reactivating export refunds.

France outlined its support for the Commission's forthcoming Green Paper on forest protection, emphasising the importance of taking a holistic approach—covering everything from the benefits that forests bring in respect of climate change to forest-based industries. A number of member states supported, including the UK, emphasising the importance of the EU forest action plan and a member state led-approach. The Commission agreed.

France requested more details about the parameters within which the Commission intended to prepare for and conduct the forthcoming WTO ministerial conference. The Commission emphasised that these were regular events, and that trade colleagues within the Council were informed of the Commission's approach.

Hungary, supported by the Czech Republic and Slovakia, presented a paper seeking to resurrect a proposal, previously rejected through comitology, that sheep and goats going direct to slaughter on intra-Community trade do not have to be electronically identified. The UK also intervened to sympathise, and while making it clear that it would not go back on its agreement not to seek further changes, urged the Commission to thoroughly review implementation of the regulation at the earliest opportunity.

With regard to fisheries, and the technical conservation measures regulation, Council reached political agreement (with the UK and Ireland voting against) on an interim compromise for 18 months only of the current annual provisions governing mesh sizes, gear types and catch composition, having failed to agree the main framework proposal. This was in the context of the impending entry into force of the Lisbon treaty which would require co-decision with the European Parliament on this aspect of fisheries. An absence of any decision would have left a legal gap on such technical measures from 1 January 2010 given current measures are in the annual fishing opportunities regulation which will remain as a Council only decision.

The UK and Ireland worked very hard in bilaterals with the presidency and the Commission to find an acceptable solution. The Commission was inflexible, claiming that the relaxation of the relevant catch composition measures would be detrimental to haddock stocks. The UK asserted that this had no effect on fishing mortality and merely led to increased discarding. Regrettably, the presidency was not able to accept UK and Irish requests and a final compromise was agreed with no concessions offered. Agreement was reached by qualified majority, with the final formal adoption by written procedure by 30 November.

The Commission then updated the Council on the progress of the annual fisheries negotiations with Norway. They explained that the negotiations were particularly difficult this year after the Community's decision not to allow Norway to access mackerel in the North sea. It is therefore possible that the negotiations will carry on into 2010 or even fail completely with the danger of a precipitate rush to fish quotas and no access to each other's waters. The UK underlined the need for a balanced outcome on mackerel and the need for progress on the Danish discards initiative.

Next, the proposal fixing the 2010 total allowable catches (TACs) and quotas for the Black sea was agreed. The TAC for turbot was increased to 96 tonnes from the 76 proposed by the Commission (a 4 per cent. reduction, not 24 per cent.) on condition that Bulgaria and Romania developed by 15 February 2010 national plans to control the turbot fisheries and landings. The Commission also announced that it would speak to Turkey about its introducing similar measures for turbot.

Finally, there were two issues raised under any other fisheries business. The Commission had tabled a seven page statement outlining their plans to combat seabird by-catch. The UK underlined the importance, calling for the Commission to publish a formal action plan as this would give a chance for a full consultation with stakeholders including the European Parliament.

Italy called for the cut in bluefin tuna quota agreed at the recent International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tuna (ICCAT) meeting to be phased in by 15 per cent. per year.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

General Affairs Council and Foreign Affairs Council

The Minister for Europe (Chris Bryant): The General Affairs Council (GAC) and Foreign Affairs Council (FAC) have replaced the General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC) under the provisions of the Lisbon treaty, which came into force on 1 December 2009. The GAC and FAC will be held on 25 January in Brussels. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary and I will represent the UK.

The agenda items are as follows:

GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Spanish presidency programme

The Spanish presidency will present its programme and priorities. Supporting Europe's economic recovery, in particular through developing the new EU strategy for jobs and growth (EU 2020), will be a high priority for Spain. The presidency will also focus on the international stage, with a number of full EU summits, and preparation for the UN millennium development goals summit in September. We look to Spain to provide continued EU leadership on climate change and implementing the Copenhagen accord. Finally, Spain will focus on the rights of EU citizens by implementing the Stockholm programme on Justice and Home Affairs and continue work on implementing the Lisbon treaty.

We look forward to working with our Spanish colleagues on such a broad agenda and welcome in particular Spain's focus on economic recovery with a low carbon, social agenda at its core. The EU 2020 strategy will be

vital to improving Europe's global competitiveness and we will work to ensure the strategy is ambitious and innovative.

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Iran

Ministers will discuss recent developments on the nuclear dossier. Ministers may consider the way forward in the context of the dual track policy, in order to persuade Iran to enter into meaningful negotiations. They will also continue to play close attention to the human rights situation inside Iran.

Bosnia and Herzegovina

Ministers are likely to consider further the future of EUFOR operation Althea, following a decision at the December FAC to revert to this issue in January. The Government believe that EUFOR makes a vital contribution to stability and security in BiH and should therefore only be reconfigured when the time is right. Ministers will also discuss the broader political situation in BiH. The Government will underline the importance of giving strong support to the High Representative/EU Special Representative in BiH. The Government continue to support the EU/US initiative and to believe that the conditionality set by the Peace Implementation Council must be met before the Office of the High Representative can close.

Somalia

Ministers will discuss a possible CSDP mission to train security forces in Somalia, and may also consider whether to agree to the legal basis for this mission.

Afghanistan/Pakistan

Discussion is likely to focus on the London conference on 28 January and on how to strengthen the EU's engagement in Afghanistan and Pakistan in 2010. This might include restructuring the architecture of the EU contribution in Afghanistan, pushing forward the implementation of the EU action plan for Afghanistan and Pakistan, agreed at the October European Council, and cementing plans for a second EU-Pakistan summit, to be held during the Spanish presidency.

Yemen

Ministers will discuss the situation in Yemen. In particular they may focus on how to build on the EU's response to date, following on from conclusions at the October GAERC, including the need for urgent political and economic reform to address Yemen's challenges. The UK will also brief on plans for the meeting on Yemen in London on 27 January.

Ukraine

Ministers may discuss the latest developments, including the first round of the presidential elections held on 17 January. We welcome the fact that the elections have taken place under calm conditions and will continue to urge the contenders in the second round to rely on the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) to ensure as trouble-free and conclusive an election as possible. We believe that whoever wins the elections will pursue Ukraine's progress towards European integration. Their challenge will be to make Ukraine's governance work better, which would help European integration proceed more smoothly.

PRIME MINISTER

Appointment of a Surveillance Commissioner

The Prime Minister (Mr. Gordon Brown): In accordance with section 91 of the Police Act 1997, I have agreed to appoint the hon. Sir George Newman as a Surveillance Commissioner from 1 January 2010 to 31 December 2012. He succeeds the right hon. Sir Philip Otton in this role.

TRANSPORT

Rail Franchises

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Chris Mole): My right hon. and noble Friend the Secretary of State for Transport, Lord Adonis has made the following ministerial statement:

I am today launching public consultations for the new InterCity East Coast, Greater Anglia, and Essex Thameside franchises. The formal accreditation process for bidders for Greater Anglia and Essex Thameside also starts today.

Our overall aim for the new franchises is to continue the existing operations and make improvements based on emerging value for money and affordability requirements.

The InterCity East Coast franchise will build on the new east coast main line timetable that is being introduced in May 2011 to take advantage of planned infrastructure enhancements to enable extra trains to run, to accelerate journey times and to introduce a standard interval clockface timetable. Further major service improvements are proposed from 2016 when super express trains will be introduced, providing more capacity, more frequent trains and shorter journey times. Franchisees will also be asked for proposals to improve the overall passenger experience, including better stations, improved catering and simpler ticketing.

Passengers on the Greater Anglia franchise are set to benefit from longer trains, enhancements at stations, more security and other service improvements. The new franchise operator will have to consider quicker journey times between Norwich and London,

improving the performance and reliability of long distance services and introducing minimum catering standards on InterCity trains. They will also set national passenger survey targets for trains, stations and customer service with a requirement to invest more to make improvements in those areas if they fail to meet those targets.

Passengers on the Essex Thameside franchise will benefit from longer trains and better security. The new operator will be expected to provide better service information for passengers and improved facilities at stations, including more secure cycle spaces and additional car parking facilities. They will also be required to monitor service quality and ensure stations and trains are cleaned and maintained to a high standard.

The new Greater Anglia franchise will begin operation on Friday 1 April 2011, Essex Thameside on Sunday 29 May 2011 and InterCity East Coast in autumn 2011. All three franchises are proposed to last for a franchise term of at least 10 years with provisions made to allow the termination of the contracts earlier if the franchise fails to deliver good quality service to passengers. The franchise length may also be extended dependent on proposals to deliver investment and significant passenger benefit. Any such proposals would have to offer good value for money to the taxpayer.

The consultation documents set out the main challenges that the new franchises will face and highlights the key requirements that the Department currently proposes to include within each invitation to tender (ITT). They set out proposals to increase peak capacity and improve security, access to stations and overall service quality.

Responses to the consultations will inform the development of the invitation to tender that bidders for each franchise will be asked to bid against. We expect to publish the ITT for both Greater Anglia and Essex Thameside in summer 2010 and will award these franchises in late 2010 and early 2011. The ITT for InterCity East Coast will be published in autumn 2010. The franchise will be awarded in summer 2011.

Over the coming weeks the Department will be having extensive discussions with local interested stakeholders, via a series of stakeholder meetings.

All three consultations will run until the 19 April 2010. Copies of the consultation documents, as well as the recently published discussion paper on general franchise policy have been placed in the House Library and are available on the Department for Transport website.

Petitions

Thursday 21 January 2010

PRESENTED PETITION

Petition presented to the House but not read on the Floor

Badman Report (Totnes)

The Petition of persons resident in the Totnes parliamentary constituency and others,

Declares that they are concerned about the recommendations of the Badman Report, which suggests closer monitoring of home educators, including a compulsory annual registration scheme and right of access to people's homes for local authority officials; further declares that the Petitioners believe the recommendations are based on a review that was extremely rushed, failed to give due consideration to the evidence, failed to ensure that the data it collected were sufficiently robust, and failed to take proper account of the existing legislative framework.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families either not to bring forward, or to withdraw, proposed legislative measures providing for tighter registration and monitoring of children educated at home in the absence of a thorough independent inquiry into the condition and future of elective home education in England; but instead to take the steps necessary to ensure that the existing Elective Home Education Guidelines for Local Authorities are properly implemented, learning from current best practice, in all local authorities in England.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[*Presented by Mr. Anthony Steen.*]

[P000689]

OBSERVATIONS

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Dr Ghassemlou

The Petition of member of the Kurdistan Democratic Party in the UK and others,

Declares that 20 after their deaths the case of Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, the General-Secretary of the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan, Abdullah Ghaderi-Azar and Fadhil Rassoul has never been resolved, notes that they travelled to Vienna, on 13 July 1989 to negotiate a peaceful solution and obtain political rights for the Kurdish nation, with the appointed Iranian representatives, but that all three were killed during the meeting

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urge the Government to encourage the EU to press the Government of Austria to allow an independent judicial enquiry into these deaths and to secure a just and true resolution to this case.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[*Presented by Bob Spink, Official Report, 15 December 2009; Vol. 502, c. 836.*]

[P000648]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs:

We share the Petitioner's concern over the deaths of Abdul Rahman Ghassemlou, Abdullah Ghaderi-Azar and Fadhil Rassoul in Vienna in 1989. We understand that, following an investigation by the Austrian authorities, arrest warrants were issued for three suspects in July 1989. Unfortunately no arrests have been made, but the case remains open and the warrants are still valid.

We hope that those responsible will be brought to justice and that the families and friends of the victims will be able to gain a resolution to this long standing issue.

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 21 January 2010

TRANSPORT

Aircraft

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what information his Department holds on the average weight of aeroplanes departing from UK airports in each of the last five years. [312502]

Paul Clark: The Department for Transport does not hold this information.

Departmental Internet

Grant Shapps: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport which websites his Department's staff are prevented from accessing from departmental networked computers. [311841]

Chris Mole: The Department for Transport has an acceptable use policy that restricts unsuitable websites. It is not practical to list all individual blocked websites due to the numbers involved, but the main categories blocked by the Department and its agencies are as follows:

- Adult or sexually explicit (including pornography, nudity and intimate apparel)
- Crime and violence (including weapons, hate crime, historical revisionism and profanity)
- Drugs, alcohol and tobacco
- Gambling
- Personal (including dating, social networking, chat, messaging, lifestyle and auctions)
- Remote proxies
- Entertainment/culture (including internet TV/radio, streaming media and media downloads/sharing).

<i>Performance year</i>	<i>Number of staff</i>	<i>Total number of awards</i>	<i>Value of non-consolidated performance payments (£)</i>	<i>Wages and salaries for the year (£)</i>	<i>Non-consolidated performance payments as percentage of wages and salaries</i>
2003-04	10,338	4,814	2,020,828	358,466,000	0.56
2004-05	11,151	5,537	1,881,308	358,165,000	0.53
2005-06	19,239	13,682	8,212,780	439,645,000	1.87
2006-07	19,262	14,906	9,820,319	496,044,000	1.98
2007-08	18,598	13,472	10,285,859	517,884,000	1.99
2008-09	19,451	13,192	11,797,001	535,555,000	2.20

Grant Shapps: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how many (a) year-end and (b) in-year bonuses were paid to officials in his Department in each of the last three years; and how much was paid in such bonuses in each such year. [307102]

Chris Mole: I refer the hon. Member to my answer given today to the hon. Member for Ilford, North

Departmental Pay

Dr. Cable: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how many staff in his Department received bonus payments in 2008-09; what proportion of the total workforce they represented; what the total amount of bonuses paid was; what the largest single payment was; and if he will make a statement. [300566]

Chris Mole: I refer the hon. Member to my answer given today to the hon. Member for Ilford, North (Mr. Scott), which shows how many staff received a non-consolidated variable pay award, what proportion of the total work force they represented and what the total amount of non-consolidated variable payments was.

The largest single non-consolidated variable payment was £15,000.

Mr. Scott: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how much has been paid in bonuses to civil servants in his Department in each year since 2003. [306462]

Chris Mole: An element of the Department for Transport's overall pay award is allocated to non-consolidated variable pay related to performance. These payments are used to drive high performance and form part of the pay award for members of staff who demonstrate exceptional performance, for example by exceeding targets set or meeting challenging objectives.

Non-consolidated variable pay awards are funded from within existing pay bill controls, and have to be re-earned each year against pre-determined targets and, as such, do not add to future pay bill costs. The percentage of the pay bill set aside for performance-related awards for the SCS is based on recommendations from the independent Senior Salaries Review Body.

The following table details how many people were eligible for and received a non-consolidated variable pay award, awarded under the Department for Transport's standard pay and performance management process for the last six performance years. It also details the wages and salaries as published in the departmental resource accounts.

(Mr. Scott), which shows how many non-consolidated variable pay awards were paid, and what the total amount of non-consolidated variable payments was for the last three years.

Driving Offences: Chelmsford

Mr. Burns: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what recent estimate he has made of the

number of 17 to 21 year olds using motor vehicles on the road network without insurance in (a) West Chelmsford constituency and (b) Chelmsford local authority area. [312479]

Paul Clark: No information is held on uninsured driving on a constituency or local authority area basis.

First Capital Connect: Franchises

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what the earliest date is on which the First Capital Connect franchise can be terminated, assuming no exceptional intervention powers are invoked by his Department. [312500]

Chris Mole: The First Capital Connect franchise can run until 31 March 2015. The Secretary of State may exercise an option to serve notice on First Capital Connect for the franchise to end at a notified date between 31 March 2012 and 31 March 2015. The franchise also contains provisions where the Secretary of State may terminate the franchise for an event of default.

Independent Penalty Fares Appeals Service

Sir John Stanley: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport if he will take steps to (a) cease allowing the Independent Penalty Fares Appeals Service (IPFAS) to be a subsidiary business of Southeastern and (b) make IPFAS wholly independent of the train operating companies. [311940]

Chris Mole: There are no proposals to alter the status of the Independent Penalty Fares Appeals Service. Its accounts and management are wholly separate to Southeastern. There are two penalty fares appeal bodies. Their revenue is not dependent on success or failure of appeals. Each body is paid a specified amount for appeals, regardless of the outcome. Appeals are regularly successful.

National Air Traffic Services

Paul Rowen: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport whether his Department plans to sell off Government shares in National Air Traffic Services; and if he will make a statement. [312474]

Paul Clark: On 8 December the Government published the Operational Efficiency Programme: Asset Portfolio.

The portfolio includes a section on NATS which notes that in light of the impending expiry of the restrictions on the transfer of shares for NATS, it is appropriate for Government to engage with other shareholders who are likely to consider the shareholding options available to them.

No decision has been made by Government with regards to reducing their shareholding. Any options considered would be required to best meet the needs of the Company and its workforce, as well as shareholders.

Official Cars

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport with reference to the written ministerial statement of 16 July 2009, *Official Report*, column 79WS, on the cost of ministerial cars for 2008-09, how many cars there were in 1996-97 for (a) Ministers and (b) senior civil servants; and what the annual cost was of providing the service. [312463]

Paul Clark: The Government Car and Despatch Agency was formed in April 1997. Information before that date is not available and could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Road Traffic

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how many journeys and what percentage of miles were made by each type of vehicle on (a) motorways and (b) dual carriageways in the UK in each of the last three years. [312493]

Paul Clark: The Department for Transport does not hold data on the number of journeys made each year by type of vehicle on motorways or dual carriageways.

Traffic data on dual carriageways are not available for Northern Ireland. However, the percentage of miles driven by type of vehicle in Great Britain on motorways and dual carriageways in 2006, 2007 and 2008 is shown in the following table.

	<i>Cars and taxis</i>	<i>Motorcycles</i>	<i>Buses and coaches</i>	<i>Light vans</i>	<i>Goods vehicles</i>	<i>Pedal cycles</i>	<i>Percentage All vehicles</i>
<i>2006</i>							
Motorways	14.5	0.1	0.1	2.4	2.4	0.0	19.4
Dual carriageways	14.4	0.2	0.1	2.2	1.3	—	18.2
All other roads	49.7	0.8	0.8	8.2	2.0	0.9	62.4
All roads	78.6	1.0	1.1	12.7	5.7	0.9	100.0
<i>2007</i>							
Motorways	14.5	0.1	0.1	2.4	2.4	0.0	19.4
Dual carriageways	14.1	0.2	0.1	2.3	1.3	—	18.0
All other roads	49.6	0.8	0.9	8.5	2.0	0.8	62.6
All roads	78.1	1.1	1.1	13.2	5.7	0.8	100.0
<i>2008</i>							
Motorways	14.6	0.1	0.1	2.4	2.4	0.0	19.5

							Percentage
	<i>Cars and taxis</i>	<i>Motorcycles</i>	<i>Buses and coaches</i>	<i>Light vans</i>	<i>Goods vehicles</i>	<i>Pedal cycles</i>	<i>All vehicles</i>
Dual carriageways	14.2	0.1	0.1	2.3	1.3	—	18.0
All other roads	49.5	0.8	0.8	8.6	2.0	0.9	62.5
All roads	78.2	1.0	1.0	13.3	5.6	0.9	100.0

'—' = Negligible (less than half the final digit shown)

Source:

National Road Traffic Survey, DFT.

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what estimate he has made of the (a) percentage of UK-registered and (b) number of foreign-registered vehicles of each type which have used (i) motorways and (ii) dual carriageways in the last year. [312503]

Paul Clark: The Department for Transport does not hold data on either the percentage of vehicles that have used motorways or dual carriageways, or the number of foreign registered vehicles that have used motorways or dual carriageways.

Roads: Accidents

Chris Ruane: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how many and what proportion of drivers in each five-year age cohort were involved in a road traffic accident causing (a) death and (b) serious injury in each of the last three years for which figures are readily available. [311727]

Paul Clark: The information requested is shown in the following tables.

Drivers¹ involved in (a) fatal and (b) serious² reported road accidents by age group: GB 2006-08

<i>Age of driver</i>	<i>Fatal accidents</i>			<i>Serious accidents</i>			<i>Number of drivers</i>
	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	
Under 17	14	8	7	66	41	50	
17-19	363	331	268	2,566	2,382	2,178	
20-24	562	483	384	3,826	3,813	3,497	
25-29	440	371	367	3,363	3,121	3,006	
30-34	368	351	300	3,072	2,917	2,587	
35-39	406	394	310	3,448	3,103	2,862	
40-44	414	394	324	3,266	3,011	2,868	
45-49	351	347	321	2,505	2,500	2,407	
50-54	269	307	238	1,980	2,040	1,887	
55-59	304	258	172	1,844	1,738	1,591	
60-64	212	191	180	1,335	1,381	1,380	
65-69	111	117	103	816	782	763	
70-74	86	85	77	644	573	605	
75-79	63	69	78	451	479	450	
80-84	55	43	55	299	319	327	
85-89	35	38	20	148	139	169	
90-94	2	6	9	18	23	23	
95+	2	1	1	1	2	3	

¹ Car, goods vehicle, bus and coach drivers.

² Accidents in which at least one person was seriously injured but no person was killed.

Drivers¹ involved in (a) fatal and (b) serious² reported road accidents per 100,000 driving licence holders³ by age group: GB 2006-08

<i>Age of Driver</i>	<i>Fatal accidents</i>			<i>Rate per 100,000 driving licence holders</i>		
	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>	<i>2006</i>	<i>2007</i>	<i>2008</i>
17-19	24	20	17	167	146	137
20-24	19	16	12	126	123	110
25-29	14	12	11	107	99	92
30-34	11	11	9	89	88	79
35-39	10	10	8	87	80	74
40-49	10	10	8	76	72	68
50-59	9	9	7	61	61	56
60+	7	7	6	47	45	42

¹ Car, goods vehicle, bus and coach drivers.

² Accidents in which at least one person was seriously injured but no person was killed.

³ Full and provisional driving licences.

Source:

National Travel Survey

It is not possible to identify if the same driver was involved in more than one accident so there may be some double counting in the number of drivers involved in accidents. This does not take into account people that drive without a licence, driving licence holders that do not drive or those under 17 years of age.

Due to the small sample size used in the National Travel Survey some age groups are shown in age bands larger than five years in the second table.

Chris Ruane: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how many (a) adults and (b) children who were (i) killed and (ii) seriously injured in road accidents involving drivers who were under the influence of (A) drink, (B) drugs and (C) both drink and drugs in each of the last three years. [311866]

Paul Clark: The estimated number of (a) adults and (b) children who were (i) killed and (ii) seriously injured in reported drink drive accidents in each of the last three years with data available is shown in the following table:

Estimated¹ (i) killed and (ii) seriously injured drink drive casualties: GB 2005-07

	2005	2006	2007
(i) Killed			
(a) Adult ²	550	550	410
(b) Child ³	10	10	0
All ages ⁴	550	560	410
(ii) Seriously injured			
(a) Adult ²	1,950	1,860	1,700
(b) Child ³	90	70	70
All ages ⁴	2,090	1,970	1,760

¹Estimates are based on breath test and coroners' data. They are rounded to the nearest 10 so columns may not add up to their total.

²Aged 16+ years.

³Aged 0-15 years.

⁴Includes cases where age was not recorded.

The number of (a) adults and (b) children who were (i) killed and (ii) seriously injured in road accidents where "driver impaired by drugs (illicit or medicinal)" was reported as a contributory factor in each of the last three years with data available, and the number where a driver also had "impaired by alcohol" reported as a contributory factor, are shown in the following table:

Reported (a) adult and (b) child road casualties who were (i) killed and (ii) seriously injured in road accidents where "impaired by drugs (illicit or medicinal)" and "impaired by alcohol" were reported as contributory factors¹: GB 2006-08

Contributory factor	Year of accident		
	2006	2007	2008
<i>Impaired by drugs (illicit or medicinal)</i>			
(i) Killed			
(a) Adult ²	62	70	57
(b) Child ³	2	1	3
All ages ⁴	64	71	60
(ii) Seriously injured			
(a) Adult ²	246	247	265
(b) Child ³	9	13	11
All ages ⁴	262	261	280

Reported (a) adult and (b) child road casualties who were (i) killed and (ii) seriously injured in road accidents where "impaired by drugs (illicit or medicinal)" and "impaired by alcohol" were reported as contributory factors¹: GB 2006-08

Contributory factor	Year of accident		
	2006	2007	2008
<i>Driver "impaired by drugs (illicit or medicinal)" and "impaired by alcohol"</i>			
(i) Killed			
(a) Adult ²	27	34	27
(b) Child ³	0	0	2
All ages ⁴	27	34	29
(ii) Seriously injured			
(a) Adult ²	94	121	121
(b) Child ³	2	7	9
All ages ⁴	99	129	132

¹ Only includes accidents where a police officer attended the scene and reported a contributory factor.

² Aged 16+ years.

³ Aged 0-15 years.

⁴ Includes cases where age was not recorded.

Contributory factors reflect the police officer's opinion at the time of reporting, and where some factors may have contributed to the cause of an accident it may be difficult for a police officer attending the scene after the accident to identify them, so these factors may be under-reported. Not all reported road accidents are included in the contributory factor analysis, only those where a police officer attended the scene and at least one contributory factor was reported.

Rolling Stock: Procurement

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport pursuant to the answer of 6 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 336W, on rolling stock, how many vehicles were offered to the Department where the purchase option was not pursued and the vehicles were subsequently exported. [311166]

Chris Mole: Although sale of the vehicles is a matter for the rolling stock leasing companies I am aware that:

HSBC Rail (UK) Limited exported 77 Mark 2 vehicles (11 in 2006, 26 in 2007 and 40 in 2008). These vehicles were built by British Rail in the early 1970s, were around 30 years old when taken out of traffic and replaced by new Voyager and Pendolino trains from 2000, and were around 35 years old when offered to the Department.

Porterbrook sold 26 Class 87 locomotives to a UK company who subsequently sold them to Bulgaria, these locomotives also date from the early 1970s, were replaced by new Pendolino trains from 2002, and were around 35 years old when offered to the Department.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Departmental Consultants

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much her Department has spent on behavioural research consultants in the last five financial years. [310976]

Jim Knight: The information requested could not be provided within the disproportionate costs threshold.

Departmental Manpower

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many jobs in her Department she plans to outsource in the next five years. [310975]

Jim Knight: My Department's policy is to rigorously and continuously examine all of our activities and to apply our "contestability" policy which offers the opportunity to use external provision, using competition, to create incentives for continuous improvement in the cost and quality of services and to provide customers with greater choice.

Plans to determine the most efficient delivery model for the Department and its constituent agencies are therefore subject to this continuous review and the optimum balance of in-house provision and outsourced providers is sought.

Departmental Records

Harry Cohen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate she has made of the number of paper files held in her Department and its agencies; what the annual cost to each of monitoring a paper filing system is; what consideration she has given to alternative filing arrangements; and whether any changes to present practices are planned. [307037]

Jim Knight: A full record storage and retrieval service is currently delivered to DWP by Capita plc. The current file-holding is in the region of 58 million files and the annual contract cost for 2008-09 was £21.2 million. In the main these paper documents form the legal basis on which applications to benefit are determined and must be retained for audit, review, appeal and other business related functions while the claim to benefit is current and for a period after termination of claim.

DWP is actively engaged in a range of initiatives to reduce paper e.g. a scanning solution for documents received from clients. These scanned images will be stored in and retrieved from a single Departmental Document Repository System.

Jobcentre Plus has also set up a Paper Reduction Programme to consider opportunities to reduce the amount of paper that is used and moved around its business.

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if she will consider the merits of automatically placing individuals with (a) Huntington's disease and (b) certain other conditions on employment support allowance. [312484]

Jonathan Shaw: Entitlement to employment and support allowance does not depend on an individual's diagnosis or condition, but on how severely a condition impacts on an individual's ability to function. This is in recognition of the fact that individuals with the same condition can experience varying functional effects. Accordingly, the assessment for benefit entitlement accurately identifies individuals for the most appropriate benefit and support, by focusing on the functional effects of a condition.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the criteria are for qualification for employment support allowances. [312485]

Jonathan Shaw: The basic qualification conditions for employment and support allowance are that the customer:

Has limited capability for work;

Is at least 16 years old;

As not reached pensionable age;

Is in Great Britain;

Is not entitled to Income Support or Jobseeker's Allowance.

There are additional conditions to determine if a customer is entitled to contributory and/or income-related employment and support allowance.

Employment Schemes: Older Workers

Mr. Harper: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions with reference to her Department's White Paper on Building Britain's Recovery, whether people currently on (a) incapacity benefit and (b) employment and support allowance will be eligible for the new specialist back to work support for the over 50's; and when she expects that support to be available. [312241]

Jonathan Shaw: The White Paper announced five new back to work measures for the over 50s, principally designed for those on jobseekers allowance (JSA). However, early access (day one of a claim) to work trials will extend equally to customers on incapacity benefits and employment and support allowance. The new specialist contracted support for over 50s will be delivered as part of the Jobcentre Plus Support Contract (JCPSC), which is an important tool for advisers and an integral part of the JSA customer journey.

The new JCPSC provision for over 50s will be open to people claiming JSA and New Deal for Lone Parents (NDLP), New Deal for Partners (NDP) and Work Focused Support for Carers (WFSC) participants. People in receipt of IB will be able to access the JCPSC provision where they meet the eligibility criteria as a NDLP participant. Partners of customers in receipt of ESA/IB will be able to access the JCPSC provision where they meet the eligibility criteria as a NDP participant.

We are working to introduce the over 50s measures in spring this year.

Employment Services

Mr. Harper: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent steps her Department has taken to develop the profiling tool for jobseekers referred to on page 108 of her Department's White Paper, Building Britain's Recovery; when she expects trials of that tool to start; where such trials will be undertaken; and recipients of what benefits will be included in those trials. [312239]

Jim Knight: We are currently conducting a trial that builds upon the Jobseekers Classification Instrument which is a questionnaire used in Australia to determine the level of service a jobseeker needs in order to find work. The trial has already started, is taking place

across Great Britain via telephone interview and will cover 5,000 people making a new jobseeker's allowance claim.

Future Jobs Fund

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many young people were employed in each area where the Future Jobs Fund is operating in each month since its introduction. [311721]

Jim Knight: Information on Future Jobs Fund starts is not currently available, but will be made available from spring 2010 through a statistical release that is planned to cover the whole of the Young Person's Guarantee. This is normal practice for DWP employment programmes and it allows time for input from the UK Statistics Authority and for the information to be collected, understood, verified and reported.

Income Support: Disabled

Mr. Harper: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what her most recent estimate is of the number of people in receipt of income support on the grounds of disability. [312240]

Jonathan Shaw: The information is not available in the format requested.

Pension Credit

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if she will make it her policy to increase pension credit payment levels to compensate for the effects of lower interest rates on the income of pensioners. [309699]

Angela Eagle: From November 2009 the amount of capital completely ignored in the calculation of pension credit was increased from £6,000 to £10,000. This change was made in response to the impact of falling interest rates on pensioners and means that around 88 per cent. of pension credit recipients have all of their capital ignored.

From April 2010 the standard minimum guarantee in pension credit is due to increase by 2 per cent. This means that, from April, no single pensioner need live on less than £132.60 a week and no couple on less than £202.40 a week. The above earnings increase in the pension credit guarantee underlines the Government's ongoing commitment to tackling pensioner poverty.

We have a good track record of reducing pensioner poverty. In 2007-08 there were 900,000 fewer pensioners in relative poverty than in 1998-99 (measured as below 60 per cent. of contemporary median household income after housing costs). Pensioners are less likely to be living in poverty, as measured by relative low income after housing costs, than the population as a whole.

Pensioners: Disabled

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent estimate she has made of the average income of a recipient of (a) attendance allowance and (b) disability living allowance who is over 65 years or over. [309336]

Jonathan Shaw: In 2007-08 the median income of individuals in receipt of attendance allowance was £12,900 per year and the median income of disability living allowance recipients aged 65 years or over was £12,200 per year. However, to look at the living standards of recipients of disability living allowance and attendance allowance, it is more appropriate to use equivalised household incomes (where household incomes are adjusted for household size and composition) as presented in the Department for Work and Pensions' Households Below Average Income report. Results on this basis are given in the following table:

Median equivalised annual household incomes of household containing recipients of attendance allowance and disability living allowance who are aged 65 or over

Group	Median annual household income (£)	
	Before housing costs	After housing costs
Recipients of attendance allowance	19,200	18,900
Recipients of disability living allowance	18,500	17,400
All households with someone aged 65 or over	17,000	15,900

Notes:

1. Figures have been rounded to the nearest £100.
2. The Family Resources Survey is a nationally representative sample of approximately 26,000 households. Since 2002-03, the Family Resources Survey has covered the whole of the United Kingdom. The Households Below Average Income series is sourced from the Family Resources Survey.
3. Data for 2007-08 were collected between April 2007 and March 2008.
4. The Family Resources Survey is known to under-record both incomes and benefit receipt so the estimates presented should be treated with caution.
5. The figures are based on a sample of households which have been adjusted for non-response using multi-purpose grossing factors which align the Family Resources Survey to Government office region population by age and sex. Estimates are subject to sampling error and remaining non-response error.
6. Attendance allowance and disability living allowance amounts have been included as income.
7. The Households Below Average Income series uses disposable household income, adjusted (or 'equivalised') for household size and composition, as an income measure as a proxy for standard of living. For the Households Below Average Income series, incomes have been equivalised using Organisations for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) equivalisation factors.

Sources:

1. The Family Resources Survey 2007-08.
2. Households Below Average Income report 2007-08.

Social Security Benefits

Mr. Newmark: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in (a) England, (b) Essex and (c) Braintree constituency are in receipt of each type of benefit administered by her Department. [312079]

Jim Knight [holding answer 20 January 2010]: The information requested is in the following table.

Recipients of benefits in the Braintree parliamentary constituency, the county of Essex and England by statistical group: May 2009

	England	Essex	Braintree
Jobseekers	1,245,820	27,360	2,430
ESA and incapacity benefits	2,162,560	44,550	3,450
Lone parents	625,830	13,750	1,130

Recipients of benefits in the Braintree parliamentary constituency, the county of Essex and England by statistical group: May 2009

	England	Essex	Braintree
Carers	665,180	16,450	1,220
Others on income related benefit	2,105,360	51,380	3,960
Disabled	1,764,340	45,630	3,530
Bereaved	80,170	2,210	160
Receiving state pension only	6,240,990	198,100	13,950
All	14,890,230	399,450	29,840

Notes:

1. Caseload figures are rounded to the nearest ten; some additional disclosure control has also been applied.
2. Totals may not sum due to rounding.
3. Caseload figures for attendance allowance, carers allowance, and disability living allowance include those cases with entitlement but where payment is currently suspended (for example, because of an extended stay in hospital or an overlapping benefit).
4. The statistical group is a hierarchical variable. A person who fits into more than one category will only appear in the top-most one for which they are eligible. For example a claimant of disability living allowance and jobseeker's allowance would appear in "Jobseekers", not in "Disabled".
5. From November 2008 the "incapacity benefits group" includes employment and support allowance (ESA). ESA replaced incapacity benefit and income support paid on the grounds of incapacity for new claims from 27 October 2008. Prior to this the "incapacity benefits group" referred to claimants of incapacity benefit (including credits only) or severe disablement allowance including people claiming income support on the grounds of incapacity.
6. May 2009 are the most recent data available.

Source:

DWP Information Directorate: Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study.

Unemployment: Leeds

John Battle: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps she has taken to reduce levels of unemployment in Leeds West constituency amongst lone parents since 2001; and if she will make a statement. [306951]

Jim Knight: Lone parents in Leeds, West have access to a wide range of pre-employment and in-work support, including the new deal for lone parents, dedicated personal advisers, working tax credits and in-work credit. Lone parents claiming jobseeker's allowance also have access to support available to other jobseekers, such as self-employment support, provisions such as work-focused training and recruitment subsidies available as part of the six month offer, the flexible new deal, and access to Local Employment Partnerships, where available.

According to the Household Labour Force Survey, the employment rate of lone parents in West Yorkshire was approximately 50.2 per cent. in 2001 (Quarter 2) and approximately 52.8 per cent. in 2009 (Quarter 2). West Yorkshire is the smallest region which includes Leeds, West for which the Department has employment data for lone parents.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Electoral Fraud

7. **Mr. Gordon Prentice:** To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what steps the Commission is taking to minimise the risk of fraud in the general election. [312133]

Mr. Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that it is working with police forces, electoral registration officers and returning officers to establish a network of single point of contact officers for electoral matters and has delivered training seminars for police forces and electoral administrators on electoral fraud.

The Commission has also, with the Association of Chief Police Officers, published guidance for electoral administrators and police forces on tackling electoral malpractice, and has established performance standards for electoral registration officers and returning officers on how to identify fraudulent activity.

General Election Counts

9. **Richard Ottaway:** To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission what information the Electoral Commission holds on the number of election counts that are not planned to commence on the evening of polling day in the general election. [312135]

Mr. Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that it has asked all returning officers to provide information about their current plans for counting ballot papers at the next UK parliamentary general election. This information has been made available in the House of Commons Library.

In summary, as of 7 January, returning officers for 586 out of 650 constituencies had provided information. Of these, 52 currently do not plan to count ballot papers on the evening of polling day at the general election. A further 17 have indicated they may defer counting in the event that the general election is combined with local authority elections, and 187 were still undecided.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

Departmental Electronic Equipment

Mr. Hands: To ask the Solicitor-General how many iPods have been bought by the Law Officers' Departments since 2005; and at what cost. [311893]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service is a devolved organisation. To obtain this information would require local managers to review all paper procurement records and would incur disproportionate cost.

The remaining Law Officers' Departments have not purchased any iPods during this period.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Reform of the House of Commons Committee

27. **Sir Nicholas Winterton:** To ask the Leader of the House when she plans to bring forward proposals for the House to decide on the recommendations of the Select Committee on the Reform of the House of Commons. [312143]

Barbara Keeley: I refer the hon. Member to the answer my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House gave to the hon. Member for East Dunbartonshire (Jo Swinson) in oral questions today.

WALES

Economic Situation: Wales

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what meetings Ministers in his Department have had with (a) Welsh Assembly Government Ministers, (b) ministerial colleagues and (c) representatives of Bosch to discuss the closure of Bosch operations in Wales; what the date of each such meeting was; and who attended each; [312250]

(2) when he was informed of Bosch's intention to end their operations in Wales; [312251]

(3) what discussions he has had with Unite on the closure of Bosch operations in Wales. [312252]

Mr. Hain: I have had discussions with a range of interested parties, including the First Minister and Unite.

Last October Bosch announced that it was holding a 90 day of consultation on the future of the plant, either to cut 300 posts or to close the site completely. On 14 January, Bosch management confirmed that it was recommending the closure of the factory, phasing out production and all jobs by the summer of 2011.

Although the consultation period continues until the end of February, we are already working closely with the Welsh Assembly Government to provide the support and assistance necessary to help those affected to find new opportunities and get them back into work as quickly as possible.

PRIME MINISTER

Department for Business, Innovation and Skills

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to the answer of 10 December 2009, *Official Report*, column 547W, on the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, what mechanisms are in place to assess the effectiveness of machinery of government changes; and whether he has made such an assessment since 5 June 2009. [310345]

The Prime Minister: The machinery of government is kept under constant review.

Ministerial Policy Advisers: Pay

John Mason: To ask the Prime Minister what severance payments have been made to Ministers who have left office since May 2007. [311198]

The Prime Minister: Severance pay is payable in accordance with section 4 of the Ministerial and other Pensions and Salaries Act 1991.

Olympic Games: Canada

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Prime Minister how many (a) Ministers and (b) officials from his Office are planning to attend the Winter Olympics in Vancouver in February 2010; and what estimate he has made of the cost of such attendance. [310842]

The Prime Minister: Since 1999 the Government have published on an annual basis a list of all overseas visits by Cabinet Ministers costing in excess of £500, as well as the total cost of all ministerial travel overseas. From 2007-08 the list was extended to include all Ministers. The list also provides information on the number of officials who accompany Ministers. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House. Information for 2009-10 will be published as soon as the information is available.

All travel by Ministers and civil servants is undertaken in accordance with the Ministerial Code and Civil Service Management Code respectively.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Employment Tribunals Service

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many employment tribunals relating to his Department have been held in each of the last five years; and what the total cost to his Department was of such tribunals in each such year. [309940]

Dan Norris: DEFRA and its executive agencies have been taken to an employment tribunal 14 times in the last five years. Of these 14 cases, five cases were found in favour of the individual and DEFRA incurred costs. As the number of employment tribunals upheld in each of the last five years is such a small number, we cannot give further details because of the possibility of identifying individuals.

Fly Tipping: Fixed Penalties

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (1) if he will place in the Library a copy of the Flycapture Fixed Penalty Notice dataset for each local authority for 2008-09; [311485]

(2) what proportion of local authorities provide flycapture fixed penalty notice data for waste receptacle offences to his Department. [311495]

Dan Norris: DEFRA collects information from local authorities, on fixed penalty notices for a range of environmental offences, including litter, graffiti, abandoned vehicles and waste receptacles. These are published on the DEFRA website:

<http://www.defra.gov.uk/environment/quality/local/legislation/fpn/index.htm>

The most recent complete year is 2006-07—the first year many of the FPNs came into being. The return indicates that 43 out of 354 English local authorities (12 per cent.) issued a total of 988 fixed penalty notices for waste receptacle offences.

Figures for 2007-08 and 2008-09 are being collected from local authorities and these will be published on the DEFRA website shortly.

Forestry Commission: Land

Mr. Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether the Forestry Commission plans to sell any of the land it holds. [312490]

Huw Irranca-Davies: The Forestry Commission has an ongoing programme of asset sales, the proceeds of which are re-invested in the management and development of the public forest estate.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Bars

Michael Fabricant: To ask the hon. Member for North Devon, representing the House of Commons Commission pursuant to the answer of 12 January 2010, *Official Report*, columns 825-6W, on bars, for what reason the House of Commons Commission decided not to consult the Administration Committee on possible sites for location of nursery facilities; and if he will make a statement. [312365]

Nick Harvey: The Commission considered it important to have the planned nursery facility operating early in the new Parliament, before new Members had made other childcare arrangements. This is a challenging timescale, given the need for listed building consent and consent for change of use, the time required to make the premises ready and the requirement to pass the Ofsted inspection and be registered with Ofsted. In view of the time constraints, the Commission decided it was not feasible to consult the Administration Committee.

Legislation: Internet

Mr. Maude: To ask the hon. Member for North Devon, representing the House of Commons Commission if the House of Commons Commission will bring forward arrangements to ensure that legislation introduced in the House is published on the internet in the format recommended by mysociety.org in its Free Our Bills campaign. [312170]

Nick Harvey: The House Administration is currently considering, together with its counterpart in the House of Lords, a proposal for a Procedural Data Programme to update the IT systems holding data about the proceedings of the House, including Bills and amendments to them, so that the data is made available in an open standardised electronic format. The programme would aim to produce Bills and amendments in an electronic format which both complies with open standards and is readily re-usable so that it can be exchanged between parliamentary systems and made available to the public for further processing by others. This output would be similar to what is being requested in the Free our Bills campaign, and also to what is referred to by the House of Lords Information Committee in its recent Report *Are the Lords listening? Creating connections between people*

and Parliament (HL Paper 138—1, 2008-09). The work would be undertaken in consultation with the Office of the Parliamentary Counsel, the Office of Public Sector Information (responsible for publishing Acts) and the Cabinet Office.

Staff are working with the existing software supplier to improve the quality of the XML output from the Bill drafting software. In addition, staff are examining the possibilities of using Bill data in its existing form to publish improved information on the parliamentary website, such as by linking Bill texts to existing Acts of Parliament which the Bill would amend. Some Bill texts showing the amendments made at Committee stage are already published on the parliamentary website (for example, the Financial Services Bill).

Members: Email

Mr. Maude: To ask the hon. Member for North Devon, representing the House of Commons Commission with reference to the answer of 12 November 2009, *Official Report*, column 622W, on Members: email, whether PICT has had discussions with representatives of Pretty Good Privacy (PGP) to find a technical fix to allow PGP software to be used on hon. Members' computers in a way which is not incompatible with Parliament's current version of VPN (remote access) software. [312432]

Nick Harvey: No. PICT provide support to an alternative encryption software product which is deemed to be completely satisfactory. However, Members are not restricted to using the encryption product that PICT offer and support, and can choose to use other products, including PGP.

Mr. Maude: To ask the hon. Member for North Devon, representing the House of Commons Commission with reference to the answer of 12 November 2009, *Official Report*, column 622W, on Members: email, if the House of Commons Commission will ask PICT to undertake a further evaluation of whether Pretty Good Privacy software can be used by hon. Members following the introduction of new versions of the PGP email proxy and the Infoexpress VPN client. [312433]

Nick Harvey: No, there is no need to do so. Members are not restricted to using the encryption product that PICT offer and support.

OLYMPICS

Olympic Games 2012: Construction

Philip Davies: To ask the Minister for the Olympics with reference to the answer to the hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire of 29 October 2009, *Official Report*, columns 517-8W, on the Olympic Games 2012: construction, if she will list the construction contracts which have been awarded to firms based on each region. [309302]

Tessa Jowell: Full details of Olympic Delivery Authority's direct suppliers, including a map showing benefits to each region is available on London 2012's website at:

www.london2012.com/get-involved/business-network/oda-suppliers/index.php

Details of companies which have construction contracts through the supply chains of ODA's tier one contractors are also provided on the website, this includes the region they are from.

Olympic Games 2012: Finance

Hugh Robertson: To ask the Minister for the Olympics what commitments the Government Olympic Executive has received from other Government bodies in relation to support for the London 2012 Olympics; and what budget is attached to each such commitment.

[312343]

Tessa Jowell: As part of the £9.325 billion public sector funding package for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Department for Communities and Local Government (CLG), and the Department for Transport (DfT) are providing funding to the Olympic Delivery Authority for venues, infrastructure and Olympic Park security. As part of that package, the Home Office is providing £600 million for the wider policing and security of the games, and there is a further £238 million as a security contingency. CLG is providing £2.851 million and DfT £1.016 million.

In total 19 Government Departments are engaged in delivering the games and the Government Olympic Executive (GOE) is currently working closely with those Departments to help them develop their plans and confirm the associated costs.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Big Lottery Fund: Discrimination

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what funding the Big Lottery Fund has provided to Developing Discrimination Advice Regional Events in 2009-10.

[311801]

Mr. Simon: The information requested is not held by my Department and relates to matters that are the responsibility of the Big Lottery Fund.

Accordingly, I have asked the chief executive of the Big Lottery Fund to write direct to the hon. Member.

Copies of the reply will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

Camelot Group

Mr. Vaizey: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what discussions members his Department have had with the National Lottery Commission on Camelot's proposed entry into the commercial market for bill payments and mobile telephone payments; and whether the Commission has made any assessment of the potential effect of such an entry on the commercial market in the area.

[312249]

Mr. Simon: My officials and I have regular meetings with the National Lottery Commission about the full range of National Lottery Regulation issues, and the possibility of Camelot providing ancillary services has been discussed in that context.

The approval of the National Lottery Commission is required to allow the National Lottery operator to undertake such services and the Commission is currently considering proposals from Camelot.

Digital Broadcasting: Radio

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the likely effects of digital switchover under the provisions of the Digital Economy Bill on the ability of local commercial radio stations without a digital path to continue to broadcast on the analogue spectrum.

[312081]

Mr. Simon: No specific assessment has been made of the impact of the radio provisions set out in the draft Digital Economy Bill on local commercial stations remaining on FM after the digital radio switchover. However, these provisions, and the proposals in the Digital Britain White Paper, were made following 18 months of consultation with the radio industry, which included representatives of small local commercial stations.

I am continuing this dialogue with the industry with the specific purpose of ensuring that local radio can continue to thrive on FM after the digital radio switchover.

Digital Broadcasting: Scotland

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of Scottish households are able to receive digital radio services; what plans his Department has to increase coverage for digital radio in Scotland before 2015; what the cost of implementing those plans will be; and who will pay for the implementation.

[311894]

Mr. Simon: The Spectrum Planning Group, which formed part of the Digital Radio Working Group, reported in November 2008 that 77.8 per cent. of the population in Scotland had access to indoor Digital Audio Broadcasting (DAB).

Coverage of digital radio broadcasting in the UK continues to increase and both the commercial and the BBC's national multiplexes now reach about 90 per cent. of the UK population. The Digital Radio Upgrade programme will require new investment in building and improving DAB coverage and reception. To this end we will be working with the BBC and commercial operators to ensure coverage of DAB is comparable to FM by the end of 2014.

The Digital Britain White Paper was clear that the investment need to increase coverage will need to come from both commercial operators and the BBC.

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what percentage of households in Scotland receive (a) digital commercial radio and (b) BBC digital radio services.

[312104]

Mr. Simon: The Spectrum Planning Group, which formed part of the Digital Radio Working Group, reported in November 2008 that 76.2 per cent. of the population in Scotland had access to digital commercial radio services, while 77.8 per cent. of the population in Scotland has access to BBC digital radio services. Figures are based on indoor coverage.

Industrial Health and Safety

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether written health and safety advice is issued to each new employee in his Department. [311375]

Mr. Simon: While a written document is not provided to new staff, they are directed towards the departmental intranet on starting which outlines in detail the procedures and guidance on this matter. They are also given an emergency contact card which encourages them to read the evacuation procedures and provides them with key essential numbers for internal security, NHS Direct and other such contacts.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan: Peacekeeping Operations

Robert Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Estonian military personnel are serving with British Forces in Afghanistan; and in what capacity. [311355]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: There are 155 Estonian military personnel serving in Afghanistan. An Estonian Infantry company operates with British forces in Task Force Helmand.

Aircraft Carriers: Procurement

Mr. Davidson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what sub-contracts have been awarded in his Department's aircraft carriers procurement programme; and what the monetary value is of each such sub-contract. [311746]

Mr. Quentin Davies: As at 21 December 2009, a total of 93 sub-contracts had been placed by the Aircraft Carrier Alliance to support the build of the two Queen Elizabeth Class Aircraft Carriers. A detailed list of these sub-contracts will be placed in the Library of the House.

Ex-servicemen: Military Decorations

Mark Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether he plans to introduce a lapel badge for those who worked in the munitions factories during the Second World War. [305243]

Mr. McFadden: I have been asked to reply.

While I gratefully acknowledge the important contribution made by the munitions workers in the Second World War, there are no present plans to introduce a lapel badge.

Helicopters

Willie Rennie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what percentage of each helicopter type in the (a) Army Air Corps, (b) Royal Navy and (c) Royal Air Force is (i) in service and (ii) fit for purpose. [311896]

Mr. Quentin Davies: Operational capability is measured in terms of flying hours rather than the number of airframes available. All rotary wing operational requirements are currently being met.

"In-Service" has been taken to mean the effective fleet which covers all aircraft barring those which are redundant, declared surplus or awaiting disposal. Aircraft in the Forward Fleet are those aircraft that are available to Front Line Commands for Operational and training purposes. "Fit for purpose" has been taken to mean which are 'Available'. This is defined as those aircraft within the Forward Fleet that are considered capable of carrying out their planned missions on a given date. The number of helicopters available varies from day to day, primarily due to routine maintenance requirements.

All aircraft in the Forward Fleet which are not Available are classified as Short-Term Unserviceable, because they may be undergoing first-line maintenance, other minor works or being prepared for transportation. Aircraft which are Short-Term Unserviceable can usually be made Available relatively quickly.

The Departmental Fleet comprises effective and non-effective aircraft. Non-effective aircraft are those aircraft still on the Military Register which are declared surplus and awaiting disposal and are no longer expected to be flown. Effective aircraft comprise those in the Depth Fleet and those in the Forward Fleet.

Aircraft in the Depth Fleet are those which are undergoing modification, depth maintenance and repair; in storage (including attrition aircraft); surplus aircraft awaiting classification as 'ineffective'; or Trials aircraft.

The information requested is shown in the following table. The figures are averages for December 2009.

<i>Helicopter type/mark</i>	<i>Departmental fleet (number of aircraft)</i>	<i>Effective fleet (number of aircraft)</i>	<i>Proportion of departmental fleet that is effective (percentage)</i>	<i>Forward fleet (number of aircraft)</i>	<i>Available (number of aircraft)</i>	<i>Proportion of forward fleet that is available (percentage)</i>
<i>Royal Navy</i>						
Lynx Mk3	28	28	100	20	13	65
Lynx Mk8	33	33	100	20	13	65
Merlin Mk1	42	42	100	22	10	45
Sea King Mk 4/6	42	42	100	27	18	67
Sea King Mk5	15	15	100	11	7	64
Sea King Mk7	13	13	100	10	7	70
<i>Army</i>						
Apache	67	67	100	46	23	50
Gazelle	84	37	44	22	16	73

<i>Helicopter type/mark</i>	<i>Departmental fleet (number of aircraft)</i>	<i>Effective fleet (number of aircraft)</i>	<i>Proportion of departmental fleet that is effective (percentage)</i>	<i>Forward fleet (number of aircraft)</i>	<i>Available (number of aircraft)</i>	<i>Proportion of forward fleet that is available (percentage)</i>
Lynx Mk 7/9	100	88	88	54	34	63
Bell 212	7	7	100	7	7	100
<i>Royal Air Force</i>						
Chinook 2/2a	38	38	100	27	21	78
Merlin Mk 3/3a	28	28	100	19	7	37
Puma	34	34	100	24	12	50
Sea King Mk 3/3a	25	25	100	17	9	53

Members: Correspondence

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to reply to the letter of 30 November 2009 from the hon. Member for Billericay regarding a constituent, Mr. J. Dodd. [312248]

Bill Rammell: I will reply to the hon. Member for Billericay before 30 January 2010, responding to the letter from his constituent, Mr J. Dodd.

Navy: Caribbean

Mr. Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Royal Navy ships are located in the Caribbean; and whether any are being tasked to assist with humanitarian efforts in Haiti. [312573]

Mr. Kevan Jones: There are no Royal Navy ships in the region at this time. The Ministry of Defence is sending a Royal Fleet Auxiliary ship, RFA Largs Bay, to carry vital relief goods to Haiti. This is a high priority task and I trust it will be seen as a significant contribution by HMG to the international aid effort.

In addition, an eight-strong Royal Military Police protection team has been deployed to assist the FCO's consular Rapid Deployment Team, and we have sent a 12-man Operational Liaison and Reconnaissance Team to assess whether further specialist UK military support is required.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Buildings

Sarah Teather: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the (a) area and (b) estimated value is of (i) vacant and (ii) occupied office space (A) owned and (B) rented by his Department. [310523]

Mr. Woodward: The area and annual rental costs for vacant and occupied office space rented by the Northern Ireland Office, including the Public Prosecution Service and the Crown Solicitor's Office is shown in the following table.

<i>Name of building</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Gross floor area (square metre)</i>	<i>Annual rental costs excluding VAT (£)</i>
Castle Buildings, Stormont	Occupied	3,862	510,000
Hillview Buildings, Stormont	Occupied	812	47,000
Knockview Buildings, Stormont	Occupied	1,921	120,000
PSNI HQ Brooklyn, Belfast	Occupied	153	8,640
Dundonald House Annex	Occupied	n/a	0
Stormont House Bungalow, Stormont	Occupied	132	12,000
Stormont House and Annexe, Stormont	Occupied	3,225	64,000
Massey House, Stormont	Occupied	2,475	45,000
Unit 2, Walled Garden, Stormont	Vacant	350	26,000
Lagan House, Belfast	Occupied	947	100,000
Millennium House, 4th Floor, Belfast	Occupied	594	92,000
Millennium House, 6th Floor, Belfast	Occupied	1,579	219,000
Windsor House, 20th Floor, Belfast	Occupied	297	31,400
Thames House, London	Occupied	3,098	902,576
Royal Courts of Justice, Chichester Street, Belfast	Occupied	65	6,250
Belfast Chambers, 93 Chichester Street, Belfast	Occupied	5,465	525,828
Lisburn Chambers, Linenhall Street, Lisburn	Occupied	2,493	236,500
Linum Chambers, Bedford square, Bedford Street, Belfast	Occupied	2,802	295,000
Ballymena Chambers, Parkway, Ballymena	Occupied	2,494	179,800
Omagh Chambers, 2 Townhall Square, High Street, Omagh	Occupied	2,265	196,000
Foyle Chambers, 35 Limavady Road, Londonderry	Occupied	2,365	206,000
3rd Floor, Royal Courts of Justice	Occupied	1,239	78,500

The area and net book value for vacant and occupied office space owned by the Northern Ireland Office is shown in the following table.

<i>Name of building</i>	<i>Status</i>	<i>Gross floor area (square metre)</i>	<i>Net book value (£)</i>
Hillsborough Castle, Hillsborough.	Owned	4226	77,272,207
Maryfield, Belfast	Owned	n/a	3,000,000

n/a = not available

Departmental Electronic Equipment

Mr. Hands: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many iPods have been bought by his Department since 2005; and at what cost. [311911]

Paul Goggins: There have been no iPods bought by the Northern Ireland Office, including its arm's length bodies and the Public Prosecution Service Northern Ireland but excluding its agencies and NDPBs, since 2005.

HEALTH

Dental Services: Bexley

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of children in the London borough of Bexley were treated by a dentist providing NHS services in the last 12 months. [311563]

Ann Keen: Information is not available in the format requested. The proportion of child patients seen by an NHS dentist in the previous 24 months in Bexley Care Trust is 59.1 per cent. as at 30 September 2009.

Health Services: Sight Impaired

Mark Hunter: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans his Department has to issue guidance to NHS bodies on the provision of information to blind and partially-sighted people at the time of their diagnosis with another condition or illness. [311288]

Ann Keen: Under the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, service providers are required to make reasonable adjustments for disabled people. This may include producing information about the diagnosis and treatment of medical conditions in different formats, depending on an assessment of the person's needs. It is up to individual service providers as to how they make any necessary reasonable adjustments.

Hospital Wards: Closures

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many wards operated by Southend Hospital Trust have been closed during January 2010; and for what reason. [312489]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is a matter for Southend University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust. We have written to John Bruce, Chair of Southend University Hospital NHS Foundation Trust, informing him of the hon. Member's inquiries. He will reply shortly and a copy of the letter will be placed in the Library.

Influenza

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many persons were recorded as having contracted seasonal influenza in each year since 1998; and how many persons were recorded as having contracted swine influenza in the last 12 months. [312496]

Gillian Merron: Data on the total numbers of cases of seasonal influenza are not collected.

At the start of the swine flu pandemic, all suspected cases were investigated by laboratory testing. As of 1 July 2009 there were 6,929 confirmed cases of swine flu in the United Kingdom.

From July, however, as case numbers rose rapidly, only a small proportion of suspected cases were laboratory confirmed. From that point onwards, estimates of case numbers were made by the Health Protection Agency (HPA), with the aim of providing an indication of the trend in the occurrence of the disease in the population. It was recognised, however, that there was considerable uncertainty in the case number estimates and, in order to allow for this, wide ranges around the estimates were provided.

A total of 845,000 cases of illness due to influenza infection were estimated to have occurred in the population of England during the pandemic in 2009 based on the published, weekly, HPA estimates up to 20 December 2009 (range 415,000 to 1,662,000). This is recognised to underestimate the true number of people infected due to the occurrence of infection in many others who had either very mild illness or infection with no illness at all.

Influenza: Vaccination

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many people have been inoculated against influenza in (a) West Chelmsford constituency and (b) Chelmsford local authority area in each of the last five years. [312487]

Gillian Merron: Data on the number of people who have received influenza vaccine are available nationally and at the strategic health authority and the primary care trust (PCT) levels. No data are available for individual parliamentary constituencies or local authorities.

Data on the total number of people vaccinated against influenza during the influenza season (winter) of the years 2005-06 to 2009-10 are given in the following table for the PCT that have included the West Chelmsford constituency and Chelmsford local authority.

<i>Influenza season (winter)</i>	<i>Primary care trust¹</i>	<i>Number of people vaccinated with seasonal influenza vaccine</i>	<i>Number of people vaccinated with swine influenza vaccine</i>
2005-06	Chelmsford	16,492	—
	Maldon and South Chelmsford	11,176	—

Influenza season (winter)	Primary care trust ¹	Number of people vaccinated with seasonal influenza vaccine	Number of people vaccinated with swine influenza vaccine
	Witham, Braintree and Halstead	21,786	—
2006-07	Mid Essex	50,712	—
2007-08	Mid Essex	55,423	—
2008-09	Mid Essex	57,626	—
2009-10	Mid Essex	² 53,058	³ 8,942

¹ Primary care trust boundaries changed in 2006.

² Provisional data up to end December 2009. These data include vaccination of frontline healthcare workers for which there are no data available for the primary care trust in earlier years.

³ Provisional data up to end of November 2009 (December 2009 data were not available at time of writing). These data include vaccination of frontline healthcare workers. The figure is for the number of people that have received at least one dose of vaccine. Most people only need one dose of swine influenza vaccine but some require two doses given at least three weeks apart (data on the number of people that have completed their vaccination course are not yet available).

NHS: Finance

Jenny Willott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) which NHS charities which have NHS bodies as corporate trustees have submitted requests to change to independent trustees in the last 12 months; and if he will make a statement; [311760]

(2) which NHS charities will be required to consolidate their funds into the accounts of the relevant NHS body under the new International Accounting Standard 27 being introduced in April 2010; and if he will make a statement. [311761]

Phil Hope: Three national health service bodies submitted a request to appoint independent trustees. Two have since indicated that they do not want to proceed at this stage.

It is not possible to identify individual NHS charities that will be required to consolidate their accounts into those of their relevant NHS body under the new International Accounting Standard 27 in April 2010, as application of the accounting standard will be determined locally taking into account the materiality of charitable funds. Our best estimate is that this may be around 30, which amounts to around 10 per cent. of those who are currently governed by a corporate trustee.

However, we are continuing to work with the Treasury, the Charity Commission and other stakeholders to seek ways to strengthen the independent governance of NHS charities to enable us to meet the standard without invoking the requirement for consolidation.

Although accounts may be consolidated for reporting, the charity's funds would remain wholly independent from NHS budgets.

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the additional cost to the NHS arising from incidents attributable to weather conditions in January 2010. [311773]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: This is a matter for the local national health service. The NHS, as part of its planning process, ensures operational challenges, such as adverse weather are factored into local contingency plans, including the cost of treating patients.

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with reference to the pre-Budget report, which budgetary headings of NHS spending will comprise (a) the 95 per cent. of NHS frontline spending due to rise in line with inflation and (b) the 5 per cent. that will not. [311995]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: National health service frontline spending is defined as 95 per cent. of the NHS near-cash expenditure limit in 2010-11. This covers all NHS spending that supports patient care.

The remaining 5 per cent. covers a large number of budgets that do not directly contribute to patient care in the NHS including areas like consultancy and administrative budgets for the Department, arm's length bodies and strategic health authorities.

Full details will be set out in the next spending review.

NHS: ICT

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much NHS benefits and pensions sub-departments spent on information technology in the last three financial years; how much of this was spent on (a) software development and testing and (b) application including (i) staff training, (ii) the cost of new hardware and software and (iii) the cost of launching into the live environment. [311383]

Ann Keen: NHS Pensions, a division of the Business Services Authority, administers the NHS Pension Scheme on behalf of the Department. They are unable to breakdown the costs of launching into the live environment because these costs are not broken down to this level within their accounts. These particular costs are therefore included in the overall development and testing costs in section 1 of the following table:

	NHS Pensions			£ Total
	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10 ¹	
1. Software development and testing	56,508	3,479,307	11,828,878	15,364,694
2. Staff training	7,240	1,266	17,310	25,816
3. Cost of new hardware and software	—	19,921	187,057	206,978
Total	63,748	3,500,494	12,033,245	15,597,487

¹ April to December.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health which NHS IT projects have been outsourced to companies based overseas in the last three years; and what the monetary value is of each such contract. [311384]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Within the national programme for information technology (IT), no discrete system or service projects have been outsourced to companies based overseas during the period. Comprehensive information is not held centrally about local IT procurements by national health service organisations outside of the national programme, and could be obtained only at disproportionate expense.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS has allocated for the (a) procurement, (b) maintenance, (c) compliance testing and (d) security of IT systems in 2010-11. [311385]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information requested is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Number of claims where the claimant funding was conditional fee arrangement (CFA) closed April 2004 to March 2009

<i>Year of closure</i>	<i>Number of CFA claims closed</i>	<i>Number of claims</i>	<i>Damages paid (£)</i>	<i>Defence costs paid (£)</i>	<i>Claimant costs paid (£)</i>
2004-05	233	151	4,551,050	886,720	2,084,936
2005-06	861	625	31,892,845	5,177,915	14,448,748
2006-07	1,142	799	46,973,706	7,579,297	22,640,640
2007-08	1,559	1,127	62,559,320	10,596,148	37,934,943
2008-09	1,579	1,120	68,841,494	9,828,907	38,888,773
Total	5,374	3,822	214,818,415	34,068,986	115,998,040

Primary Care Trusts: Overtime

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much each primary care trust has paid in staff overtime in January 2010. [312015]

Ann Keen: Information about how much each primary care trust has paid in overtime in January 2010 will be available from the Electronic Staff Record in March 2010.

Swine Flu

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of persons who died following contraction of swine influenza in the last 12 months had also contracted other diseases. [312495]

Gillian Merron: Overall approximately 80 per cent. of people who died with Pandemic H1N1 (2009) infection also had other pre-existing diseases or other underlying medical conditions.

Further detail is available in a report in the *British Medical Journal*, 'Donaldson LJ, Rutter PD, Ellis BM, Greaves FEC, Mytton OT, Pebody RG and Yardley IE. Mortality from pandemic A/H1N1 2009 influenza in England: public health surveillance study'. *BMJ* 2009; 339 b5213; this is available online at:

http://www.bmj.com/cgi/content/abstract/339/dec10_1/b5213

Swine Flu: Vaccination

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of unused stocks of swine influenza

NHS: Negligence

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many cases of clinical negligence which were funded by conditional fee agreements were closed in each of the last five years; in how many such cases damages were paid (a) by agreement to settle and (b) by award; what the total cost was of defending each such case where damages were paid; how much was paid to claimants in legal costs in (i) total, (ii) base costs and (iii) success fees; and in such cases where damages were paid, how much was paid in after-the-event insurance premiums. [312528]

Ann Keen: The information requested is in the following table and was provided by the NHS Litigation Authority (NHSLA). The NHSLA is only able to provide an overall total of claimant costs because a global figure is recorded in their database. To provide a detailed breakdown of claimant costs, including After the Event insurance, would be at disproportionate cost.

vaccine can be returned to suppliers at no cost to the public purse. [312497]

Gillian Merron: We are unable to return vaccines that have already been delivered. The options for handling the anticipated surplus of vaccine are currently being explored with the manufacturers. We will be seeking to minimise the overall cost to the British taxpayer.

Swine Influenza: Expenditure

Norman Lamb: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his Department's estimated expenditure under each budgetary heading has been on the swine influenza outbreak. [311997]

Gillian Merron: The spend on drugs for pandemic flu preparedness (not swine flu specific) prior to the swine flu pandemic was over £500 million. We also had plans for additional committed spend on further drugs. Since the outbreak, that spend has taken our expenditure to over £1 billion. We are not able to break down this number due to confidentiality clauses in our contracts with the various manufacturers.

The costs of consumables are also subject to confidentiality clauses.

The system development costs incurred to date for the National Pandemic Flu Service amount to approximately £13.5 million. Further operational costs are all in commercial confidence.

The cost of advertising and publicity activity in England on swine influenza, including the Swine Flu Information Phone Line, is approximately £15 million to date.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Departmental Billing

John Mason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of invoices from suppliers his Department paid within 10 days of receipt in December 2009. [311258]

Mr. Woolas: The Home Office performance for paying all invoices within 30 days and paying SME compliant invoices within 10 days in December 2009 is shown in the following table:

Table 1: Home Office performance of paying total number of invoices within 30 days and SME compliant invoices within 10 days for December 2009—Home Office and UKBA

	Number/ percentage
Total number of all invoices paid	5,623
Percentage of total number of all invoices paid within 30 days	95
Number of SMEs' compliant invoices paid within 10 days	1,282
SMEs—percentage of compliant invoices paid with 10 days	99

CRB's performance of paying invoices within 10 days in December 2009 is shown in the following table:

Table 2: CRB performance of paying SME invoices within 10 days for December 2009

	Number/percentage
Total number of all invoices	284
Number of SME invoices paid within 10 days	109
SME percentage of invoices paid within 10 days	89.34

Departmental Contracts

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 11 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 703W, on the UK Border Agency, who his Department's commercial partners are; and which are the 110 locations referred to. [311463]

Mr. Woolas: UKBA has global contracts with two suppliers to provide visa application support services across all its regions. These are VFS-Global and CSC.

The two commercial partners operate 105 visa application centres, the locations of which are in the following list. This is an updated figure.

Country	Location
Algeria	Algiers
Bahrain	Manama
Bangladesh	Chittagong Dhaka Sylhet
Brazil	Brasilia Rio de Janeiro

Country	Location
	Sao Paulo
Canada	Edmonton Halifax Ottawa Toronto Vancouver
China	Beijing Chengdu Chongqing Fuzhou Guangzhou Hangzhou Jinan Nanjing Shanghai Shenyang Shenzhen Wuhan
Egypt	Alexandria Cairo
Ethiopia	Addis Ababa
France	Bordeaux Marseille Paris
Germany	Berlin Dusseldorf Munich
Ghana	Accra
India	New Delhi Jalandar Chandigarh Kolkata Chennai Hyderabad Bangalore Cochin Mumbai South Mumbai North Ahmedabad
Italy	Rome
Indonesia	Jakarta
Jamaica	Kingston
	Pune

<i>Country</i>	<i>Location</i>
Japan	Osaka
	Tokyo
Jordan	Amman
Kazakhstan	Almaty
Kenya	Nairobi
Kuwait	Kuwait City
Lebanon	Beirut
Libya	Tripoli
Malawi	Lilongwe
Malaysia	Kuala Lumpur
Mozambique	Maputo
Namibia	Windhoek
Nepal	Kathmandu
Nigeria	Abuja Lagos - Ikeja Lagos - VI
Oman	Muscat
Pakistan	Islamabad Karachi Lahore Mirpur
Philippines	Manila
Qatar	Doha
Russia	Yekaterinburg Moscow Novosibirsk Rostov St. Petersburg
Serbia	Belgrade
Singapore	Singapore
Saudi Arabia	Jeddah Riyadh Al Khobar
South Africa	Cape Town Durban Johannesburg Port Elizabeth

<i>Country</i>	<i>Location</i>
	Pretoria
South Korea	Seoul
Sri Lanka	Colombo
Switzerland	Geneva
	Zurich
Syria	Damascus
Taiwan	Taipei
Thailand	Bangkok
Turkey	Ankara Bursa Gazientep Istanbul Izmir
UAE	Abu Dhabi Dubai
Uganda	Kampala
Ukraine	Kiev
Zimbabwe	Harare

Entry Clearances

Dr. Evan Harris: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of appeals against visa refusal decisions at all overseas posts were allowed in (a) January 2009, (b) April 2009, (c) July 2009 and (d) October 2009. [312089]

Mr. Woolas: The information requested is given in the following table. Immigration statistics for October 2009 will be published on 25 February.

UKBA monitors closely the reasons why appeals were overturned and uses the information to improve decision-making quality.

<i>Worldwide</i>	
<i>Report year 2009</i>	<i>Allowed rate (percentage)</i>
January	44
April	38
July	41

Entry Clearances: Overseas Students

Mr. Sharma: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many colleges approved by the UK Border Agency between December 2008 and December 2009 were subsequently suspended and their licence either not issued or cancelled. [311858]

Mr. Woolas: Of the colleges admitted to the Register of Sponsors for Tiers 2, 4 and 5 during the period 1 December 2008 and 31 December 2009 as of 18 January

2010 the UK Border Agency has revoked the licences of 13 sponsors and suspended a further 85.

The figure quoted is not provided under National Statistics protocols and has been derived from local management information and is therefore provisional and subject to change.

Mr. Sharma: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many students who failed to attend college or to pay their fees were returned to their country of origin between December 2008 and December 2009. [311859]

Mr. Woolas: The information requested is not centrally recorded and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Sharma: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many student spouse visas were issued from the beginning of December 2008 to December 2009. [311860]

Mr. Woolas: With the introduction of tier 4 of the points based system (students) on 31 March 2009, the

UK Border Agency kept a separate record of visas issued to partners of students. Hitherto, both partners and children of students were recorded in the same category, "Student Dependent". The number of visas issued in these categories in the period December 2008 to September 2009 are shown in the following table. Visa statistics for the last quarter of 2009 will be published on 25 February.

Visas issued: student dependents: December 2008 to September 2009

<i>Visa category</i>	<i>Visas issued</i>
Student dependent (spouses + children) December 2008 to March 2009	10,961
Tier four (general) dependent-partners April 2008 to September 2009	6,566

Mr. Sharma: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many (a) husbands and (b) wives of persons studying in the UK from (i) India, (ii) Pakistan and (iii) Bangladesh were issued with visas for the purpose of entering the UK to join their spouses between January 2007 and December 2009. [311863]

Mr. Woolas: The number of visas issue to partners

Visas issued: student dependents: January 2007 to September 2009

<i>Visa Category</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>Pakistan</i>	<i>Bangladesh</i>	<i>Total</i>
Student Dependent(spouses + children January 2007 - March 2009)	5331	3822	2129	1,1282
Tier four (General) Dependent -Partners April 2008 - September 2009	1869	89	54	2,012

With the introduction of Tier 4 of the Points Based System (Students) on 31 March 2009, the UK Border Agency kept a separate record of visas issued to partners of students. Hitherto, both partners and children of students were recorded in the same category, Student Dependent. It is not therefore possible to provide the information requested except at disproportionate cost.

Immobilisation of Vehicles

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department has paid in vehicle clamping charges incurred on (a) privately-owned and (b) publicly-owned land in each of the last 10 years; and if he will make a statement. [302749]

Mr. Woolas: The Department's accounting systems do not hold the information at the requested level of detail. An answer could not be provided without incurring disproportionate cost.

Industrial Health and Safety

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will place in the Library a copy of the health and safety advice issued to each new starter upon joining his Department. [311815]

Mr. Woolas: The Home Office and its agencies, UKBA, IPS and CRB provide general health and safety advice to new starters through induction training and local line manager input. This advice includes emergency and evacuation procedures, accident reporting and first aid.

The Health and Safety policy and other health and safety information is also available for all employees on the Home Office intranet.

We have no centrally produced Health and Safety advice sheet that can be placed in the Library but will make available a copy of the Home Office Health and Safety policy.

Members: Correspondence

Mr. Arbuthnot: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to reply to the letters from the hon. Member for North East Hampshire of 18 June and 17 August 2009 on his constituent, Mr. Peter Booth. [310920]

Mr. Woolas: The signed reply letter was sent to the hon. Member for North East Hampshire on 18 January 2010.

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letters from the hon. Member for Billericay of 27 October and 8 December 2009 on his constituents, Mr and Mrs Adedoyin. [312235]

Mr. Woolas: Lin Homer, chief executive of the UK Border Agency wrote to the Member on 14 January 2010.

Passports: Fraud

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many fake British passports have been recovered (a) in the UK and (b) overseas in each year since 2005. [311304]

Meg Hillier: The number of counterfeit, or 'fake' UK passports identified in the UK and recorded by UK Border Agency since 2005 is as follows. The figures for 2009 are not currently available.

	<i>UK (number)</i>
2005	6
2006	7
2007	13
2008	23
Total	49

Figures for 'fake' UK passports encountered overseas are not available.

Passports: Lost Property

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will inquire into the whereabouts of the passport of Miss Inaaya Khurram post ref Abu Dhabi 296566; and if he will make a statement. [311378]

Mr. Woolas: I am unable to comment on individual cases in PQ replies. I have written to the hon. Member in response to the question he has raised.

Prosecutions: EU Action

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the potential effect on judicial systems in the UK of the European Public Prosecutor envisaged under the provisions of the Lisbon treaty; and if he will make a statement. [312431]

Meg Hillier: There has been no assessment of the impact of a European Public Prosecutor (EPP) on judicial systems in the UK because no proposal to create such a body has been presented.

While the Lisbon treaty created a legal base for an EPP any proposal seeking to take advantage of that legal base would have to be agreed by unanimity of all participating member states. The UK would also have the choice whether or not to participate by virtue of our Justice and Home Affairs Opt-In Protocol. Therefore, under no circumstances could we be obliged to take part in the creation of an EPP were a proposal to be made.

Repatriation: Expenditure

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent on the reintegration scheme in 2008-09. [311017]

Mr. Woolas: Reintegration assistance to support enforced and voluntary removals is provided by Assisted Voluntary Returns programmes and the Facilitated Returns Scheme.

The cost of the 2008-09 Voluntary Assisted Return and Reintegration programmes is currently not available as it is subject to audit, which will be made available in spring 2011.

The chief executive of the UK Border Agency will provide information to the Home Affairs Committee on FRS expenditure when she writes in January 2010.

Surveillance: Local Government

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst of 7 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 487W, on Members: surveillance, whether guidance has been given to public authorities on the use of surveillance authorised under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 in respect of hon. Members and noble Lords. [312020]

Mr. Hanson: Guidance to public authorities authorising covert techniques under the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000 is given in Home Office statutory codes of practice approved by Parliament. We are currently revising the codes on covert surveillance and covert human intelligence sources to make it clear that special consideration must be given to authorisations which involve information relating to communications between a Member of Parliament and a constituent in respect of constituency matters. The draft revised codes were laid before Parliament on 5 and 18 January to come into effect on 6 April.

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst of 7 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 524W, on the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act 2000, which 34 local authorities supported the use of the Act by local authorities for surveillance related to dog fouling, littering or school enrolment checking. [312022]

Mr. Hanson: My response of 7 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 524W, to the hon. Member for Bromley and Chislehurst (Robert Neill) stated that the relevant details would be published shortly and copies placed in the House Library. That was done on 18 January.

UK Border Agency: Telephone Services

Julia Goldsworthy: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what estimate he has made of the number of calls to the UK Border Agency helpline which have not been connected in the last 12 months. [312253]

Mr. Woolas: We do not record how many calls have not been connected to the UK Border Agency Helpline. Management information is only available for the resolution or otherwise of those calls that are connected.

Vetting: Young People

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many Criminal Record Bureau checks have been made on individuals who were under the age of 18 at the time of checking in the most recent year for which figures are available. [311793]

Meg Hillier: The total volume of applications made for Criminal Records Bureau (CRB) checks by people under the age of 18 during the financial year April 2009 to 18 January 2010 is 111,949.

JUSTICE

Departmental Advertising

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what advertising campaigns for which his Department is responsible have (a) commenced and (b) continued in 2009-10; and what the cost of each such campaign has been. [309944]

Mr. Wills: Advertising expenditure on campaigns is interpreted as advertising expenditure other than for recruitment purposes.

The nature of the Ministry of Justice's activities—principally administering the courts, prisons, probation and tribunals systems—is such that it does not engage in significant levels of advertising on campaigns.

A survey of business areas across the Department and its Executive agencies (the National Offender Management Service, Her Majesty's Courts Service, the Tribunals Service and the office of the Public Guardian) identified the following advertising campaigns which have commenced or continued in the 2009-10 year to date.

Campaign	Cost (£)	Date
Community Payback ¹	Funded by Home Office	March/April 2009
Youth Justice Campaign ²	Funded jointly by the Youth Task Force and Joint Youth Justice Unit	December 2009
Promotional Adverts ³	2,663	2009/10 (expenditure up until 12 January 2010)
Total	26,623	—

¹ The Community Payback campaign was commissioned by the Ministry of Justice and ran in March/April 2009. It was funded by the Home Office as part of the wider Justice Seen Justice Done campaign. The campaign informed the public of their power to nominate projects through which offenders can pay back local communities for their crimes without taking away work from others or making a profit for anyone.

² The Youth Justice campaign was commissioned by the Ministry of Justice and ran in December 2009 in the north-west of England. The campaign informed people of measures in place to tackle youth antisocial behaviour and offending. The total cost of £122,559 was funded by the Youth Taskforce (part of the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)) and the Joint Youth Justice Unit (which is managed and funded jointly by the DCSF and the Ministry of Justice).

³ The Law Commission within the Democracy, Constitution and Law division of the Ministry of Justice spent £2,663 on a number of promotional adverts in law journals, primarily to raise the profile of the Law Commission in order to: improve the rate at which proposals get implemented encourage a wider level of response to proposals on law reform encourage buy in for current and future work to continue the promotion of better law.

In addition to these outward facing campaigns, the Ministry's Communications Directorate has undertaken various internal campaigns to promote specific corporate initiatives to staff. The cost of these campaigns cannot be separately identified from the wider work of the Communications Directorate.

Departmental Training

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many sessions of media training were organised for Ministers in his Department in each of the last three years. [311513]

Mr. Wills: Training is available to Ministers on a range of issues, including handling the media, as part of both their induction and continuing development to help them carry out their duties effectively under the

Ministerial Code. No sessions of media training have been organised for Ministry of Justice Ministers in the last three years.

Departmental Waste

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what volume of waste his Department generated in each of the last three years; what percentage of this was (a) paper, (b) plastic, (c) glass, (d) metal, (e) electrical goods and batteries and (f) food waste; and what percentage of his Department's waste was (i) disposed of securely, (ii) disposed of in landfill and (iii) recycled. [311840]

Mr. Wills: The waste figures for the Ministry of Justice (MOJ) are not separated out therefore individual figures for the amount of: paper, plastic, glass, metal, electrical goods and batteries and food waste generated and the percentage of each type that was recycled are not available; nor are figures for the amount of waste disposed of securely and disposed of in landfill.

The MOJ was created in May 2007. All central Government Departments and executive agencies are required to report on sustainable operations on the Government estate (SOG) targets as part of the sustainable development in government (SDiG) reporting process. The waste reduction and recycling targets are to:

Reduce waste arising by 5 per cent. by 2010 and by 25 per cent. by 2020 relative to their 2004-05 levels, and to

Increase recycling figures to 40 per cent. of their waste arising by 2010 and by 75 per cent. by 2020.

The estimate made of total waste arising from the Ministry of Justice in 2007-08 was 71,060 tonnes of which 22 per cent. was recycled. The assessment of 2007-08 performance can be found on the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) website:

<http://www.sd-commission.org.uk/publications.php?id=853>

The estimate made of total waste arising from the Ministry of Justice in 2008-09 was 82,3277 tonnes—a reduction of 19.9 per cent. against a revised baseline. This represents excellent progress and the Ministry of Justice has already exceeded the 2010-11 waste reduction target; 36.6 per cent. was recycled. The assessment of 2008-09 performance, published by CESP on 18 December 2009, can be found on the OGC website:

http://www.ogc.gov.uk/sustainability_programme_progress.asp

Recording food waste as part of SOGE (sustainable operations on the Government estate) is optional. The following table gives an estimate of food waste generated at the Ministry of Justice by those areas that have collected the data.

	2007-8	2008-09	Tonnes 2009-10
MOJ HQ	106	168	67
National Archives	3	3	3

HM Prison Service carried out two surveys as part of a business case to evaluate requirements for in-vessel composting and de-watering technology with the overall aim of providing an effective solution to sites with food waste disposal issues and upholding the philosophy of "waste to resource". The philosophy of "waste to resource"

means taking waste and processing it into a useful, useable product and adding value to it. In 2006, based on 32 prisons, on average 1.45 kgs of food per prison place were wasted per week. In 2007, based on 51 prisons, the figure was 1.34 kgs of food waste per prison place per week.

	Number of prisons responding	Operational capacity	Average food waste per place per week (kg)
2006	32	17,416	1.45
2007	51	30,121	1.34

The use of de-watering and in-vessel composting technology has been introduced at around 35 prisons to process food waste into compost. The compost is used on prison gardens and horticultural activities thereby reducing the requirement for bought-in compost and contributing towards the HM Prison Service strategy for phasing out peat-based products.

Additionally, a small scale anaerobic digestion plant has been installed in Guy Marsh Prison with the objective of processing biodegradable wastes, including food waste, into biogas.

Industrial Health and Safety

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether written health and safety advice is issued to each new employee in his Department. [311374]

Mr. Wills: While formal written health and safety advice is not issued to each new employee in the Ministry of Justice (MoJ), written policy and guidance is available to all staff on the intranet. The MoJ is committed to ensuring that all staff receive appropriate information, instruction and training on the health and safety matters relevant to their roles, and health, safety and fire awareness are an important part of the induction process for new staff. Moreover, health and safety risk assessments and safe systems of work are available at the point of use. HM Prison Service was awarded the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents Training Trophy in 2007 for excellence in the delivery of work-related health and safety training.

Prisons: Drugs

Alan Duncan: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many internal audits of mandatory drug testing have been carried out in each of the last two years; and if he will publish them. [300954]

Maria Eagle: National Offender Management Service's (NOMS) Internal Audit completed two audits of mandatory drug testing (MDT) in the last two years. A follow-up audit which assessed progress made in implementing recommendations made in an earlier report was completed in 2008. A further full audit of MDT was completed in August 2009. From January 2010, Internal Audit will undertake a regular programme of MDT audits. This will become part of the existing establishment audit programme and will review MDT procedures in approximately 35 establishments per year. Reports are published internally.

Remand in Custody

Mr. Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many young people of each ethnicity aged (a) under 18, (b) between 18 and 20 and (c) between 21 and 25 years old have been (i) remanded in custody and (ii) sentenced to custody in each of the last five years. [312256]

Maria Eagle: Figures requested are shown in the following tables.

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.

Remand receptions by ethnicity and age band 2004

	Ages				Total
	15-17	18-20	21-25	Over 25	
Total	4,355	8,517	31,943	9,741	54,556
White	3,343	6,407	8,817	22,336	40,903
Mixed	217	330	380	718	1,645
Asian or Asian British	179	508	964	1,783	3,434
Black or Black British	573	1,096	1,676	4,350	7,695
Chinese or Other	27	108	124	334	593
Unrecorded	13	38	78	27	156
1991 census codes	3	30	67	30	130

Sentenced receptions by ethnicity and age band 2004

	Ages				Total
	15-17	18-20	21-25	Over 25	
Total	5,172	13,092	22,240	52,822	93,326
White	4,120	10,652	17,828	42,959	75,559
Mixed	253	395	575	1,037	2,260
Asian or Asian British	227	683	1,482	2,425	4,817
Black or Black British	529	1,174	2,068	5,738	9,509
Chinese or Other	26	105	158	390	679
Unrecorded	16	47	58	120	241
1991 census codes	1	36	71	153	261

Remand receptions by ethnicity and age band 2005

	Ages				Total
	15-17	18-20	21-25	Over 25	
Total	4,358	8,405	11,661	31,031	55,455
White	3,272	6,271	8,435	22,918	40,896
Mixed	232	319	366	715	1,632
Asian or Asian British	202	509	977	2,114	3,802
Black or Black British	612	1,186	1,666	4,742	8,206
Chinese or Other	25	84	172	428	709
Unrecorded	13	32	26	70	141
1991 census codes	2	4	19	44	69

Sentenced receptions by ethnicity and age band 2005

	Ages				Total
	15-17	18-20	21-25	Over 25	
Total	5,175	12,644	20,495	52,100	90,414
White	4,185	10,280	16,275	41,550	72,290
Mixed	246	418	524	988	2,176
Asian or Asian British	218	644	1,435	2,869	5,166
Black or Black British	498	1,167	1,971	5,884	9,520
Chinese or Other	18	87	203	611	919
Unrecorded	8	42	63	150	263
1991 census codes	2	6	24	48	80

Remand receptions by ethnicity and age band 2006

	Ages				Total
	15-17	18-20	21-25	Over 25	
Total	4,538	8,499	11,249	31,523	55,809
White	3,284	6,254	8,023	23,258	40,819
Mixed	288	395	392	722	1,797
Asian or Asian British	204	489	1,005	2,188	3,886
Black or Black British	714	1,229	1,607	4,709	8,259
Chinese or Other	34	99	184	522	839
Unrecorded	9	28	25	78	140
1991 census codes	5	5	13	46	69

Immediate custodial sentence receptions by ethnicity and age band 2006

	Ages				Total
	15-17	18-20	21-25	Over 25	
Total	5,291	12,694	19,437	50,712	88,134
White	4,154	10,247	15,155	40,266	69,822
Mixed	271	463	515	1,005	2,254
Asian or Asian British	229	645	1,493	2,831	5,198
Black or Black British	604	1,168	1,963	5,777	9,512
Chinese or Other	25	118	248	633	1,024
Unrecorded	6	49	48	159	262
1991 census codes	2	4	15	41	62

Remand receptions by ethnicity and age band 2007

	Ages				Total
	15-17	18-20	21-25	Over 25	
Total	4,460	8,299	11,197	31,349	55,305
White	3,140	5,996	7,898	22,466	39,500
Mixed	308	392	420	793	1,913
Asian or Asian British	233	490	959	2,305	3,987
Black or Black British	721	1,293	1,616	4,952	8,582
Chinese or Other	42	115	262	753	1,172
Unrecorded	13	10	24	58	105
1991 census codes	3	3	18	22	46

Immediate custodial sentence receptions by ethnicity and age band 2007

	Ages				Total
	15-17	18-20	21-25	Over 25	
Total	5,356	13,666	19,617	51,622	90,261
White	4,138	11,047	15,369	40,872	71,426
Mixed	369	586	630	1,022	2,607
Asian or Asian British	232	625	1,380	3,069	5,306
Black or Black British	582	1,277	1,919	5,794	9,572
Chinese or Other	24	106	247	720	1,097
Unrecorded	9	18	67	135	229
1991 census codes	2	7	5	10	24

Remand receptions by ethnicity and age band 2008

	Ages				All
	15-17	18-20	21-25	Over 25	
All	4,051	8,413	11,460	33,493	57,417
White	2,772	5,934	8,086	23,976	40,768
Mixed	293	467	471	857	2,088
Asian or Asian British	233	546	983	2,690	4,452
Black or Black British	706	1,313	1,674	5,128	8,821
Chinese or Other	39	130	229	803	1,201
Unrecorded	6	13	14	37	70
1991 census codes	2	10	3	2	17

Ethnic by age (sentenced) 2008

	15-17	18-20	21-25	Over 25	All
	All	5,290	14,199	21,535	57,796
White	3,982	11,339	16,981	45,701	78,003
Mixed	331	621	723	1,209	2,884
Asian or British Asian	263	709	1,522	3,642	6,136
Black or Black British	691	1,401	2,044	6,232	10,368
Chinese and Other	14	112	222	933	1,281
Not recorded	7	12	34	69	122
1991 census codes	2	5	9	10	26

Reoffenders

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice pursuant to the answer of 16 December 2009, *Official Report*, column 1246W, on reoffenders, for what reason some offenders were listed in prison data but could not be found on the police national computer. [312410]

Maria Eagle: The answer I gave the hon. Member for Shipley (Philip Davies) on 16 December 2009, *Official Report*, columns 1246-47W, presented figures on offences committed by offenders while on Home Detention Curfew (HDC). These figures were obtained by matching a dataset of offenders released on HDC with offending data taken from an extract of the police national computer (PNC). There is no unique offender ID common to the two datasets. The matching process uses each offender's surname, forename, gender and date of birth and involves both direct matching and a variety of 'sounds like'

algorithms to allow for minor errors in data entry. A small proportion of cases in each quarter cannot be matched; this can result from errors in the recording of personal details in either of the data sources, from duplicate matches when it is not possible to decide between PNC records for offenders with similar details, or from records missing from the PNC. In 2007-08 one per cent. of the offenders listed on the prison data as released on HDC could not be matched to the PNC.

Sexual Offences: Finance

Mr. Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much funding the Government allocated to the Coventry Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre in 2008-09. [312121]

Claire Ward: The Government provided Coventry Rape and Sexual Abuse Centre with £124,300 of funding in 2008-09.

CABINET OFFICE

Government Departments: Telecommunications

Mark Pritchard: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if she will discuss with BT improvements to the resilience and security of its telecommunications services to Government Departments. [305612]

Tessa Jowell: BT and other suppliers of telecommunications services to Government Departments discuss these issues with senior officials directly and in a number of forums including in the Electronic Communications—Resilience and Response Group.

CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

Apprentices

Mr. Laws: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families what proportion of (a) 16 and (b) 17 year-olds are (i) employed and (ii) non-employed apprentices on (A) Level 2 and (B) Level 3 frameworks. [303728]

Mr. Iain Wright: According to DCSF official participation estimates for young people in England at the end of 2008, 3.1 per cent. of academic age 16-year-olds were on a level 2 apprenticeship and 0.7 per cent. were on a level 3 apprenticeship. The corresponding figures for 17-year-olds were 4.9 per cent. on level 2 apprenticeships and 1.4 per cent. on level 3 apprenticeships.

These estimates are based on snapshot data for the end of 2008 and on the highest course of study of the young person. They cannot be broken down by employment status because the Learning and Skills Council's Individualised Learner Record (ILR) which is the source of information for apprenticeships only has employment status when they start their apprenticeship and this often changes during their time on an apprenticeship.

Departmental Electronic Equipment

Mr. Hands: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families how many iPods have been bought by his Department since 2005; and at what cost. [311903]

Ms Diana R. Johnson: The DCSF have no records of any iPod devices being purchased.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mr. Graham Stuart: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families how much expenditure his Department has incurred in respect of meals and subsistence for (a) him and (b) each other Minister in his Department since June 2007; and if he will make a statement. [303105]

Ms Diana R. Johnson: The information is not available in the format requested and can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Written Questions

Mr. Harper: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families how many and what percentage of parliamentary questions tabled for written answer by his Department on a named day in session 2008-09 received a substantive answer on that day. [307538]

Ms Diana R. Johnson: The information requested is in the following table.

<i>Named day PQs Session 2008-09</i>			
	<i>Tabled</i>	<i>Replied to on named day</i>	<i>Percentage</i>
December 2008	42	20	48
January 2009	77	42	55
February 2009	75	34	43
March 2009	83	51	61
April 2009	65	46	71
May 2009	71	51	72
June 2009	49	34	69
July 2009	15	12	80
August 2009	n/a	n/a	n/a
September 2009	38	31	82
October 2009	69	46	67
November 2009	82	46	56
December 2009	47	34	72

Central guidance on answering parliamentary questions is now available in the "Guide to Parliamentary Work", at:

<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/parliamentary-clerk-guide.aspx>

In the response to the Procedure Committee Report on written parliamentary questions, the Government accepted the Committee's recommendation that Departments be required to provide the Procedure Committee with sessional statistics in a standard format on the time taken to respond to written parliamentary questions, accompanied by an explanatory memorandum setting out any factors affecting their performance. This will be taken forward as soon as possible.

Future Jobs Fund

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families how many school leavers have participated in programmes under the Future Jobs Fund (a) nationally and (b) in Milton Keynes since its inception. [311246]

Jim Knight: I have been asked to reply.

The Future Jobs Fund started in July 2009 and the youth element is aimed at 18 to 24-year-olds who have been unemployed for six months; therefore we would not expect last year's school leavers to participate in the scheme yet.

GCSE

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families (1) how many and what proportion of students (a) with special educational needs and (b) whose first language is not English gained (i) five GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A* to C, (ii) five GCSEs at grades A* to G and (iii) at least one GCSE pass in each year since 1997; [310562]

(2) how many and what proportion of students eligible for free school meals gained (a) five GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A* to C, (b) five GCSEs at grades A* to G and (c) at least one GCSE pass in each year since 2002. [310564]

Ms Diana R. Johnson [holding answer 13 January 2010]: Information on pupil attainment linked to their characteristics was not recorded before 2002, therefore the requested information for 1997 to 2001 is not available. All the requested information has been published for 2006 to 2009, with some elements published for earlier years.

The requested information for the years 2006 to 2009 is published on the departmental website at:

http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000900/SFR34_2009FinalUpdated.xls

The available information for 2005 is published on the departmental website at:

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000640/index.shtml>

The available information for 2004 is published on the departmental website at:

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000564/index.shtml>

The available information for the years 2002 and 2003 is published on the departmental website at:

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000448/index.shtml>

Measure (i), five GCSEs including English and mathematics at grades A* to C, is available for 2005-09.

Measure (ii), five GCSEs at grades A* to G, is available for 2002, 2003 and 2006 to 2009.

Measure (iii), at least one GCSE pass, is available for 2004-09.

In addition, the number of pupils achieving no GCSE passes is available for 2002 and 2003.

Offenders

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families how many employees of his Department have been convicted of a criminal offence in the last five years. [310696]

Ms Diana R. Johnson: The Department requires employees to notify their manager immediately they are arrested and charged with a criminal offence. If the employee is convicted, the Department will investigate and start a disciplinary process which may lead to dismissal. New employees must declare convictions during the recruitment process. Records back to 1995 are not held electronically nor in the format requested and a comprehensive search of paper based files, back to 1995 would result in disproportionate cost.

Young Offenders

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families with reference to the statistical release of 26 November 2009 entitled Youth crime: young people aged 10 to 17 receiving their first reprimand, warning or conviction, in England, 2000-01 to 2008-09, how many of the offenders referred to in table one were aged (a) 10 to 12, (b) 13 to 15 and (c) 16 to 17 years old. [312100]

Mr. Coaker [holding answer 20 January 2010]: The number of young people, aged (a) 10 to 12, (b) 13 to 15 and (c) 16 to 17, receiving their first reprimand, warning or conviction processed by English or Welsh police forces can be found in the following tables:

Number of young people aged 10 to 17 receiving their first reprimand, warning or conviction, processed by English or Welsh police forces (and percentage of year total)

	Financial year									
	2000-01		2001-02		2002-03		2003-04		2004-05	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
(a) 10 to 12-year-old at time of offence	13,652	15	13,136	15	11,492	14	11,936	14	13,048	14
(b) 13 to 15-year-old at time of offence	45,393	51	44,672	50	40,830	49	44,139	50	49,067	51
(c) 16 to 17-year-old at time of offence	30,808	34	31,108	35	30,957	37	32,164	36	33,640	35
Total (10 to 17-year-old at time of offence)	89,853	100	88,916	100	83,279	100	88,239	100	95,755	100

	2005-06		2006-07		2007-08		2008-09	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
(a) 10 to 12-year-old at time of offence	14,769	14	15,686	14	13,780	14	10,152	13
(b) 13 to 15-year-old at time of offence	56,233	52	57,695	52	51,307	51	39,237	50
(c) 16 to 17-year-old at time of offence	36,273	34	36,905	33	35,123	35	29,871	38
Total (10 to 17-year-old at time of offence)	107,275	100	110,286	100	100,210	100	79,260	100

An equivalent breakdown by age bands is not available for offenders living in England due to the method used to allocate records where insufficient address data are available.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Location

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development with reference to the answer of 17 June 2009, *Official Report*, House of Lords, column 210WA, in respect of which countries co-location with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office has been explored but rejected; and for what reasons co-location was rejected in each case. [311568]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: Since April 2007, the Department for International Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) have explored options to co-locate in Pretoria, Abuja, Bridgetown and Pristina and decided not to proceed because the proposed moves would not provide value for money. The options for these posts are kept under review, along with those for all other posts which are currently not co-located.

Departmental Public Consultation

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether any citizen juries or summits have been hosted by his Department since October 2008. [311624]

Mr. Michael Foster: No citizen juries or summits have been hosted by the Department for International Development (DFID) since October 2008.

Diplomatic Services: Procurement

Mr. Andrew Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development in which countries his Department share procurement arrangements with the British Embassy, Consulate or High Commission. [311588]

Mr. Douglas Alexander: The Department of International Development (DFID) shares some aspects of procurement arrangements overseas with the Foreign Office, collaborating as opportunities arise, most frequently in the provision of estate management and security, travel management and healthcare support. We are pursuing opportunities to extend shared procurement arrangements.

Middle East: Armed Conflict

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to the answer of 5 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 201W, on the Middle East: armed conflict, what steps are being taken to remove white phosphorus contamination from rubble in Gaza; how many sites have been found to be contaminated; what timetable is envisaged for decontamination; and what assessment has been made of the risk to public health arising from such contamination. [311486]

Mr. Michael Foster: Following the end of the conflict the UN Mine Action Team (UNMAT) carried out an unexploded ordnance (UXO) clearance operation and any white phosphorus (WP) rounds that were found, whether leaking or intact, were removed and neutralised. During this initial phase UNMAT assisted in the destruction of over 100 WP rounds. UNMAT has also removed and neutralized 53 WP rounds found in further clearance operations carried out since July 2009.

Currently, the UN does not know of any contaminated sites where WP remains. However, there may be a residual risk in buildings and areas yet to be cleared. The removal of UXO and explosive remnants of war (ERW) from rubble and agricultural areas will continue until July 2010.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) is unaware of any assessments of the risk to public health arising from WP contamination. However, UNMAT notes that exposed WP normally burns immediately, leaving remnants which pose a limited risk. Unexposed WP is safe until it is discovered or exposed to air. If WP is exposed during clearance, UNMAT is ready to deal with the situation immediately.

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to the answer of 5 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 256W, on the Middle East: armed conflict, what arrangements his Department has made to meet the housing needs of the 60,000 families identified as being in need; and if he will make a statement. [311487]

Mr. Michael Foster: The Department for International Development (DFID) supported the provision of basic shelter by the UN Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) in the immediate aftermath of the conflict. The Prime Minister, other UK Ministers and officials have repeatedly pressed the Government of Israel to permit the import of materials for the reconstruction of homes and other buildings.

We are pleased that Israel has now allowed some glass to enter, but we will continue to advocate on this issue. We are also following with interest the UNRWA pilot project to build three houses using locally-manufactured compressed earth bricks, made from locally sourced materials such as sub-soil and aggregates.

Palestinians: Overseas Aid

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development on how many occasions a Minister from his Department has visited Gaza to assess the humanitarian situation since the conflict in Gaza began; and if he will make a statement. [311397]

Mr. Michael Foster: The Secretary of State for International Development visited Gaza on 1 March 2009. He was accompanied by John Ging, the UN Relief and Works Agency's Director for Gaza. The Secretary of State saw for himself the level of destruction in Gaza and met with people affected by the conflict. He also discussed relief efforts with the representatives of UK Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs).

Officials from the Department for International Development regularly visit Gaza to assess the humanitarian situation and keep in close contact with NGOs and United Nations agencies. The Secretary of State receives regular briefings regarding the situation on the ground.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what plans the Government has to raise the restrictions placed by the government of Israel on access for humanitarian aid and reconstruction materials into Gaza at the UN Security Council; and if he will make a statement. [311400]

Mr. Michael Foster: The UK consistently presses the Government of Israel to ease border restrictions and permit the flow of humanitarian aid and reconstruction material into Gaza. The Secretary of State for International Development raised this issue in a telephone call with the Israeli Defence Minister in December. The UK has also raised the need for improved access in several international fora, including the UN Security Council on 17 December 2009.

We shall continue to take all appropriate opportunities to press for improved access into Gaza, full implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1860 and full respect of international humanitarian law.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what Government policy is on the legality under international law of Israeli restrictions on the access into Gaza of humanitarian aid. [311401]

Mr. Michael Foster: Although there is no permanent physical Israeli presence in Gaza, given the significant control that Israel has over Gaza's borders, airspace and territorial waters, Israel retains obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention as an occupying power. These include an obligation to facilitate the transfer of humanitarian aid into Gaza. We are extremely concerned by the continued restrictions on materials entering Gaza and will continue to press the Israeli Government to ease their restrictions.

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Richmond, Yorks, of 5 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 255W, on Palestinians: overseas aid, what assessment he has made of the extent to which the decision of the government of Israel to link aid and reconstruction materials access to Hamas's refusal to renounce violence constitutes collective punishment of the people of Gaza; and if he will make a statement. [311581]

Mr. Michael Foster: We have serious concerns about the Israeli restrictions on Gaza and the impact they have on the lives of Gazans. Although there is no permanent physical Israeli presence in Gaza, given the significant control that Israel has over Gaza's borders, airspace and territorial waters, Israel retains obligations under the Fourth Geneva Convention as an occupying power. The Fourth Geneva Convention is clear that an occupying power must co-operate in allowing the passage and distribution of relief consignments. The restrictions currently imposed on the passage of relief supplies are, as we see it, a disproportionate response to the security threat.

The extent of Israeli restrictions, and the threat to Israel from militants in Gaza, varies constantly. Rather than focus on whether the restrictions at any given time, amount to collective punishment, we have consistently pressed the Israeli Government to comply with their obligations under international law and allow passage of relief supplies. Although aid is entering Gaza, according to the United Nations this is insufficient to meet the needs of the Gazan people.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Climate Change: International Cooperation

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many officials accompanied the UK ministerial delegation to the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen; how many such officials used each (a) mode and (b) class of travel; and what the total cost was of such travel. [310741]

Joan Ruddock: Two Ministers and 54 officials comprised the official UK delegation to the UN Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen. 45 delegates travelled by air, seven travelled by train, and four did not require any international travel.

Both Ministers and the five DECC officials accompanying them travelled business class. The other 33 DECC delegates travelled on economy tickets. The total cost of DECC's travel was roughly £19,390.

This does not include the Prime Minister and the delegation from No. 10.

Climatic Research Unit

Mr. Rob Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what plans he has for his Department's funding of the climate programme at the Hadley Centre after 2010. [310991]

Joan Ruddock: Funding for climate change research undertaken by the Met Office Hadley Centre has been agreed through to March 2011, with contributions from DECC, DEFRA and DFID. Funding beyond April 2011 will be subject to the normal Government Spending Round processes.

Departmental Food

Mr. Paice: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate he has made of the quantity of food waste generated by his Department in each year for which figures are available. [310810]

Joan Ruddock: DECC endeavours to send as much of its food waste as possible for environmentally-friendly treatment (generally composting) rather than to landfill. The total amount of food waste sent for treatment in this way, included as part of the Sustainable Operations on the Government Estate reporting process is 6.88 tonnes for January 2009 to December 2009.

Some additional food waste, which has not been quantified, may have entered the residual waste stream and been sent to landfill.

Departmental Internet

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change pursuant to the answer of 13 January 2010, *Official Report*, columns 1045-8W, on departmental internet, how many staff worked on each listed website (a) in each of the last three years and (b) on the latest date for which figures are available. [311920]

Joan Ruddock [*holding answer 19 January 2010*]: The DECC corporate site:

www.decc.gov.uk

was launched on 23 February 2009. 1.5 full-time equivalent members of staff worked on the website at the time of launch in 2008-09. 3.5 members of staff are working on the website as of 19 January 2010.

The majority of other sites run by the Department are resourced entirely by outside agencies and require/have required no departmental staff involvement.

Those sites that do require/have required staff involvement are as follows:

	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009 to date
http://actonco2.direct.gov.uk/actonco2/home.html	0	0	2 FT staff	2 FT staff
www.og.decc.gov.uk	1 ¹	1 ¹	1 ¹	1 ¹
https://www.og.decc.gov.uk/EIP/pages/help.htm	1 ¹	1 ¹	1 ¹	1 ¹
www.pilottaskforce.co.uk	1 ¹	1 ¹	1 ¹	1 ¹
www.actoncopenhagen.gov.uk	0	0	0	1 FT May 2009 to present; and 1 FT from August to December 2009
www.corwm.org.uk	1 FT	1 FT	1 FT	1 FT
https://www.energyngpsconsultation.decc.gov.uk/	0	0	0	2 FT

¹ One FT member of staff working across the three sites <https://www.og.decc.gov.uk/EIP/pages/help.htm> was launched in 2008-09.

Exhaust Emissions: Aviation

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what research his Department has (a) commissioned and (b) undertaken on claims by airlines that they are able to prove reductions in greenhouse gas emissions arising from their activities. [311945]

Joan Ruddock: The Department has not commissioned or undertaken research on any claims that may have been made by airlines that they are able to prove reductions in greenhouse gas emissions arising from their activities. DECC does, however, monitor UK aviation emissions through its UK greenhouse gas inventory and to some extent can use this to assess the impact of activities in the airline industry.

The Government encourage airlines to set environmental targets and to monitor their progress against them. However, we have no current plans to review the differing methodologies they apply in carrying out this work.

Fuel Poverty: Preston

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many households in Preston have received assistance under the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme since the inception of the scheme. [311143]

Mr. Kidney: The following table shows how many households in Preston have received assistance under the Warm Front Scheme (the operating name of the Home Energy Efficiency Scheme in England) since its inception.

	Preston
	Number
2000-01	607
2001-02	985
2002-03	1,191
2003-04	1,317
2004-05	845
2005-06	562
2005-06	423
2006-07	1,248

Preston

	<i>Number</i>
2007-08	1,272
2008-09	865
2009-10 ¹	772
Total	10,087

¹ Up to 31 December 2009

Industrial Diseases: Compensation

Mr. Roger Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether he plans to establish a compensation scheme for surface workers as part of the British Coal Respiratory Disease Scheme; and if he will make a statement. [312234]

Mr. Kidney: No.

Miners with surface only exposure to dust were not covered by the 1998 High Court Respiratory Disease Judgment and not included under the Claims Handling Agreement (CHA). The Department's position has been that the levels of respirable dust (rather than visible dust) in surface jobs was not sufficient to cause lung disease. Despite the Department's position on these cases, I recognise there has been a long-standing campaign to seek compensation for surface workers. In an attempt to settle this issue, four "test" cases were to be brought before the court for determination in November 2009.

I can now report that at a pre-trial court hearing on 9 October 2009, the solicitors acting for the four selected claimants conceded the litigation on all four cases and costs were awarded to the Department. When advising the court of the position, the claimants' counsel said:

"in the light of the expert evidence in each case, the court was likely to make findings in relation to dust exposure that would make it difficult for any of these four claimants to establish any significant injury."

On this basis, no case for compensation has been established in respect of surface workers with surface only exposure.

However, due to the Department's diligence, I can report that c.650 claims previously identified as Coal Preparation Plant only claims by their solicitors were found to be able to be compensated as "mixed workers" under the CHA and these are now being processed. Additionally, another c.200 claims are now having their underground only employment assessed and settled.

Under a Court Order agreed in December 2009, and not opposed by the claimant's solicitors, all remaining surface only claims are now in the "strike out" process for mid February 2010.

Natural Gas: Storage

Andrew Stunell: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether he plans to increase the capacity of the UK's strategic gas reserve in respect of (a) short-term and (b) long-term strategic storage; and if he will make a statement. [310099]

Mr. Kidney: The provision of gas storage capacity is a commercial matter; Great Britain does not have a designated "strategic gas reserve". National Grid's 'Gas Transportation Ten Year Statement 2009', published in December, reports 22 commercial gas storage projects at various stages of

development. If these all proceed to commissioning, they could increase our gas storage capacity, to serve a range of short-term and long-term needs, by some 400 per cent. by around 2020. The Government are helping these projects to go forward, through reforms to the onshore and offshore consents regimes under the Planning and Energy Acts 2008; and by clarifying, alongside Budget 2009, that cushion gas, required by gas storage facilities, is eligible for tax relief.

Nuclear Power Stations

Mr. Dai Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change pursuant to the answer to Baroness Neville-Jones of 11 January 2010, *Official Report*, House of Lords, column WA128, what the outcome was of the inquiry into the removal of protectively marked information from a nuclear licensed site in 2006. [311291]

Mr. Kidney: A recommendation was made to provide a programme of training and education for the individual responsible for the inadvertent disclosure, and this training duly took place.

Mr. Dai Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change by what process he plans to take into account submissions made to his Department's consultations on (a) the National Nuclear Policy Statement and (b) the regulatory justification of new nuclear power stations; and when he expects to respond to each consultation. [311292]

Mr. Kidney: The consultation on the Nuclear and other energy National Policy Statements will close on 22 February 2010. The Government will carefully consider the responses made to the consultation, along with the output of the Parliamentary Scrutiny of the National Policy Statements, and intend to publish a revised National Policy Statement when the process is complete.

On Regulatory Justification, my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has published his proposed decisions for consultation. He will consider all responses received before making his final decisions and expects to respond to the consultation at the end of this process.

Warm Front Scheme

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate his Department has made of the average waiting time for the installation of (a) heating and (b) insulation measures under the Warm Front scheme in (i) Jarrow constituency, (ii) South Tyneside, (iii) the North East and (iv) the UK in each year since the inception of that scheme. [310621]

Mr. Kidney: The following table details average timescales in working days for (a) heating and (b) insulation measures delivered by Warm Front in England since the beginning of the current phase of the scheme in 2005, and for Jarrow, South Tyneside and North East England in the current year to date.

Further details on timescales for (i) Jarrow constituency, (ii) South Tyneside, (iii) the North East will be placed in the House of Commons Library when available.

	2005-06		2006-07		2007-08		2008-09		Average days 2009-10 ¹	
	Heating	Insulation	Heating	Insulation	Heating	Insulation	Heating	Insulation	Heating	Insulation
Jarrow	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	32.2	17.1
South Tyneside	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	36.3	16.1
North East England	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	36.2	13.6
England	67.7	30.9	81.7	33.2	65.8	27.6	65.1	34.0	36.1	14.8

¹ To 31 December 2009

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what estimate he has made of the number of back boilers which have been replaced under the Warm Front scheme in (a) Jarrow constituency, (b) South Tyneside, (c) the North East and (d) the UK in each year since its inception.

[310622]

Jarrow constituency, (b) South Tyneside, (c) the North East and (d) England in each year since the current phase of the Scheme began in 2005, but does not differentiate between back boilers and other type of boiler replaced under Warm Front. Details on types of boiler being replaced are not recorded.

Mr. Kidney: The following table shows the total number of boilers replaced by the Warm Front Scheme in (a)

Boilers Installed	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10 ¹	Total
Jarrow	31	104	248	257	160	800
South Tyneside	80	295	493	550	291	1709
North East England	1175	4745	7379	8448	6152	27899
England	14,136	53,436	75,600	80,458	66,212	289,842

¹ Up to 3 December 2009

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much has been provided in Warm Front grants in (a) Jarrow constituency, (b) South Tyneside, (c) the North East and (d) the UK in each year since their inception.

[310664]

Mr. Kidney: The following table shows the value of Warm Front funding spent in (a) Jarrow constituency, (b) South Tyneside, (c) the North East and (d) England in each year since the beginning of the current phase of the Scheme in 2005.

Measures Spend	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	Total
Jarrow	194,674.62	335,418.07	722,418.63	791,523.15	518,328.38	2,562,362.85
South Tyneside	439,733.01	917,753.50	1,431,320.02	1,659,580.58	307,773.59	4,756,160.71
North East England	8,013,910.25	17,304,135.33	24,211,961.07	27,050,477.38	17,056,295.05	93,636,779.09
England	117,586,794.08	261,354,000.01	336,001,000.06	362,115,000.16	319,114,710.69	1,396,171,505.00

Note:

Figures above include the cost of all measures provided through Warm Front, including those subsequently funded through interaction with other programmes (for example with utilities and CERT).

Warm Front Scheme: Derbyshire

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many households in (a) Chesterfield and (b) Derbyshire have received grants under the Warm Front Scheme in each year since the inception of the scheme.

[311382]

Mr. Kidney: The following table shows the number of households which have received grants under the Warm Front Scheme in (a) Chesterfield and (b) Derbyshire each year since the beginning of the current phase of the Scheme in 2005. Figures prior to 2005 are unavailable.

The current Scheme manager did not manage the Scheme in these areas at this time, as such, the data retained are not sufficient to provide a consolidated response.

	Chesterfield	Derbyshire
2005-06	187	2,847
2006-07	615	6,183
2007-08	754	6,481
2008-09	498	5,341
2009-10 ¹	471	4,117
Total	2,525	19,585

¹ Up to 31 December 2009.

Warm Front Scheme: Disabled

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change for what reasons he decided that households with no eligible adults but with children in receipt of disability living allowance would not be eligible for assistance under the Warm Front scheme. [311649]

Mr. Kidney: To be eligible for the Scheme the applicant or their spouse must be a homeowner or tenant in the private sector and in receipt of a qualifying disability or income related benefit.

The current criteria have been selected because they offer a practical way of assessing the likelihood of a household being at risk of fuel poverty. Although this method is by no means perfect, other methods considered were judged to be either less accurate at reaching target vulnerable groups or prohibitively expensive to administer.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Affordable Housing: Lewes

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has to increase the number of dwellings available for low-cost home ownership in Lewes constituency. [311169]

John Healey: Increasing affordable housing is a priority for Government and we have substantially increased funding for this through The National Affordable Housing Programme, delivered through the Homes and Communities Agency. Most recently a substantial part of the extra £1.5 billion Housing Pledge set out in June 2009 is for additional affordable housing.

It is for local authorities and their partners to seek funding for suitable good value-for money-schemes. Registered social landlords working in Lewes have been successful in bids for almost £1.8 million in the current three year period to build 60 low-cost home ownership properties. This is in addition to almost £6 million provided to build new affordable homes for rent.

Air Conditioning

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) what assessment he has made of the level of compliance with the requirement for all air conditioning systems over 250kW to be inspected under the terms of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive by 4 January 2009; and if he will make a statement; [310923]

(2) what assessment he has made of the level of compliance in Government buildings with the requirement under the terms of the Energy Performance of Buildings Directive for air conditioning systems over 250kW to be inspected by 4 January 2009; and if he will make a statement. [310924]

John Healey: This information is not held centrally.

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether he plans to require all mandatory air conditioning systems reports to be logged on a central database; and if he will make a statement. [310925]

John Healey: We intend to consult in due course on whether to make it mandatory to lodge air conditioning reports on the National Register.

Community Relations

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what datasets are being collected under his Departmental Strategic Objective Indicator 4.4, on the extent to which domestic communities, particularly Muslim communities, reject and condemn violent extremism; what the methodology is for collecting data for this indicator; what targets have been set for it; and what the baseline is. [311813]

Mr. Malik: The Citizenship Survey already provides data to measure across our DSO 4. We are continuing to explore ways to measure DSO 4.4 in a manner which ensures a robust indicator for which data quality standards are met. No targets or baselines have been set as yet for DSO 4.4.

Community Relations: Finance

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with reference to page 13 of his Department's Resource Accounts 2008-09, HC 449, whether any delays in awarding grants under new Prevent grant programmes came from (a) potential applicants not having satisfied appropriate checks and (b) the time taken to perform appropriate checks; and which body undertook the checks on grant recipients. [311531]

Mr. Malik: Organisations that apply to the Community Leadership Fund (CLF) for funding are subject to an assessment process, which includes evaluation of proposals against published criteria and the suitability of organisations to deliver their proposals through financial and background checks. Agreement to fund organisations is also subject to ministerial approval.

Delays did not arise from potential applicants not having satisfied appropriate checks, but the assessment process took longer than expected due to the volume of applications received—approximately three months, from closing date to obtaining ministerial approval. This resulted in some payments not being made to organisations before the end of the financial year.

Departmental Consultants

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much his Department has paid PA Consulting for services relating to the FiReControl project; and whether a proportion of such payments included bonus payments for meeting targets. [312026]

Mr. Malik: Between April 2004 and December 2009 we have paid PA Consulting £37 million for consultancy services in relation to FiReControl. PA Consultancy invoice us for the number of days their consultants work on the project in line with the contract terms and conditions. No bonus payments are made by the Department.

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with reference to his Department's press release of 6 January 2010, on new faith advisers, what consideration he gave to appointing a representative of the Roman Catholic Church as an adviser. [311797]

Mr. Malik: The new panel of expert advisers on faith is not a representative body and there is therefore no requirement for it to include representatives of any denomination or faith. The Faith Communities Consultative Council which I jointly chair continues to be the main representative forum for consultation between Government and faith communities. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of England and Wales is represented on the Council.

Domestic Waste: Waste Disposal

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether his Department has provided guidance to local authorities on the use of stop notice powers in respect of (a) illegal dumping of material from an unauthorised traveller site and (b) the stationing of a caravan which is used as a residence. [312027]

Mr. Malik: Local authorities have powers under the 'Clean Neighbourhoods and Environment Act 2005' that enables them to remove fly-tipped waste and upon conviction to recover costs from those who deposited the waste, or allowed it to be illegally dumped.

The Government have published guidance setting out the powers available to local authorities when tackling unauthorised developments. The 'Guide to Effective Use of Enforcement Powers—Part 2: Unauthorised Development of Caravan Sites' is available on the Department's website at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/unauthorisedsites>

Empty Property: Chelmsford

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what estimate he has made of the number of empty (a) residential and (b) commercial properties in (i) West Chelmsford constituency and (ii) Chelmsford local authority area in the last five years for which figures are available. [312481]

Barbara Follett: The number of empty residential properties in the Chelmsford local authority area in 2005 to 2009 are shown in the following table:

	<i>Number</i>
2005	1,489
2006	1,551
2007	1,703
2008	1,706
2009	1,674

The data are both short-term and long-term empty dwellings as reported annually by all billing authorities in England in October of the year. Data are not available at a constituency level.

No estimates of empty non-domestic properties have been published.

Fabian Society

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will place in the Library a copy of the speech given by the Minister for Housing and Planning to the Fabian Society on 9 December 2009. [311547]

John Healey: A copy of my speech is available on the Fabian Society website at:

<http://www.fabian-society.org.uk/events/speeches/healey-speech-housing-after-the-crunch>

Fire Prevention: Construction

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Peterborough of 8 December 2009, *Official Report*, column 302W, on fires, if he will place in the Library a copy of the minutes of the meetings of (a) 13 October, (b) 1 December and (c) 3 December 2009. [311845]

Mr. Malik: The minutes of the joint meeting with Business and Community Safety Forum and the Practitioners' Forum on 13 October 2009 will be placed in the Library as soon as they have been formally agreed by the respective forums.

Minutes were not taken for either the private meeting between myself and the Chief Fire Officers Association Presidential Team on 1 December 2009, or for the meeting which my officials facilitated with representatives from the fire service, local authority building control bodies, Association of Consultant Approved Inspectors and the Health and Safety Executive on 3 December 2009.

Fire Services

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the (a) original timetable was and (b) the latest timetable is for the (i) Firelink, (ii) FireBuy Integrated Clothing and (iii) FireControl project. [311626]

Mr. Malik: The ministerial announcement of the Firelink project was made in May 2002 with completion scheduled December 2007. Subsequently the contract was awarded in March 2006 and roll-out to fire service vehicles commenced in November 2008, with completion revised to March 2010.

The original timetable of the Integrated Clothing Project was for Firebuy to let the contract by December 2006. The purchase only part of the contract was signed in November 2007 and the fully managed service option was signed in May 2008.

The original go-live timetable for the FiReControl project was to complete in December 2007 in line with the Firelink project. The current estimated go-live date is May 2011.

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will place in the Library a copy of the intervention protocol prepared by the Secretary of State under section 23 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. [311800]

Mr. Malik: On 19 February 2003 Government and the Local Government Association signed a protocol: 'Central Government Engagement and Intervention in Poorly Performing Authorities'. Pages 10 and 11 of the current Fire and Rescue Services National Framework says this protocol meets the requirement of section 23 of the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004. I have arranged for a copy of the 2003 protocol to be placed in the Library.

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what assessment has been made of the effects on the number of fire (a) stations and (b) appliances at each location of the repeal of section 19 (4) of the Fire Services Act 1947, requiring a fire authority to obtain the prior consent of the Secretary of State for the closure of a fire station and reductions in the number of fire appliances. [312036]

Numbers of fire stations and fire appliances, England

		2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	2008-09
Number of fire stations ¹		1,443	1,442	1,444	1,437	1,439	1,435
Total appliances		3,279	3,274	3,308	3,358	3,475	3,325
	Pumps	2,120	2,110	2,091	2,086	2,075	2,062
Front-line fleet	Other appliances ²	776	769	825	812	859	823
	Pumps	333	351	356	404	475	387
Reserve fleet	Other appliances ²	50	44	36	56	66	53

¹ Whole time and retained.

² Includes aerials and special appliances.

Source:

Annual Returns to Communities and Local Government

Fire Services: Finance

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what steps are being taken to control the FiReControl project budget. [311543]

Mr. Malik: The Department works to deliver the benefits of FiReControl, at least cost to the taxpayer.

We have professional finance and contractual expertise to control the budget and manage contracts with suppliers. FiReControl follows the Department's finance and procurement processes. We follow best practice set out by the Office of Government Commerce, who rigorously review the project on a regular basis.

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the (a) original and (b) most recent cost estimate is for the (i) Firelink, (ii) Firebuy Integrated Clothing and (iii) FireControl project. [311629]

Mr. Malik: The information is as follows:

(i) On a comparable basis the Firelink cost estimates are:

Original contract award 29 March 2006: £353 million.

Current estimate, August 2009: £313 million.

(ii) There is no recent separate cost estimate for the Firebuy Integrated Clothing Project. This is one of a number of contracts established within the fire and rescue service procurement remit of Firebuy.

Mr. Malik: The repeal of Section 19 of the Fire Services Act 1947 was an essential element of the move to integrated risk management planning (IRMP), under which local fire and rescue authorities (FRAs) and local communities are able to make appropriate decisions at the local level.

The numbers of fire (a) stations and (b) appliances are provided to the Department in annual data returns by Fire and Rescue Services in England. Figures since 2003-04 are collected and are shown in the following table.

No assessment has been made by this Department of the direct effects on the number of fire stations and fire appliances of the repeal of section 19(4) of the 1947 Act, although the Audit Commission takes account of individual FRAs' IRMP—under which decisions on the number and location of stations and appliances are made—in drawing up annual assessments as part of the comprehensive area assessment.

(iii) For the FiReControl project, I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Copeland (Mr. Reed) on 2 November 2009, *Official Report*, column 764W.

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his latest estimate is of the cost to the public purse of the FiReControl project since its inception. [312008]

Mr. Malik: The current estimated overall cost of implementation of the FiReControl project is £420 million.

Fire Services: Pay

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what (a) salary and (b) other remuneration is paid to each chief executive of the new regional fire control companies. [311662]

Mr. Malik: The responsibility for salary and other remuneration is a matter for the Local Authority Control Company which employs the chief executives.

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Meriden of 10 December 2009, *Official Report*, column 586W, on fire services: finance, what performance targets officials on

the FiReControl project met in respect of which bonuses to justify the bonuses; and which performance targets are used to assess the award of bonuses to officials working on the project. [311831]

Mr. Malik: These payments have been made in line with the Department's pay and reward policy.

Fire Services: Recruitment

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with reference to the answer of 7 July 2009, *Official Report*, column 706W, on fire services: equality, whether any Fire and Rescue Services have targets to increase recruitment of Travellers. [311742]

Mr. Malik: Fire and rescue services have not been set any targets for the recruitment of Travellers.

The 'Fire and Rescue Service Equality and Diversity Strategy' published in May 2008 made it clear that all services in England are expected to promote equality and to seek to improve the diversity within their work force in order to better reflect the communities they serve.

Floods: Thames Gateway

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his latest assessment is of the level of flood risk in the Thames Gateway development area; and what recent planning guidance his Department has provided on new-build development in areas of the Thames Gateway at risk of flooding. [312031]

Mr. Malik: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) on 12 January 2010, *Official Report*, columns 887-88W.

Green Belt: Thames Gateway

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his policy is on protecting the green belt within the Thames Gateway; and if he will make a statement. [310830]

Mr. Malik: The Government have a continuing commitment to the protection of green belt and its crucial characteristics of openness and permanence. Among the policies set out in PPG2 (Planning Policy Guidance Note 2, 'Green Belts') to guide decision-makers is a presumption against allowing inappropriate development on green belt land. These policies are applied as vigorously in the Thames Gateway as they are everywhere else.

Only in exceptional circumstances may green belt boundaries be altered. Any proposal for significant change in green belt area has to be made during the preparation of regional strategy. Any essential adjustment of the boundary of a green belt is for the local planning authority to propose as part of the local plan process. The Secretary of State monitors emerging regional strategies and local plans to ensure they are consistent with national policy. Government Offices make representations to the independent examinations of draft RSSs and LDFs if

the approach proposed is not consistent with PPG2. There are no plans to change the policy set out in PPG2.

Home Information Packs

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Clwyd West of 8 December 2009, *Official Report*, column 297W, on home information packs, when the 2010 report on the effectiveness of the home information packs programme will be published; by whom the report is being produced; using what methodology; and at what cost. [311518]

John Healey: We intend to evaluate the effectiveness of HIPs by updating 'The HIP Baseline Research Report', published in January 2007. A copy of the report is available at

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/hipbaselineresearch>

We are currently in the process of commissioning the study through the established contract tender process, so the timing and cost have yet to be finalised. I expect the interim results could be available in summer 2010.

Homes and Communities Agency: Public Relations

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what public relations firms are on the Homes and Communities Agency's (HCA) Public Relations Panel; and whether the HCA uses public relation contractors listed in framework agreements with the Central Office of Information. [311542]

John Healey: The HCA Public Relations panel is no longer in place. All contracts ended in December 2009, there are no current contracts in place.

Local Government Finance

Julia Goldsworthy: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on what occasions his Department has used budget-capping powers in respect of local authorities in the last 10 years; and for what reasons in each case. [312255]

Barbara Follett: Capping action has been taken against 34 authorities on five occasions over the last 10 years. In each case, action was taken because the authorities exceeded the capping principles determined by the Secretary of State.

Mortgages: Government Assistance

Mr. Timpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) how many people resident in Crewe and Nantwich constituency have received funding from the Mortgage Rescue Scheme; [311430]

(2) how many people resident in Crewe and Nantwich constituency have received funding from the Homeowners Mortgage Support Scheme. [311431]

John Healey: In the current economic conditions, we have acted rapidly to put in place help and support for households struggling with their mortgage at every stage, and launched a campaign to ensure households

have clear information about the help available. Over the last year, over 330,000 homeowners have received help and advice with their mortgage, and targeted safety net schemes are available for those in most need. Repossessions, arrears and voluntary repossessions are currently running at around half the rates at which they peaked in the early 1990s.

As part of the monitoring arrangements for the Mortgage Rescue Scheme, headline data for January—September 2009, provided by local authorities and broken down by Government Office Region, are available on the Department's website at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/mortgagerescuestatistics>

Figures reported by local authorities are provided in a table, which has been placed in the Library. Data is not collected at constituency level. Data for the October—December period will be published on 11 February 2010.

The Homeowners Mortgage Support scheme was launched in April 2009. Management information on Homeowners Mortgage Support and equivalent forbearance schemes was released by the Department on 9 December 2009. Figures can be accessed using the following link:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/1408110>

Data is not collected at constituency level.

Multiple Occupation: Licensing

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with reference to the answer of 29 October 2009, *Official Report*, column 472W, on multiple occupation: licensing, for what reasons the report has not yet been published; and if he will make a statement. [311377]

Mr. Ian Austin: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave him on 12 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 894W.

Natural Resources: West Midlands

Mr. Cash: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether he has taken steps to assess the merits of proposals by public authorities in the West Midlands to reduce levels of aggregate extractions. [311750]

Mr. Ian Austin: No. Such assessments will take place as part of the preparation of the Regional Strategy for the West Midlands, and in examining relevant development plan documents by each minerals planning authority.

Non-domestic Rates: Greater London

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the contribution of the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government of 8 December 2009 to the Sixth Delegated Legislation Committee, on the Business Rate Supplements (Rateable Value Condition) (England) Regulations 2009, *Official Report*, column 8, how many and what proportion of business properties in London will be exempt from the supplementary business rate following the 2010 rates revaluation; and how much revenue he estimates the supplementary rate will raise in 2010-11. [311811]

Barbara Follett: 231,040 hereditaments, which is 82 per cent. of all hereditaments in London, are assessed with a rateable value of £50,000 or less. These data are consistent with the statistical release titled: "Non-domestic rateable values: 2010 Local Rating Lists—England and Wales", published on 18 December 2009. A copy of this statistical release is available at the following link:

http://www.voa.gov.uk/publications/statistical_releases/VOA_Statistics_Release_Final.pdf

The minimum threshold must be £50,000, although the Mayor of London has the discretion to set a higher threshold exempting additional hereditaments. Final decisions on the level of the supplement and the extent of further exemptions are for the Mayor of London, therefore we cannot estimate the amount of revenue that would be raised.

Planning Act 2008

Mr. Truswell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what plans he has to issue guidance to local authorities on the preparation of local impact reports under Section 60 of the Planning Act 2008. [312086]

Mr. Ian Austin: It is for local authorities to decide what is relevant for inclusion in a local impact report and Government do not intend to publish guidance on what they should contain. The Infrastructure Planning Commission will be providing further advice to local authorities as to how they should be presented.

Private Rented Housing: Registration

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what timetable he has set for bringing forward legislation on the registration of private sector landlords; and which public body would be responsible for the register under those proposals. [311715]

Mr. Ian Austin: We consulted over the summer on our response to the independent review of the private rented sector carried out by Julie Rugg and David Rhodes of the Centre for Housing Policy at the University of York. This included proposals for a national register of private landlords. We have been considering the consultation responses received and plan to publish the results shortly.

Social Rented Housing: Home Working

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what guidance the (a) Housing Corporation, (b) Tenant Services Authority and (c) Homes and Communities Agency has provided to social landlords on home working by tenants. [312032]

Mr. Ian Austin: In its Neighbourhood and Community Strategy of October 2006, the Housing Corporation emphasised the value of all housing associations promoting employment opportunities—including residents working from their homes.

The Homes and Communities Agency (HCA) was formed on 1 December 2008, taking over the investment and regeneration responsibilities of the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships. Provision for

home-working is included in the HCA's guidance for local authorities and other partners on the development of Local Investment Plans ("Single Conversation: Further Information—Local Investment Plan"). This guidance is available via the HCA's website:

<http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/singleconversation.htm>

Urban design guidance published by the Housing Corporation and English Partnerships, and now maintained by the HCA, also includes material on live-work and home-working. This guidance is available online:

<http://www.urbandesigncompendium.co.uk/>

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Africa: Travel Information

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent travel advice he has issued in respect of the security of British citizens to Africa; and if he will make a statement.

[312000]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) issues regularly-reviewed Travel Advice notices for 56 countries in Africa. The advice includes information on threats to personal safety arising from political unrest, conflicts, terrorist activities, anti-British demonstrations, lawlessness, violence, natural disasters, epidemics, and aircraft and shipping safety. FCO Travel Advice is reviewed for every country every month and following any significant incident. It is revised and reissued at least every three months. In a developing crisis FCO Travel Advice may be updated several times a day. The FCO website also contains important general information on safety abroad, under the heading 'Know Before You Go' and information on World Cup 2010 can be found there. There is also a link from the FCO Travel Advice for South Africa to that page. FCO Travel Advice is based on objective assessments of the risks to British nationals and is intended to give British nationals the information they need to make their own decisions about travelling to a particular country.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: NATO Enlargement

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when he expects Bosnia-Herzegovina to be ready to be invited to participate in the NATO Membership Action Plan; and what his policy is on such membership.

[311600]

David Miliband: The UK fully supports Bosnia and Herzegovina's aspiration to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and continues to provide active support to help achieve that aim. In December NATO Foreign Ministers agreed Bosnia and Herzegovina would join the Membership Action Plan (MAP) once it has achieved the necessary progress on reform. The next formal review of Bosnia and Herzegovina's progress will be in spring this year.

MAP is an important tool in assisting countries to prepare for NATO membership. For a country to fully benefit from this tool it must have robust and functional political structures in place to take forward the comprehensive process and implement the wide spectrum of democratic and defence reforms required for membership.

Colombia: Human Rights

Michael Connarty: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will hold discussions with the Colombian government to seek to ensure the safety of human rights activists and lawyers in Colombia.

[311363]

Chris Bryant: We regularly raise serious concerns over human rights with senior Colombian Ministers. I visited Colombia in October 2009, and during a meeting with President Uribe, urged him to do more to improve the human rights situation. I also issued a joint statement with Foreign Minister Jaime Bermudez, declaring that:

"the defence of human rights is necessary and legitimate for democracy, in a country like Colombia which is proud of being fully open and ready for international scrutiny on this subject".

I also met the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs specifically to discuss human rights earlier this week.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary also raised human rights concerns during a meeting with Minister Bermudez in December 2009.

Cuba: Foreign Relations

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aims and objectives he has set for UK foreign policy in respect of Cuba.

[311408]

Chris Bryant: The UK's foreign policy towards Cuba is in line with the EU Common Position, which we agreed in 1996 and review annually each June at the European Council. Through engagement with both the Cuban Government and Cuban civil society, this policy aims to support the principles of pluralistic democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and an improvement of the living standards of the Cuban people. Specifically we hope to see concrete improvements in human rights, such as the release of all political prisoners, improved economic freedoms for all Cuban citizens and an end to restrictions on freedom of expression and independent trade unions. We work closely with our EU partners to further develop engagement with Cuba, including through the EU-Cuba political dialogue, and continue to look for opportunities to strengthen bilateral relations. We already co-operate at a working level on a number of issues such as climate change, child protection, counter-narcotics, and through scientific and cultural links.

Departmental Health and Safety

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the health and safety advice issued to each new starter upon joining his Department.

[311823]

Chris Bryant [*holding answer 19 January 2010*]: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is currently updating its health and safety induction programme and documentation. This includes the publication of a new Health and Safety induction handbook. Upon completion the FCO will make arrangements for a copy to be placed in the Library.

Diplomatic Service

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on proposals to extend the provisions of the Vienna Convention to locally-engaged staff in countries where embassy employees have been subject to harassment by state authorities; and if his will make a statement. [311598]

David Miliband: The current provisions of Article 7 of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations 1961 (VCDR) allow sending states to appoint members of staff to its missions. There is a clear distinction in the way in which the VCDR treats staff appointed from the sending state and those recruited locally. This means that UK-based diplomatic agents, once appointed and accredited by the receiving state, are afforded immunities and privileges according to Article 31(1) of the VCDR, for example, immunity from the criminal jurisdiction of the receiving state and from its civil and administrative jurisdiction, subject to limited exceptions. However, under the current VCDR provisions the consent of the receiving state is required in order to appoint as diplomatic agents any locally engaged staff who are nationals or residents of that state and this consent can be withdrawn at any time under Article 8 of the VCDR.

Our locally engaged staff are either nationals or residents of the receiving state. The fact that VCDR gives the receiving state the right to withdraw any immunity afforded to locally engaged staff at will means that the Foreign and Commonwealth Office does not consider that offering them immunity is a viable means of affording them any substantive additional protection, particularly in those countries where relations with the host government are sometimes strained.

Estonia: Embassies

Robert Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what environmental projects in Estonia received support from the British Embassy in that country in the last three years. [311350]

Chris Bryant: Our embassy in Tallinn has supported the following environmental projects in the last three years:

2006-07:

Saving the World—Policy Paper on Climate Change and Estonia: support to the Estonian Foreign Policy Institute to commission and research a policy paper on Climate Change and how it effects Estonia for production in May/June 2007

2007-08:

Climate Change in Estonia—Schools Information Campaign: funding the printing and distribution of Estonian language posters on climate change, for distribution to all secondary schools in Estonia to raise awareness of climate change issues.

Distribution of the first translation of the Executive Summary of the Stern Review in Estonia to local policy makers to help influence the climate change debate in Estonia and provide a reference tool.

A grant for Tartu university to design an Estonia-specific carbon footprint calculator to enable Estonians to calculate

accurately their carbon footprint, which would then be used as an educational project with a selection of Estonian schools to enable students to calculate their footprints and ways in which they could reduce them.

2008:

Environment Ministry attendance at a key Regional Climate Change Conference in Slovenia that focuses on the opportunities for economic growth.

Visit of Ministry of Foreign Affairs Director Maarin Ratnik to Wilton Park for a conference on Energy Security in the EU to offer Estonia an opportunity to discuss the impact of the European Council's conclusions on the EU's energy and climate package.

Attendance of senior researcher from Tallinn Technical university and senior specialist from Ministry of Environment on Carbon Capture Storage (CCS) Study tour in UK to increase Estonia's expertise on CCS by sharing UK's best practice and to increase general public awareness of CCS issues in relation to climate change by publishing an article written by study tour participants in well circulated Estonian press.

Visit to Estonia by Lord Giddens to give a speech at the 25th Anniversary event for the Chevening alumni event on "The Politics of Climate Change", with the aim of capitalising on their attendance to continue (through Lord Giddens) to work on the Estonian mindset regarding climate change issues, notably Estonian reliance on (environmentally unfriendly) oil shale.

Four Estonian delegates participated in a seminar on Climate Change: Everybody's Business, organised by our embassy in Riga, to increase awareness of climate change among Estonian businesses with a view to positive effects on business 2009:

Sponsorship for Reet Aus (the only fashion designer in Estonia working exclusively with recycled goods) to attend Fashion Week in London with the aim of supporting a green clothing initiative by making them from sustainable ecologically sound procedures and raising awareness.

Support for the Estonian portal Bioneer

www.bioneer.ee

towards publishing articles on climate change in 2009.

Iran: Nuclear Power

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his latest assessment is of the status of talks with (a) the Government of Iran and (b) his international counterparts on a fuel supply for the Tehran nuclear research reactor; and if he will make a statement. [311596]

David Miliband: The UK is not directly involved in the talks on the International Atomic Energy Agency's proposal of October 2009. However, we support the proposal and are disappointed by Iran's failure to engage on it. This proposal could have begun to rebuild confidence in Iran's intentions by guaranteeing that part of Iran's fuel stock was used for legitimate purposes. I remain in close touch with my E3+3 and EU colleagues on all the issues associated with Iran's nuclear programme.

Mr. Hague: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the Government's policy is on further (a) UN and (b) EU sanctions on Iran; and if he will make a statement. [311597]

David Miliband: The Government continue to pursue the dual track strategy of engagement and pressure to address the issue of Iran's nuclear programme. Consideration of further appropriate UN measures designed to influence the regime's decision making on the nuclear file has now begun. With regard to EU sanctions, I refer the right hon. Member to the December European Council Declaration on Iran, where the EU clearly committed to considering further measures to accompany UN action.

Kashmir

Paul Rowen: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department has spent in Kashmir in the last two years. [312475]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: In both Indian and Pakistan Administered Kashmir, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) spent a total of £599,146 in financial year 2008-09 and expects to spend £1,011,012 in financial year 2009-10. This expenditure is on project activity funded from three sources—the Conflict Pool (which is a joint FCO, Department for International Development and Ministry of Defence fund), the Bilateral Programme Budget and the Counter Terrorism (Radicalisation) fund. The total expected spend on project activity across these three funds in Indian and Pakistan Administered Kashmir from 2008 to financial year 2009-10 will be £1,610,158.

National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security

Linda Gilroy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many full-time equivalent staff in his Department are responsible for (a) the central coordination of activities and (b) monitoring the effect of activities undertaken under the National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. [312084]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Central co-ordination of activities under the UK National Action Plan, jointly developed by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), the Ministry of Defence and the Department for International Development, is within the FCO carried out by the conflict policy team. Two members of staff cover this work as part of their wider duties, with additional support provided by others as necessary.

There is also a range of staff across the FCO and wider government network involved with the implementation and monitoring of the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The FCO does not hold information on the number of staff in its overseas network with this specific responsibility as part of their duties.

Nigeria: Politics and Government

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs when HM Ambassador to Nigeria last met (a) the President and (b) the Vice President of that country. [311651]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Our high commissioner to Nigeria last met President Yar'Adua on 5 November 2009, during the visit of my noble Friend Baroness Kinnock, the Minister of State for Africa, to Nigeria. He last met Vice President Goodluck Jonathan on 30 December 2009.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of UK relations with Nigeria, with particular reference to recent developments in that country. [311652]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The UK continues to have a strong bilateral relationship with Nigeria as one of our key partners in Africa, and remains in frequent dialogue with the Government of Nigeria at all levels. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary spoke to his Nigerian counterpart on 8 January 2010, and Baroness Kinnock, the Minister of State for Africa co-hosted an event for the Nigerian diaspora in the UK on 20 January 2010.

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has had recent discussions with the President or Vice President of Nigeria; what reports his Department has received on the state of health of the President; whether he is taking steps to encourage the Nigerian government and military to adhere to the Nigerian Constitution; and if he will make a statement. [311653]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary has not had recent discussions with the President or Vice President of Nigeria. However he last spoke to Foreign Minister Maduekwe on 8 January 2010. During their conversation my right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary expressed his concern for the health of President Yar'Adua, passed on his good wishes for the President's speedy recovery, and reiterated the UK's support for the Nigerian Government's determination to act in accordance with the Nigerian constitution.

Olympic Games: Canada

Mr. Don Foster: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many (a) Ministers and (b) officials from his Department are planning to attend the Winter Olympics in Vancouver in February 2010; and what estimate he has made of the cost of such attendance. [310841]

Chris Bryant: Since 1999 the Government have published on an annual basis a list of all overseas visits by Cabinet Ministers costing in excess of £500, as well as the total cost of all ministerial travel overseas. From 2007-08 the list was extended to include all Ministers. The list also provides information on the number of officials who accompany Ministers. Copies are available in the Libraries of the House.

Information for 2009-10 will be published as soon as the information is available. All travel by Ministers and civil servants is undertaken in accordance with the Ministerial Code and Civil Service Management Code respectively.

Palestinians: International Assistance

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what plans he has to raise the restrictions placed by the government of Israel on access for humanitarian aid and reconstruction materials into Gaza at the next discussion of the Middle East Quartet; and if he will make a statement. [311399]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We have consistently pressed the Government of Israel to ease border restrictions and permit the passage of humanitarian aid and essential reconstruction material into Gaza. The EU as a whole has made similar calls, including in the Conclusions of the December Foreign Affairs Council and the Quartet has called for Israel "to allow for the unimpeded flow of humanitarian aid, commercial goods and persons to and from Gaza". We will continue to raise this issue at the highest levels.

Palestinians: Politics and Government

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on how many occasions a Minister from his Department has visited Gaza to assess the (a) human rights and (b) political situation there since the conflict in Gaza began; and if he will make a statement. [311398]

Mr. Michael Foster: I have been asked to reply.

The Secretary of State for International Development visited Gaza on 1 March 2009. During his visit to the region he met with Israeli officials and discussed issues around access for humanitarian aid and reconstruction materials. Officials for the Department for International Development (DFID) visit Gaza frequently, and meet with other organisations and agencies who work in Gaza. The Secretary of State is kept up-to-date with all aspects of the situation in Gaza including human rights and the political environment.

Sudan: Peace Negotiations

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his most recent assessment is of progress on the objectives of the Sudanese Comprehensive Peace Agreement; and what plans he has for the Government's role as guarantor of that agreement. [311619]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The UK is a guarantor of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) and is committed to its full implementation. There has been some important recent progress with the passing of referenda legislation in December 2009. However much remains to be done, and we continue to press the parties to resolve key outstanding issues such as creating Referendum Commissions, and resolving outstanding disputes on wealth-sharing and the census. We also call on all parties to put in place the necessary conditions for credible elections, a key CPA benchmark.

My noble Friend Baroness Kinnock was in Sudan 11 to 13 January 2010 to reiterate messages on election preparation and post-2011 planning. We are also supporting work by Chatham House to encourage dialogue between the parties on important post-referendum issues. The

UK announced a further £54 million to support Sudan, bringing to £200 million our annual commitment to humanitarian aid, development and peacekeeping in Sudan.

Turkey: Foreign Relations

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aims and objectives he has set for UK foreign policy in respect of Turkey. [311413]

Chris Bryant: The UK has four key objectives as regards to Turkey. Firstly, to support Turkey's EU accession process, which strongly benefits both the EU and Turkey. Secondly, we support internal reform in Turkey to enhance the democratic process to protect human rights especially those of minorities. Thirdly, to engage with Turkey on regional issues, which include Cyprus, Afghanistan, the middle east peace process, Iran, and Iraq. Fourthly, we aim to co-operate on key international issues, such as climate change and energy security.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Building Regulations: Advertising

John Penrose: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how much expenditure under each budgetary heading his Department has incurred on advertising competent person schemes in each year since 2002. [311419]

Mr. Ian Austin: I have been asked to reply.

The Department has incurred expenditure of £48,000 since 2002 on publishing, including reprints, a leaflet, "Building work, replacements and repairs to your home", which was published specifically to publicise competent person schemes. Information about the schemes is also available on the Department's website and in other guidance publications about the Building Regulations.

Business

Mr. David Hamilton: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent steps his Department has taken to ensure that companies entering liquidation are not able to reform under a different name in order to avoid liabilities. [312551]

Ian Lucas: There is nothing in law to prevent a director of a company that has failed from forming a new company to carry on a business similar to, or even identical to, that of the failed company—providing he or she has not been disqualified from acting in the management of a limited company or subject to some other form of legal restriction such as personal bankruptcy. Directors involved in a liquidated company cannot usually be involved in the management of a new company which is known by the same, or a substantially similar, name. This has been the legal position for many years and there are no plans to change it.

Failure does not necessarily imply misconduct on the part of directors. Action can be taken against directors of failed companies to disqualify them from acting in the management of a company if the Secretary of State considers them to be unfit. They can also be prosecuted or ordered by the court to make a personal contribution towards the assets of the failed company in appropriate circumstances.

There is a robust enforcement regime in place. In the year 2008-09 an average of around five directors were disqualified every working day. In addition, and again on average, one individual was sentenced every working day having been convicted of offences following prosecutions brought by my Department as a result of referrals from the Insolvency Service.

Departmental Contracts

John Penrose: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many contractual disputes with third party suppliers his Department lost as a result of unenforceable penalty clauses in (a) 2005-06, (b) 2006-07, (c) 2007-08 and (d) 2009-10 to date; what (i) the cumulative monetary value of the contracts involved in each year and (ii) the amount awarded to the supplier in each case was; and how much the Department was entitled to but did not claim under such disputes in each year. [311415]

Mr. McFadden: The Department's contract terms do not as standard include a liquidated damages or "penalty" condition. A liquidated damages clause would only be used on a case by case basis where warranted by the particular characteristics of the procurement requirement.

Further information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

John Penrose: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what expenditure his Department incurred as a result of contractual disputes with third party suppliers in (a) 2005-06, (b) 2006-07, (c) 2007-08 (d) 2008-09 and (e) 2009-10 to date; and how much was awarded to each supplier in each such case. [311416]

Mr. McFadden: The information requested is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Manpower

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many (a) full-time and (b) part-time staff his Department employs. [310870]

Mr. McFadden: There are (a) 3,241 full-time and (b) part-time staff employed by BIS as at 30 September.

Departmental Training

Grant Shapps: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what training sessions were attended by (a) Ministers and (b) special advisers in his Department at public expense in each of the last three years. [302945]

Mr. McFadden: Training is provided to Ministers and special advisers if required in order to carry out their respective duties effectively under the "Ministerial Code" and the "Code of Conduct for Special Advisers". Details of training provided to Government Ministers by the National School of Government are publicly available and can be found at:

[http://www.nationalschool.gov.uk/policy/Ministerial Programme/ Table.asp](http://www.nationalschool.gov.uk/policy/Ministerial%20Programme/Table.asp)

Grant Shapps: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many sessions of media training were organised for Ministers in his Department in each of the last three years. [309915]

Mr. McFadden: Training is provided to Ministers if required on a range of issues including handling the media, in order to carry out their duties effectively under the "Ministerial Code".

Departmental Waste

Grant Shapps: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what volume of waste his Department and its predecessors generated in each of the last three years; what percentage of this was (a) paper, (b) plastic, (c) glass, (d) metal, (e) electrical goods and batteries and (f) food waste; and what percentage of that waste was (i) disposed of securely, (ii) disposed of in landfill and (iii) recycled. [311836]

Mr. McFadden: This Department is required to report performance data on volumes of waste generated and its recycling rates annually as part of the Sustainable Development in Government (SDiG) reporting process. All waste is disposed of securely in line with our waste duty of care and BIS does not send any materials in the categories listed to landfill. All waste is either recycled or sent to an energy from waste facility.

The latest assessment of government's performance against this target was published by the Office of Government Commerce (OGC) on 18 December 2009, and is available on the OGC website:

[http://www.ogc.gov.uk/ sustainability_programme_progress.asp](http://www.ogc.gov.uk/sustainability_programme_progress.asp)

Information on reporting years prior to 2008/09 was collated and published by the Sustainable Development Commission (SDC) can be found on the SDC website:

<http://www.sd-commission.org.uk>

English Language

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many English language schools provide language training to a standard sufficient for students to meet language criteria in visa applications. [304562]

Kevin Brennan: In 2008/09 (provisional), there were 468 providers (including colleges, local authorities and other organisations) in England with Learning and Skills Council (LSC) funded learners on English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) courses at Entry Level (1,2 and 3), Level 1 or Level 2.

The speaking and listening component of ESOL qualifications at Entry Levels 1, 2 or 3 can be acceptable evidence for the purposes of indefinite leave to remain or citizenship.

The legal requirement for visa applications is to provide evidence of the achievement of a qualification through one of the approved ESOL awarding organisations who must ensure that all colleges and centres offering ESOL qualifications are delivering the full course. Ofqual is the interim independent regulator for qualifications in England and will become the permanent regulator from 1 April 2010). Their duty is to ensure that all qualifications, including those for ESOL, are of an appropriate standard; and to take action with awarding bodies if they are not.

The UK Border Agency works closely with Ofqual to ensure that the appropriate standards are maintained. The UK Border Agency maintains a list of organisations licensed to sponsor migrants under the points based system and copies will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Higher Education: Children in Care

Mr. Touhig: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills if his Department will take steps to encourage children in local authority care to apply for admission to university. [308154]

Mr. Iain Wright: I have been asked to reply.

The Government are committed to widening participation of young people in care in higher education. To this end we have placed a requirement on local authorities to pay a £2,000 bursary to all care leavers who pursue a recognised course of higher education. This entitlement has been publicised through the National Care Advisory Service, which provides advice and support for children and young people aged 13-25 in and from care, and the 2008/09 Aim Higher Tutor's Resource Materials for young people in years 12 and 13 produced by the then Department for Innovation, Universities and Skills.

All local authorities have a duty under the Children Act 1989 to promote the educational achievement of the children and young people they look after. As part of this duty, statutory guidance sets out the importance of creating a culture of high aspirations among children in care, which includes setting out in their personal education plans the support needed to achieve long-term goals such as the pursuit of higher education.

In addition, the Children and Young Persons Act 2008 extends the entitlement to a personal adviser for care leavers from 21 to 25 where they remain in or return to education.

Lord Mandelson

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many times the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills has visited (a) Dorneywood, (b) Chevening and (c) Chequers since his appointment. [312187]

Mr. McFadden: My noble Friend the Secretary of State has visited Chequers four times since his appointment. He has not visited Dorneywood or Chevening in that time.

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills on what occasions the Secretary of State has met Colonel Muammar Gaddafi in an official capacity since becoming Secretary of State. [312271]

Mr. McFadden: None.

Parents' Learning Allowance

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills when he expects the (a) eligibility of Susan Coombe a constituent of the hon. Member for Torbay ref. 50247451102, for parent learning allowance to be confirmed and (b) first payment under that allowance to be made to that constituent. [310990]

Mr. Lammy: I will write to the hon. Member on this matter.

TREASURY

Banks: Pay

Mr. Drew: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether UK banks in which the Government have a stake will pay bonuses this year. [311949]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: The Government's shareholdings in financial institutions are managed at arm's length and on a commercial basis by UK Financial Investments Limited (UKFI).

The bonus pools for Government investee banks have not yet been determined for 2009.

Departmental Internet

Grant Shapps: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which websites his Department's staff are prevented from accessing from departmental networked computers. [311842]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: Filtering software is used within the Department to block access to certain inappropriate categories of website. In addition, and consistent with central government security guidance, measures are in place to block access to websites that contain potentially harmful software content, or malware. It is departmental policy not to publish precise details of the measures used, or what they block, as this could provide useful information for individuals who might seek to attack our IT systems.

Economic Situation

Chris Ruane: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the productivity of the UK in relation to other G7 countries since 1991. [311753]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: HM Treasury and BIS are jointly responsible for Public Service Agreement 1 (PSA 1) - to raise the productivity of the UK economy. One of the objectives of PSA 1 is to narrow the output per worker productivity gap between the UK and comparator nations (the USA, Germany and France).

To assess progress against narrowing the productivity gap, HM Treasury use ONS data from their biannual International Comparisons of Productivity¹ statistical release. Results are presented for the UK relative to the US, France, Germany, Japan, Canada, Italy and the G7 in aggregate. Since 1991, the start of the ONS data series, the UK has experienced faster average productivity growth than all other G7 countries².

¹ <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/statbase/Product.asp?vlnk=9671>

² http://www.statistics.gov.uk/downloads/theme_economy/ICP_HeadlineTables.xls

Excise Duties: Fuel Oil

Mr. Goodwill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what advice has been issued to farmers on the use of rebated fuel in tractors and other agricultural machines engaged in snow-clearing operations on public roads. [312344]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: Public notice 75—Fuel for road vehicles, which is available on the HMRC website at:

http://customs.hmrc.gov.uk/channelsPortalWebApp/channelsPortalWebApp.portal?_nfpb=true&pageLabel=pageExcise_ShowContent&propertyType=document&id=HMCE_CL_000164

and in print from its helpline, explains the circumstances under which certain 'excepted vehicles', including tractors, other agricultural machines and snow clearing vehicles are entitled to use rebated fuel.

Government Departments: Aviation

Mr. Maude: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which company won the contract for the Government Air Programme. [312161]

Ian Pearson: I refer the hon. Gentlemen to the answer I gave him on 11 November 2009, *Official Report*, column 499W.

Industrial Health and Safety

Grant Shapps: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the health and safety advice issued to each new starter upon joining his Department. [311817]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: The Department provides induction training to each new starter.

Copies of the main documents relating to Health and Safety induction training for new starters will be placed in the Library.

Job Creation

Mr. Harper: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with reference to paragraph 8 on page 33 of his Department's White Paper on Building Britain's Recovery, if he will publish the evidential basis for the estimate that up to half a million jobs have been protected by the Bank of England and the Government during the recession. [312242]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr. Hammond) on 14 December 2009, *Official Report*, column 846W.

Non-domestic Rates: Fire Services

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many fire stations (a) were on the 1997 and (b) are on the 2010 Rating List. [311709]

Grant Shapps: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many fire stations there were on the Valuation Office Agency's Rating List with special category code 101 in (a) England and (b) each local authority area in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2010. [311664]

Ian Pearson: The number of fire stations in the 1995 Local Rating Lists, which cover Specialist Category Codes 101 and 964, as at 1 April 1997 totalled 1,464.

The number of fire stations in the Draft 2010 Rating List as at 2 November 2009 totalled 1,470.

Information on each local authority area is given in the following table:

Billing authority	Fire stations	
	1995 Rating List as at 1 April 1997 (SCAT 964)	2010 Rating List as at 2 November 2009 (SCAT 101)
Adur	2	2
Allerdale	8	8
Alnwick	3	3
Amber Valley	6	6
Arun	5	5
Ashfield	2	2
Ashford	7	6
Aylesbury Vale	7	6
Babergh	5	5
Barking and Dagenham	0	2
Barnet	4	4
Barnsley	5	4
Barrow-in-Furness	4	3
Basildon	3	3
Basingstoke and Deane	5	5
Bassetlaw	5	5
Bath and North East Somerset	5	5
Bedford	3	3
Berwick-upon-Tweed	5	5
Bexley	3	3
Birmingham	17	16
Blaby	1	1
Blackburn with Darwen	2	2
Blackpool	3	3
Blyth Valley	2	2
Bolsover	3	3
Bolton	4	4
Boston	3	3
Bournemouth	3	3
Bracknell Forest	2	2
Bradford	10	11
Braintree	6	6

<i>Billing authority</i>	<i>Fire stations</i>		<i>Billing authority</i>	<i>Fire stations</i>	
	<i>1995 Rating List as at 1 April 1997 (SCAT 964)</i>	<i>2010 Rating List as at 2 November 2009 (SCAT 101)</i>		<i>1995 Rating List as at 1 April 1997 (SCAT 964)</i>	<i>2010 Rating List as at 2 November 2009 (SCAT 101)</i>
Breckland	6	6	East	5	5
Brent	3	3	Cambridgeshire		
Brentwood	3	2	East Devon	6	8
Bridgnorth	3	3	East Dorset	4	4
Brighton and Hove	3	3	East Hampshire	6	6
Bristol	6	6	East Hertfordshire	6	6
Broadland	4	4	East Lindsey	11	11
Bromley	4	4	East Northamptonshire	5	5
Bromsgrove	1	1	East Riding of Yorkshire	14	13
Broxbourne	2	2	East Staffordshire	5	5
Broxstowe	3	4	Eastbourne	1	1
Burnley	2	2	Eastleigh	5	4
Bury	3	3	Eden	7	7
Calderdale	7	7	Elmbridge	3	3
Cambridge	1	1	Enfield	3	3
Camden	4	4	Epping Forest	4	4
Cannock Chase	0	2	Epsom and Ewell	1	1
Canterbury	4	4	Erewash	2	3
Caradon	5	6	Exeter	2	3
Carlisle	3	3	Fareham	3	2
Carrick	3	3	Fenland	5	5
Castle Morpeth	2	2	Forest Heath	3	3
Castle Point	2	2	Forest of Dean	4	4
Charnwood	3	3	Fylde	3	3
Chelmsford	3	3	Gateshead	4	4
Cheltenham	2	1	Gedling	2	2
Cherwell	5	5	Gloucester	1	1
Cheshire West and Chester	7	7	Gosport	1	1
Chesterfield	2	2	Gravesham	1	1
Chester-le-Street	1	1	Great Yarmouth	3	3
Chichester	6	6	Greenwich	7	6
Chiltern	3	3	Guildford	2	2
Chorley	1	2	Hackney	4	4
Christchurch	1	1	Halton	2	2
City of London	0	1	Hambleton	5	6
Colchester	5	4	Hammersmith and Fulham	2	2
Congleton	4	4	Harborough	4	4
Copeland	6	6	Haringey	2	2
Corby	2	1	Harlow	2	2
Cotswold	7	7	Harrogate	6	6
Coventry	4	4	Harrow	2	2
Craven	3	3	Hart	4	4
Crawley	2	2	Hartlepool	2	2
Crewe and Nantwich	3	3	Hastings	2	2
Croydon	5	5	Havant	4	4
Dacorum	6	5	Havering	1	3
Darlington	1	1	Herefordshire	12	13
Dartford	2	2	Hertsmere	4	4
Daventry	5	5	High Peak	5	5
Derby	3	3	Hillingdon	3	3
Derbyshire Dales	6	6	Hinckley and Bosworth	3	2
Derwentside	3	1	Horsham	6	6
Doncaster	7	7	Hounslow	3	3
Dover	8	8	Huntingdonshire	7	7
Dudley	5	5	Hyndburn	3	4
Durham	1	1	Ipswich	2	2
Ealing	3	4	Isle of Wight	11	11
Easington	3	3			

<i>Billing authority</i>	<i>Fire stations</i>		<i>Billing authority</i>	<i>Fire stations</i>	
	<i>1995 Rating List as at 1 April 1997 (SCAT 964)</i>	<i>2010 Rating List as at 2 November 2009 (SCAT 101)</i>		<i>1995 Rating List as at 1 April 1997 (SCAT 964)</i>	<i>2010 Rating List as at 2 November 2009 (SCAT 101)</i>
Isles of Scilly	1	2	North Tyneside	2	2
Islington	3	3	North Warwickshire	3	3
Kennet	6	6	North West Leicestershire	3	3
Kensington and Chelsea	4	4	North Wiltshire	6	6
Kerrier	5	5	Northampton	3	3
Kettering	4	4	Norwich	2	4
Kings Lynn and West Norfolk	10	11	Nottingham	3	3
Kingston upon Hull	7	6	Nuneaton and Bedworth	2	2
Kingston upon Thames	2	2	Oadby and Wigston	1	1
Kirklees	11	11	Oldham	3	3
Knowsley	3	3	Oswestry	1	1
Lambeth	4	5	Oxford	2	2
Lancaster	6	6	Pendle	4	4
Leeds	14	13	Penwith	3	3
Leicester	3	3	Peterborough	4	4
Lewes	4	4	Plymouth	5	5
Lewisham	4	5	Poole	2	2
Lichfield	2	2	Portsmouth	3	3
Lincoln	1	2	Preston	2	2
Liverpool	11	10	Purbeck	3	3
Luton	2	2	Reading	4	4
Macclesfield	5	5	Redbridge	3	3
Maidstone	5	5	Redcar and Cleveland	7	8
Maldon	4	4	Redditch	1	1
Malvern Hills	2	2	Reigate and Banstead	1	1
Manchester	8	8	Restormel	7	7
Mansfield	2	2	Ribble Valley	2	2
Medway	9	9	Richmond upon Thames	2	2
Melton	1	1	Richmondshire	5	5
Mendip	5	5	Rochdale	3	3
Merton	3	3	Rochford	3	3
Mid Bedfordshire	6	6	Rossendale	3	3
Mid Devon	4	4	Rother	5	5
Mid Suffolk	6	5	Rotherham	6	4
Mid Sussex	6	6	Rugby	2	2
Middlesbrough	2	3	Runnymede	2	2
Milton Keynes	6	5	Rushcliffe	3	3
Mole Valley	2	2	Rushmoor	1	1
New Forest	11	11	Rutland	4	2
Newark and Sherwood	6	6	Ryedale	5	5
Newcastle-under-Lyme	2	3	Salford	6	5
Newcastle-upon-Tyne	6	5	Salisbury	5	5
Newham	4	4	Sandwell	6	7
North Cornwall	6	6	Scarborough	8	8
North Devon	10	10	Sedgefield	3	3
North Dorset	4	4	Sedgemoor	4	4
North East Derbyshire	2	2	Sefton	4	4
North East Lincolnshire	5	5	Selby	2	2
North Hertfordshire	3	3	Sevenoaks	6	6
North Kesteven	6	6	Sheffield	10	10
North Lincolnshire	8	9	Shepway	5	5
North Norfolk	8	8	Shrewsbury and Atcham	2	2
North Shropshire	7	7	Slough	2	2
North Somerset	9	9	Solihull	2	2
			South Bedfordshire	3	3

<i>Billing authority</i>	<i>Fire stations</i>	
	<i>1995 Rating List as at 1 April 1997 (SCAT 964)</i>	<i>2010 Rating List as at 2 November 2009 (SCAT 101)</i>
South Buckinghamshire	3	2
South Cambridgeshire	5	5
South Derbyshire	2	2
South Gloucestershire	4	4
South Hants	7	7
South Holland	5	5
South Kesteven	6	6
South Lakeland	12	12
South Norfolk	7	7
South Northamptonshire	2	2
South Oxfordshire	7	7
South Ribble	3	3
South Shropshire	7	7
South Somerset	8	8
South Staffordshire	5	5
South Tyneside	2	2
Southampton	3	3
Southend-on-Sea	2	2
Southwark	4	4
Spelthorne	2	2
St. Albans	4	5
St. Edmundsbury	6	5
St. Helens	4	3
Stafford	4	4
Staffordshire Moorlands	6	5
Stevenage	1	2
Stockport	5	5
Stockton-on-Tees	4	4
Stoke-on-Trent	3	3
Stratford-on-Avon	10	9
Stroud	5	5
Suffolk Coastal	8	7
Sunderland	6	6
Surrey Heath	2	2
Sutton	2	2
Swale	6	6
Swindon	3	3
Tameside	4	4
Tamworth	1	1
Tandridge	3	3
Taunton Deane	3	3
Teesdale	2	2
Teignbridge	4	7
Telford and Wrekin	4	4
Tendring	6	6
Test Valley	3	3
Tewkesbury	2	2
Thanet	4	4
Three Rivers	1	1
Thurrock	3	3
Tonbridge and Mailing	3	3
Torbay	3	3
Torridge	5	5
Tower Hamlets	6	6
Trafford	3	3

<i>Billing authority</i>	<i>Fire stations</i>	
	<i>1995 Rating List as at 1 April 1997 (SCAT 964)</i>	<i>2010 Rating List as at 2 November 2009 (SCAT 101)</i>
Tunbridge Wells	7	7
Tynedale	6	6
Uttlesford	6	6
Vale of White Horse	3	3
Wakefield	9	9
Walsall	4	4
Waltham Forest	2	4
Wandsworth	3	3
Wansbeck	1	1
Warrington	3	3
Warwick	3	3
Watford	2	2
Waveney	8	7
Waverley	5	5
Wealden	11	10
Wear Valley	3	3
Wellingborough	2	2
Welwyn Hatfield	3	3
West Berkshire	6	5
West Devon	8	8
West Dorset	6	8
West Lancashire	3	3
West Lindsey	5	6
West Oxfordshire	7	7
West Somerset	4	4
West Wiltshire	5	5
Westminster	4	4
Weymouth and Portland	2	2
Wigan	4	4
Winchester	7	6
Windsor and Maidenhead	4	4
Wirral	6	6
Woking	1	1
Wokingham	3	3
Wolverhampton	4	4
Worcester	1	1
Worthing	1	1
Wychavon	5	5
Wycombe	5	4
Wyre	3	3
Wyre Forest	3	3
York	2	3

Note:

Numbers may not sum to totals because of rounding.

Public Sector: Procurement

Mr. Maude: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the monetary value was of (a) central and (b) local government contracts required to be advertised on Tenders Electronic Daily, the Supplement to the Official Journal of the European Union in the last 12 months. [312160]

Ian Pearson: The current thresholds are:

Supply and Service Contracts

Local Authorities - £156,442

Central Government - £101,323

Works Contracts

All authorities - £3,927,260

Works contracts cover capital construction projects, buildings, roads and their repair. Supplies contracts will be for the purchase or lease of food, goods and other equipment. Services cover the balance and include maintenance services, transport, insurance, consultancy, waste disposal and others. The higher threshold for works contracts reflects the higher cost of construction contracts.

Revenue and Customs: Peterhead

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how much in (a) direct and (b) indirect taxes was (i) collected and (ii) administered by the HM Revenue and Customs office in Peterhead in each year since 2006. [311959]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is available only at disproportionate cost due to the work required to extract it from HM Revenue and Customs' systems.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many staff were based at the office of HM Revenue and Customs and its predecessor organisations in Peterhead in each year since 2006. [311960]

Mr. Timms: The number of staff based in HM Revenue and Customs office in Peterhead for each year since 2006 is shown in the following table:

<i>As at 1 April:</i>	<i>Headcount</i>	<i>FTE¹</i>
2006	23	20.20
2007	20	17.59
2008	18	15.40
2009	10	8.40

¹ FTE relates to full time equivalent.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer from which HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) offices the Shares Fishermen's Scheme will be administered following the closure of Keith House, Peterhead; and what steps will be taken by HMRC to retain the expertise of its staff in respect of the fishing industry following the closure. [311961]

Mr. Timms: The Share Fisherman Scheme will be administered from the HM Revenue and Customs' (HMRC's) office in Aberdeen where other work specific to the fishing industry is already carried out. HMRC's expectation is that staff in Keith House, Peterhead currently administering the scheme will relocate with their work if they are able to do so, enabling them to use their existing skills and expertise. Individual options will be explored for those who cannot relocate and the work will be continued from Aberdeen by staff with fishing industry experience.

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consultation HM Revenue and Customs undertook with the fishing industry over the closure of Keith House, Peterhead. [311963]

Mr. Timms: HM Revenue and Customs' (HMRC) local business managers in Peterhead invited the Scottish Fishermen's Federation to comment on the proposed closure of Keith House as part of its Regional Review Programme.

Revenue and Customs: Scotland

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the average length of service is of staff employed by HM Revenue and Customs and its predecessor organisations at each of its locations in Scotland. [311966]

Mr. Timms: The information requested is provided in the following table:

<i>Town</i>	<i>Office name</i>	<i>Average length of service (years)</i>
Aberdeen	Ruby House	24.5
Ayr	Russell House	25.8
Bathgate	Pyramids Business Park	4.0
Buckie	Moray House	22.4
Coatbridge	2 Muirhall Street	25.2
Cumbernauld	St. Mungos Road	14.8
Dumbarton	15 Meadowbank Street	25.1
Dumfries	Government Buildings Dumfries	25.1
Dundee	Caledonian House Dundee	23.4
	Sidlaw House	4.9
Dunfermline	Merchiston House	28.2
Dunoon	Auchencraig	18.7
East Kilbride	Hawbank Stores	19.6
	Plaza Tower	8.4
	Queensway House	18.0
Edinburgh	44 York Place	23.9
	Argyle House	14.6
	Clarendon House Edinburgh	24.4
	Elgin House	22.3
	Erskine House	14.0
	Grayfield House	17.1
	Meldrum House	23.1
	Saughton House	21.0
Elgin	Phoenix House Elgin	25.9
Falkirk	Grahame House	20.7
Galashiels	New Reiver House	27.7
Glasgow	Blythswood House	21.7
	Cotton House	21.4
	Portcullis House Glasgow	13.9
Glenrothes	Saltire House	17.8
Grangemouth	Custom House Grangemouth	25.7
Greenock	99 Dalrymple Street	28.6
	Custom House Greenock	21.8
Hamilton	1 Barrack Street	26.1
Hawick	Crown Building Hawick	21.2
Inverness	Longman House	32.9
	River House	24.2
Irvine	Marress House	26.6
Kirkcaldy	26 Victoria Road	27.0
Lerwick	Charlotte House	41.3

<i>Town</i>	<i>Office name</i>	<i>Average length of service (years)</i>
Livingston	Almondvale Shopping Centre	20.6
	Barbara Ritchie House	4.9
	Pentland House	20.0
Motherwell	43 Civic Square	26.3
Oban	Mathieson House	44.4
Paisley	Falcon Osprey and Vigilant House	22.5
	Gilmour House	27.8
	Terminal Building Glasgow Airport	33.7
Perth	1 to 3 Water Vennel	22.2
Peterhead	Keith House	19.5
Rothesay	9 King Street	26.7
Stirling	8 Spittal Street	26.0
Ullapool	24 West Argyll Street	31.6
Wick	Government Buildings and Custom House Wick	24.3

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer with which estate partners HM Revenue and Customs holds contracts relating to accommodation and facilities management for its offices in Scotland. [311968]

Mr. Timms: HM Revenue and Customs' (HMRC) main estate partner is Mapeley with whom it holds the Strategic Transfer of the Estate to the Private Sector (STEPS) contract relating to accommodation and facilities management for offices in Scotland and throughout the UK. HMRC also has estate contracts with London and Regional Properties for two offices in Scotland, one in Edinburgh and one in Glasgow.

Stamp Duty Land Tax: Carbon Emissions

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many homes have received zero carbon stamp duty relief in each month since the relief was introduced. [311708]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: The stamp duty land tax relief (SDLT) for zero carbon homes was introduced to help kick-start the market for new highly efficient technologies in homes, both for the fabric of the building and in the use of micro-generation, and sets a gold standard for green homes. Few currently exist, but the purpose of the relief is to act as signal. We have always made it clear that the SDLT relief for zero carbon homes would evolve and we expect to see more of these homes built in the future.

24 homes have qualified for the zero carbon homes relief since October 2007. Due to the small numbers involved, HMRC tax-payer confidentiality obligations do not allow the requested breakdown of relief granted by month.

Valuation Office: Personal Records

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what databases containing personal data the Valuation Office Agency (*a*) maintains and (*b*) has access to. [311665]

Ian Pearson: The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) maintains a number of databases to support its work, some of which is personal data. In addition, the VOA has access to databases owned by third parties, which are either publicly available or which the VOA has a statutory duty to access in order to carry out its work. These databases may contain personal data.

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