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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

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House of Commons

Thursday 11 March 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—

Voter Registration (Young People)

1. **Mr. Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): What estimate the Electoral Commission has made of the number of people under 25 years old who are not registered to vote. [321505]

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): The Electoral Commission informs me that it published its most recent national estimate for under-registration in England and Wales in 2005. This found that 16 per cent. of eligible 18 to 24-year-olds were not registered. However, recent research published by the commission found that in a small number of case study areas approximately 56 per cent. of those under 25 years old were missing from the registers. The commission plans further research on that issue.

Mr. Hollobone: Does my hon. Friend share my serious concern and alarm, given that the implication of those shocking statistics is that hundreds of young people in Kettering, thousands of young people throughout Northamptonshire and tens of thousands of young people throughout our country will not be able to take part in voting for a change of Government at the next general election because they are not on the electoral register?

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about that, and the Electoral Commission informs me that it is planning a campaign, which will take place before the next general election, with a range of activities targeted at young people. The campaign will include online advertising on sites that the group uses, such as Facebook, along with advertising on television and radio and in magazines. Registration is an urgent matter, and my hon. Friend is right to draw the House's attention to it.

Sir Peter Soulsby (Leicester, South) (Lab): I welcome the measures that the hon. Gentleman has just mentioned, but does he agree that registering people to vote is far

too important to be done on the cheap, and that there is no substitute in many parts of the country and with many target groups for knocking on doors, finding out who lives there and making sure that they are registered to vote?

Mr. Streeter: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and that is the responsibility of electoral returning officers throughout the country. The Electoral Commission is introducing better and clearer guidelines for them on the activity that it expects. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that we must find those young people and make sure that they are put on the electoral register so that they are at least given the opportunity to vote come polling day.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): One very worrying thing about young people not voting is that they are the people on whom the decisions will have the longest-term effect. When I go into schools I find that enthusiasm for politics is great among the younger age group, so will the Electoral Commission consider conducting research on whether a reduction in the voting age to 16 might engage people in the political system while they are at school and before they get lost?

Mr. Streeter: It is an interesting point, but I am afraid that at the most recent general election only 37 per cent. of those aged 18 to 25 could be bothered to vote, and until that percentage increases the case for 16-year-olds being given the right to vote has not been made.

Voter Participation

2. **John Robertson** (Glasgow, North-West) (Lab): What steps the Electoral Commission plans to take to maximise voter participation at the forthcoming general election. [321506]

Mr. Streeter: The commission informs me that, to encourage voter registration ahead of the general election, it will run a multi-media campaign using television, radio, press and online advertising. That activity will be targeted at the groups that are less likely to be registered, including young people, students, certain ethnic minority communities, service personnel and UK citizens living overseas.

John Robertson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his answer, but does he agree that although it is not illegal not to vote, it is illegal not to give the registration officer the necessary information? Have we not have reached the point at which we should marry up the two?

Mr. Streeter: The House would have to consider that issue, and it would involve a change in the law. The Electoral Commission is always in the marketplace for interesting ideas, and I shall make sure it is aware of the hon. Gentleman's representations, but in the end it will be a matter for this House.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby) (Con): I draw my hon. Friend's attention to column 288 at yesterday's Prime Minister's questions, when it was pointed out that the Army Families Federation has carried out trials showing that the majority of troops serving overseas will be unable to vote. In order to maximise voter participation,

will my hon. Friend speak again to the Electoral Commission and take on board the point that I have made before, which is that there should be one registration when people join the armed forces and an encouragement to cast proxy votes, so that when they serve their country abroad, which involves the possibility of dying for their country, they have the opportunity to vote?

Mr. Streeter: That is a very important matter, and the Electoral Commission is extremely alive to it. The commission is working closely with the Ministry of Justice, the Ministry of Defence, Royal Mail, the British Forces Post Office and electoral administrators to ensure that everything is done to improve the situation. Given the tight time scales involved in exercising a postal vote once a general election is called, my hon. Friend makes an extremely important point that proxy voting may be the right answer. The commission is certainly aware of that.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMISSION

The Chairman of the Public Accounts Commission was asked—

DFID Audit

3. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York) (Lab): How many days National Audit Office staff spent in developing countries when auditing the expenditure of the Department for International Development in 2009. [321508]

Mr. Edward Leigh (Gainsborough): I have been asked to reply.

During 2009, National Audit Office staff spent a total of 183 days in developing countries as part of the NAO's financial and value for money audit work relating to DFID. That total includes days spent in developing countries both by NAO employees and by employees of audit firms that the NAO engaged to assist it with its audit of DFID's annual resource accounts.

Hugh Bayley: That amounts to barely two days per country in which DFID has programmes—programmes that involve billions of pounds. Today the International Development Committee published its annual report on DFID's performance and said that although it welcomes the continued rise in DFID's budget, it is concerned that DFID's staff is being reduced, making it harder to ensure that money is well spent in the field. Will the hon. Gentleman ask the Public Accounts Commission to get the Comptroller and Auditor General to look at the problem, write a report and consider whether additional audit staff are needed to ensure that DFID money is well spent in the field?

Mr. Leigh: Constitutionally, the Comptroller and Auditor General is, quite rightly, completely independent in what he determines to study for the Public Accounts Commission and the Public Accounts Committee. However, the hon. Gentleman makes a very good point, which I shall relay to the Comptroller and Auditor General. To be completely clear, the NAO has worked recently—this year—in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Rwanda, Malawi, Ghana, Kenya and India, so it takes very seriously the work of DFID and will continue its work.

Mr. Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): Through the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter), I request that the National Audit Office look particularly—[HON. MEMBERS: "Wrong one!"] I am terribly sorry—I mean the Chairman of the Public Accounts Committee; forgive me. Will the hon. Gentleman look specifically at how DFID money in Sierra Leone is spent? An hon. Member and other friends have just come back from there with the most alarming stories of diversion of DFID aid into the pockets of Ministers down there, and we really need to get Sierra Leone under full transparent audit.

Mr. Leigh: That is an extremely good point. I shall of course relay the right hon. Gentleman's point of view to the Comptroller and Auditor General, and I am sure he would be very happy to undertake a study in Sierra Leone if that were indeed appropriate.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

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

Church Music

4. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What the policy is of the Church Commissioners on encouraging the use of music as part of church and cathedral worship. [321509]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Sir Stuart Bell): The Church's Liturgical Commission promotes and develops understanding of liturgy and its use in the Church. The commission sees music as an integral part of the Church's worship, not an optional extra.

Michael Fabricant: Is the hon. Gentleman aware that Lichfield cathedral is the only cathedral to boast an entire orchestra, which, three times a year, gives public performances of Mozart, Haydn, Beethoven and so on, but also, on other occasions, performs for worship? Through you, Mr. Speaker, may I invite the entire House here today to come to one of these concerts in Lichfield cathedral, although Members will have to pay for their own tickets?

Sir Stuart Bell: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for that kind invitation. He may be aware that the Lichfield cathedral choir heads off to America after Easter, but the cathedral frequently welcomes impressive visiting choirs. If his invitation is to hear the cathedral choir in New York, I am sure that the House would be very happy to accept.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): I endorse everything that my hon. Friend the Member for Lichfield (Michael Fabricant) says about our diocesan cathedral. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that cathedral music is one of the great glories of our English heritage? It is terribly important that cathedral choir schools are able to continue, so can he assure us that they are getting all the support that they need?

Sir Stuart Bell: As we are talking about cathedrals, I echo the views of the hon. Gentleman. He is of course aware of course that the Liturgical Commission takes a strong interest in these things. We are aware of all the traditions of the Church in relation to church music. We understand the transformative potential of music within Church of England worship; it is part and parcel, if I may say so, of our heritage, our religion, and our beliefs. It gives us all great satisfaction to hear cathedral music.

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

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

Investigatory Powers

5. **Mr. Gordon Prentice** (Pendle) (Lab): What recent assessment has been made of the adequacy of the Electoral Commission's investigatory powers. [321510]

Mr. Gary Streeter (South-West Devon): The hon. Gentleman will know that Parliament recently agreed to strengthen the commission's existing powers through the Political Parties and Elections Act 2009. However, these new powers will not come into effect until secondary legislation is agreed by Parliament. The commission informs me that it welcomes the cross-party support that is to occur early in the new Parliament.

Mr. Prentice: What does that say about today's Conservative party, which told the Electoral Commission that it would not—[*Interruption.*]

Mr. Speaker: Order. I cannot have other Members acting as arbiters on the appropriateness or otherwise of what Members are saying. Let us hear Mr. Prentice.

Mr. Prentice: As I was saying, what does it say about today's Conservative party that officials and staff of the Conservative party refused to co-operate with the Electoral Commission during its investigation into Bearwood Corporate Services? That is all documented in the press releases and supporting reports from the Electoral Commission. Will the hon. Member for South-West Devon (Mr. Streeter) advise me whether he thinks the powers of the Electoral Commission should be enhanced to compel the attendance of witnesses when matters concerning possible breaches of electoral law are being discussed?

Mr. Streeter: Parliament has already acted on that, as I said in my answer. The hon. Gentleman, who is an experienced Member of the House, will know that the Speaker's Committee does not go into individual cases, but if he would like to look at what the Electoral Commission's website says about the particular case he has raised, he will see that after a thorough investigation, the donations in question were deemed permissible. I am sure he will be good enough to welcome that.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): Can my hon. Friend say whether the investigatory powers of the Electoral Commission include an ability to prevent political parties in the House from seeking to influence how particular Members vote, particularly on matters relating to their area or their constituency? It seems that

the power of the Whips and the political parties is such that it deters people from voting, because they say, "It doesn't matter which party we vote for; we can't get somebody who will represent us."

Mr. Streeter: My hon. Friend makes an important point, but I am glad to say that it has absolutely nothing to do with the Electoral Commission.

Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North) (Lab): Given that the Electoral Commission is currently undertaking a review of ward boundaries in Stoke-on-Trent, will the hon. Gentleman assure me that it has sufficient resources to ensure that there is full public participation in deciding on the boundaries of the new local wards?

Mr. Streeter: That is of course a matter for the local government boundary committee, which is about to become a stand-alone agency, but I can reassure the hon. Lady that the matter will be conducted in its usual thorough way, including hearing the views of local people.

CHURCH COMMISSIONERS

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

English Heritage (Church Repairs)

6. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York) (Con): What discussions the Church Commissioners have had with English Heritage on grant funding for church repairs in 2010-11. [321511]

The Second Church Estates Commissioner (Sir Stuart Bell): Church officials meet regularly with English Heritage, which, together with the Heritage Lottery Fund, offers grants for urgent repairs to listed places of worship. The scheme continues to be oversubscribed and is due to end in March 2011, so we expect to have discussions with English Heritage this year about its continuation.

Miss McIntosh: I thank the hon. Gentleman for that reply, but it is extremely alarming that from the end of March next year there is no guarantee of funds being available. Will he also confirm that the amount of funding has been severely reduced in recent years, meaning that fewer churches are eligible for it?

Sir Stuart Bell: The Church itself has spent £110 million on current repairs, due in no small measure to the listed places of worship grant scheme, which saw VAT reduced to 5 per cent. The Church can be grateful that the former Chancellor of the Exchequer, now the Prime Minister, pushed that through. We are looking to continue discussions with the European Commission and others to ensure that it is continued. As to the fact that grant money has been reduced, that is regrettably that is the case.

Dean of Derby

7. **Robert Key** (Salisbury) (Con): How many applications the diocese of Derby has received for the vacant post of dean of Derby. [321512]

Sir Stuart Bell: The panel tasked with appointing the new dean of Derby was pleased to receive a very healthy number of inquiries and many good-quality applications following its advertisement. Some 30 applications were considered at the long-listing stage.

Robert Key: Given that the Church of England ordains about 400 priests a year, of whom half are women, was the hon. Gentleman as surprised as I was that not one of the applicants was a woman priest? Does he think that reflects badly on the recruitment process, and that there is some perceived institutional barrier to women making progress in the Church of England?

Sir Stuart Bell: I might in the narrow context of female deans, but the hon. Gentleman will know that the number of women archdeacons is steadily increasing. There are currently 15 of them—14 per cent. of the posts filled. We have two excellent female deans, at the hon. Gentleman's own cathedral in Salisbury and at Leicester cathedral. I agree with him, however, that we ought to do more and that there ought not to be a glass ceiling.

Minster Status

8. **Mr. Andrew Pelling** (Croydon, Central) (Ind): Whether the Church Commissioners allocate funding to the Church of England for the purpose of assisting the consideration of applications for minster status. [321513]

Sir Stuart Bell: Minster status in and of itself has no legal meaning, so the Church Commissioners do not allocate funds for it. That is an example of God moving in mysterious ways.

Mr. Pelling: Would it be possible, when God oversees this process, to put aside the issues of mammon? The business community in Croydon is pushing the idea of minster status, but is it more a matter for the religious ministry of the Church and its Christian care and compassion within the diocese?

Sir Stuart Bell: I sympathise with the hon. Gentleman, who wants a minster in Croydon. Coming from the north-east, I have one in York, another in Beverley and one in Sunderland. I would be happy to speak to the bishop on the issue, and the hon. Gentleman might also wish to drop him a line.

SOLICITOR-GENERAL

The Solicitor-General was asked—

Rape Cases

10. **Mrs. Madeleine Moon** (Bridgend) (Lab): What recent discussions she has had with the Crown Prosecution Service on the prosecution of cases involving allegations of rape. [321514]

The Solicitor-General (Vera Baird): I have frequent discussions with the Director of Public Prosecutions about the prosecution of rape cases. He is at the start of

a national programme of visits across the entire service, a primary focus of which will be discussing with front-line staff cases involving violence against women and rape. The notion now is that we know what good practice is, but it needs to be spread consistently across the country.

Mrs. Moon: I thank my hon. and learned Friend for that excellent response. In January, I addressed an excellent south Wales CPS seminar on the investigation and prosecution of rape, and saw first hand the improvement in the way in which the criminal justice system responds to rape and that the number of prosecutions is increasing. However, how are we going to support CPS staff when they are faced with defence lawyers in court who claim that a woman's behaviour—the amount of alcohol she has consumed, how she dresses and whether she was flirtatious—was an invitation to rape? After all, we do not say that leaving a window open is an invitation to burglary. How can a woman be responsible for a man's action purely because of how she dresses and so on? I would welcome my hon. and learned Friend's comments on that.

The Solicitor-General: My hon. Friend makes a very good point. May I tell her how much positive feedback there was from the CPS on her address earlier this year?

The CPS now takes very seriously the way in which myths and stereotypes can affect its own decision making—it tries to train that out—and how they can be highly relevant in court. Whether the CPS or barristers are doing the advocacy, the CPS makes a point of ensuring that the use of those myths and stereotypes is challenged. Judges—obviously totally independently of the Government or the CPS—now have comprehensive training from the Judicial Studies Board, which includes discussion of how to deal with the kind of assumptions that juries can make or be persuaded to make. There are some new directions in the new bench book, in which the judges are exploring what they can properly say to juries to ensure that a balanced approach is taken, so that the evidence is evaluated in a fair and informed way without that kind of prejudice taking a role.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I just make the point that there are nine questions in this section, and I would like to get through as many of them as possible, so we need to keep it tight.

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): How prevalent is the practice of plea bargaining across the United Kingdom in relation to rape or serious sexual attacks?

The Solicitor-General: I would have to write to the hon. Gentleman with precise figures, but I am sure that sometimes plea negotiations take place. Sometimes a complainant is not very keen to carry on with a prosecution, and some lesser verdict might none the less put the man on the sex offenders register and fire a shot across his bows, as it were. However, if the hon. Gentleman wants detailed figures, I will write to him with them.

Serious Fraud Office

11. **John Howell** (Henley) (Con): What recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Serious Fraud Office in deterring and prosecuting economic crime. [321515]

The Solicitor-General: I am reasonably pleased with the significant progress that the SFO has made over the past two years. It has reduced the time taken to deal with referrals from the public to 20 working days on average, and reduced the time by an average of nine months to investigate and prosecute crime. It has a 91 per cent. conviction rate, achieved its first ever serious crime prevention order this year, and recovered assets valued at more than £8 million—progress in the right direction.

John Howell: I thank the Solicitor-General for that answer, but when Jessica de Grazia looked at the SFO and produced her report back in June 2008, she identified a number of serious failings and deficiencies. What steps has the Solicitor-General taken to deal with those failings and deficiencies?

The Solicitor-General: There was, of course, a whole transformation programme flowing from the de Grazia report, and there was a new director in the form of Richard Alderman and a good deal of change in the higher management echelons of the SFO. The progress made was independently evaluated by the Cabinet Office capability review team in December 2009, and it regarded the SFO as having made very significant strides and improvements since that transformation programme came into play.

David Howarth (Cambridge) (LD): I am sure the Solicitor-General will agree that it is important that the SFO has sufficient resources to carry out its functions on economic crime, but can she confirm that the SFO has not received any specific funding for its anti-corruption work for at least 12 months?

The Solicitor-General: Yes, that is right, as I understand it, but none the less a good deal of work is going on in that direction. I think that there is a question later on this, but probably about 9 per cent. of the funding has, I think, gone into that area, and two specific sections of its work force are dealing with it. Clearly, any specific funding comes through a different kind of funding stream for particular cases. As the hon. Gentleman well knows, the SFO has always been funded in that way, and clearly any such demands will be treated sympathetically.

Mr. Jonathan Djanogly (Huntingdon) (Con): Fraud is now costing the United Kingdom about £30 billion a year compared with an estimated £13 billion only three years ago. It seems that the SFO is increasingly using plea bargaining as a tactic to move its cases along. Does the Solicitor-General accept that our current statutory framework is in need of reform to accommodate that?

The Solicitor-General: I am not quite sure where the hon. Gentleman thinks that the statutory framework needs to be amended to cope with plea bargaining. A new framework set up by the Law Officers has been accepted and taken forward by the SFO, and is currently very much in play. I do not think that he should take the view that fraud increased from £13 billion to £30 billion between the two assessments, because they were done on wholly different bases—the second one postdated

the setting up of the National Fraud Authority, which has done a far more thorough job because it has had the resources to do so.

Fraud is a real problem in this country today. Plea bargaining has a role to play in the quick dispatch of cases, but it always has to be made clear that people who commit fraud will be punished severely by the courts and will not be able to buy their way out of trouble.

Mr. Djanogly: We are actually receiving independent reports that the framework is not fit for purpose. What assurances can the Solicitor-General provide that the SFO is developing its flexible case criteria to minimise growing concern about overlap with other counter-fraud organisations, and has she considered a unified agency?

The Solicitor-General: I am not sure what input the hon. Gentleman is getting, but I would be pleased if he could forward to me the comments that he says back up his question. It does not seem to me that the plea bargaining structures, which is the point he started with, impinge very strongly on any statutory framework, but, as I said, I would be pleased to hear. The various agencies tackling fraud—the SFO, the CPS fraud section and the NFA—work together very closely, and where there is evidence of potential or historical overlap, they work consistently and as quickly as they can to remove it and ensure a streamlined approach.

Action Fraud Helpline

12. **Rosie Cooper (West Lancashire) (Lab):** What recent assessment she has made of the effectiveness of the Action Fraud helpline. [321516]

The Solicitor-General: Action Fraud is a helpline and website offering a central point for individuals and small to medium-sized businesses that have been the subject of fraud. It offers the option of being referred to Victim Support and gives fraud prevention advice, and although it has only been in place since October, it has certainly increased the amount of fraud reported, and assisted in intelligence gathering.

Rosie Cooper: Can the Solicitor-General tell me whether the Action Fraud helpline is up and running in my area, and say precisely how it will help my constituents who have been the victims of fraud?

The Solicitor-General: Yes, it is now. The Acton Fraud helpline started in October 2009, and it is functioning nationally, but the question is how to promote it. We need to promote it region by region, so that instead of it being inundated with complaints straight away, they come in at a rate such that it can expand to meet them. Although the helpline started in the midlands, it is now in the north-west, where my hon. Friend's constituency is, as well as the north-east, where mine is. The helpline will offer information to prosecutions, if that is practical, as well as victim support, and it will absolutely ensure that evidence of fraud brought by individuals goes into the intelligence that we use to try to wipe out fraud more broadly.

Retail Crime

13. **Miss Anne McIntosh** (Vale of York) (Con): How many prosecutions the Crown Prosecution Service has brought for offences related to retail crime in the last 12 months; and if she will make a statement. [321517]

The Solicitor-General: The records maintained by the CPS do not identify retail crime separately, but the Office for Criminal Justice Reform says that 72,609 defendants were proceeded against for stealing from shops and stores in 2008. That is the latest figure, which exceeded the figure for the preceding year, which was 67,644.

Miss McIntosh: I thank the Solicitor-General for that reply, but does she share my concern and that of retailers, particularly small shopkeepers and newsagents, about the rising tide of retail crime, including burglaries and shop theft, when a degree of violence is used? What measures does she expect her Department to be able to take to prosecute such cases successfully and to send out a strong message that her Department and the Government generally are dealing seriously with the increase in such crime?

The Solicitor-General: We do take crime very seriously. It is an established principle of sentencing that when a theft or other retail crime is visited upon a small business, the degree of violence is an aggravating factor to take into account, because it can obviously cause more damage. That is a principle that we support entirely. As I said, convictions have increased, and we intend to be vigilant to ensure that they continue to do so.

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East) (Lab): Will my hon. and learned Friend satisfy herself that the Crown Prosecution Service has not successfully prosecuted cases on the basis of police files that were compiled using evidence illegally obtained by *News of the World* phone hacking?

The Solicitor-General: Yes—I am not sure that any connection has been made, but I am very well aware of the issue, and it is an issue well raised.

Serious Fraud Office

14. **Hugh Bayley** (City of York) (Lab): How much the Serious Fraud Office spent on investigating offences of trans-national bribery in 2009. [321519]

The Solicitor-General: The SFO very much recognises the importance of that work. It has an anti-corruption and an international assistance unit working successfully with foreign Governments, and around 15 large-scale anti-corruption cases are currently under investigation. So far this financial year, the SFO has spent about 9 per cent. of its funding on such work.

Hugh Bayley: The SFO needs more money to investigate and prosecute bribery cases. The Solicitor-General will have seen that BAE Systems was required to pay \$400 million to the US Department of Justice in relation to the al-Yamamah case. Will she consider how financial penalties paid in such cases in the UK could be used to fund the cost of enforcing the law against bribery?

The Solicitor-General: Yes, there is a relationship already between asset recovery, in a broad and not technical sense, and a premium on that, as it were, for the organisation that has recovered the assets. The issue is one that we are looking at, in order to ensure that, in the criminal sense as it were, the polluter pays.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): In the context of asset recovery, will the hon. and learned Lady warmly commend the co-operation between the Police Service of Northern Ireland and the Garda Síochána, which are working increasingly closely together to combat all forms of crime, in all parts of the island of Ireland?

The Solicitor-General: Yes, I am sure that is something that should be thoroughly commended, as part of a pattern of co-operative behaviour that is reflected across the UK these days.

Rape Cases

15. **Mr. Jim Cunningham** (Coventry, South) (Lab): What recent steps she has taken to reduce the time taken between charges being brought and court proceedings in rape cases. [321520]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service tries to ensure that at the time of charge, cases are as trial-ready as possible, so that subsequent delays in the court process can be avoided. Ensuring that whenever possible one specialist rape prosecutor takes on a case from start to finish contributes to better case management and better timeliness.

Mr. Cunningham: How does the number of reported rapes compare with the number of convictions for rape?

The Solicitor-General: The conviction rate from charge to conviction is 58 per cent., which represents a significant increase on what the rate has been historically. By analogy, 65 per cent. is the conviction rate for robbery. There is obviously still room for improvement, but things are going in the right direction. It is imperative that we send out a message that rapists are now being convicted at that rate, so that women—and, indeed, men—have the confidence to report, and do not feel that they will be put through the mill again. There is still a large drop-out rate between complaint and getting to court, but we are trying to tackle that in a range of ways. We now have 30 sexual assault referral centres, and a whole phalanx of independent sexual violence advisers who befriend and support a complainant from the minute they come to the police until the end of the case. This gives the complainant better sustenance than they would have had before.

Serious Fraud Office

16. **John Robertson** (Glasgow, North-West) (Lab): What the policy of the Serious Fraud Office is on assistance for those who have lost substantial savings to fraudsters. [321521]

The Solicitor-General: The Serious Fraud Office puts victims at the heart of its work. In this financial year it has recovered about £9 million from fraudsters, and £4 million of that has been paid back to victims.

John Robertson: My hon. and learned Friend and I both served on all 39 sittings of the Standing Committee on the Proceeds of Crime Act 2002. It was never stated in those deliberations that the money had to go back to the victims. Why has only £4 million of that £9 million gone back to the victims? Does that meet their needs and reflect how much they lost in the first place?

The Solicitor-General: The SFO puts a premium on ensuring that money is repaid to victims whenever possible. Sometimes, however, it is not practical to identify where money has come from. On some occasions it has come from organisations, and is returned to them; on others, it comes into the public purse. When dealing with assets recovery, the SFO's intention is, first and foremost, to ensure repayment to identifiable victims.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): Insider trading is one of the most awful kinds of fraud. Is the Serious Fraud Office able to cope with looking after the victims of this specialist fraud, especially in the light of the fact that if the opposition got into power, they would abolish the SFO?

The Solicitor-General: Like a large number of the things that the opposition would do if they got in, that would be seriously unwise. The SFO very much has its eye on the whole insider trading agenda. It has specialists to look into it, and they can help to support the victims of that particularly heinous form of fraud.

Joint Venture Property Investments

18. **Mr. Andrew Pelling** (Croydon, Central) (Ind): What recent guidance the Law Officers' Departments have issued to Government Departments on the legal rights of local authorities undertaking joint venture property investments. [321523]

The Solicitor-General: By long-standing convention observed by successive Administrations and embodied in the ministerial code, the fact that the Law Officers have or have not advised on a particular issue, and the content of any advice, are not disclosed outside Government.

Mr. Pelling: I am grateful to the Solicitor-General for that answer, because it gives me the opportunity to highlight what might be appropriate practice for supporting local authorities that get involved in joint ventures on the basis of property speculation, as Croydon is doing. I appreciate that the economics might be a matter for another Department, but would she think it appropriate to give local authorities good guidance on their legal exposure when they get involved with special purpose vehicles and joint ventures with property companies and the private equity business?

The Solicitor-General: The hon. Gentleman was kind enough to inform me of the nature of his concern the other night. His council has not sought Government funding, or any approval or consents, for the special purpose vehicle that is the cause of his concern. The Government do not therefore have any relationship or involvement with the council in that regard. He is right, however, to suggest that if the council sought funding,

consent or associated approval in the future, the Government would consider the nature of the venture with great care.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. We now come to questions to the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey), representing the House of Commons Commission, and to the Leader of the House. Unfortunately, I note that the hon. Member for North Devon is not here. [*Interruption.*] Ah, the hon. Gentleman has arrived—and his arrival is most welcome. I call Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown.

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) (Con): Mr. Speaker, this important issue has not suddenly—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I think that the hon. Gentleman is getting a little ahead of himself, and a bit confused. "Question 19" will suffice at this stage.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

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

Day Nursery

19. **Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (Cotswold) (Con): What recent progress has been made on the establishment of a day nursery in the House. [321524]

Nick Harvey (North Devon): My apologies, Mr. Speaker, as I think I may have caused the confusion.

Following the Commission's decision to establish a nursery, a project board has been established and good progress is being made on drawing up the specifications.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Apologies for that slight slip, Mr. Speaker.

This important issue has not suddenly arisen before the House. I believe that the process so far has been unacceptable and undemocratic. Will the hon. Gentleman confirm that £400,000 has recently been spent on refurbishing Bellamy's bar, and that this proposal will cost an additional £400,000? Will he confirm whether that has been included in the House budget estimates for this financial year? Will he confirm whether the Finance and Services Committee—

Mr. Speaker: Order. [*Interruption.*] The hon. Gentleman will resume his seat. At Question Time, a Member asks one question, with a modest preamble, which the hon. Gentleman has already had. He has asked his question; he must now listen to the answer.

Nick Harvey: Thank you, Mr. Speaker. The recent refurbishment in Bellamy's involves a significant amount of work and furnishing that can be reused—certainly about a third of the cost can be used directly. The hon. Gentleman says that this has come about swiftly, but I would point out that there have been constant surveys of the need for child care provision here, and the decision has been taken to move swiftly with this project

so that the option is available to new Members as early as possible in the new Parliament to take up this facility if they need it.

Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North) (Lab): It is often said that when we come into this place we do things for our grandchildren rather than for our children, because it takes so long to get anything done. The important thing, I say to the hon. Gentleman, is that we treat the House of Commons as the workplace of parliamentary democracy. Workplace nurseries are important. Will the hon. Gentleman give me an assurance that, after my 22 years in this place, there might be at least some prospect now of having a workplace nursery for my grandchildren, and those of other Members.

Nick Harvey: I hope that it will be available a great deal sooner than that. The project is making good progress. The detailed specification is being worked through at the moment. There are some difficulties, because of the nature of the building, but much work has gone into looking at the feasibility, and we intend the project to continue to make progress and to be ready by the end of August.

Peter Luff (Mid-Worcestershire) (Con): I entirely share the perception of the need for such a day nursery, but I hope that the hon. Gentleman will agree that the House of Commons should establish any such facility on an exemplary basis. Given that, as on this particular occasion, a nursery cannot comply with statutory guidance to providers, I hope he will search urgently for an alternative site—one that would comply with that guidance.

Nick Harvey: There will be no question whatever of progressing with any project that does not meet all the statutory norms. We are progressing the project in consultation with experts and providers, and there is no question whatever of cutting corners and not meeting proper standards.

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East) (Lab): May I urge the hon. Gentleman not to be swayed by the anachronistic and vociferous views of a minority of MPs? There are plenty of places to get a beer in this place, but there is nowhere for our hard-working staff to drop off their kids.

Nick Harvey: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his observation that this project fulfils a very real and serious need. Colleagues who have had to find facilities for their children at short notice will be better served by knowing that there is such a facility on site, and being run professionally.

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

The Leader of the House was asked—

Parliamentary Questions

20. **Mr. Mark Harper** (Forest of Dean) (Con): What recent discussions she has had with ministerial colleagues to ensure the completeness and timeliness of answers to parliamentary questions for written answer. [321525]

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Barbara Keeley): I know that the hon. Gentleman has raised this matter in the House on previous occasions—for instance, in points of order on 9 and 23 February—and that the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) raised it in a point of order on Tuesday. My right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House and I take any concerns felt by Members about this very seriously, and we have held meetings and written to Ministers about their performance in answering parliamentary questions.

Mr. Harper: I am grateful to the Deputy Leader of the House for taking the matter seriously, but I am afraid that her colleagues in the Department for Work and Pensions apparently do not. However, she will be pleased to learn—as, I am sure, will you, Mr. Speaker—that some progress has been made since I raised my point of order: only 19 of my questions are now outstanding, although eight have been outstanding for more than a month. At least the Department has answered my question about how many named day written questions it does answer on time—and I am sorry to say that for the last three years it has been the pitifully low proportion of 30 per cent. The position has not got worse, which is something, but it has not got any better either. In the few remaining weeks of the current Parliament, what efforts will the Deputy Leader of the House—and, indeed, the Leader of the House—make to persuade the Department to take its responsibilities to the House seriously?

Barbara Keeley: As the hon. Gentleman says, we have taken specific action in relation to the Department for Work and Pensions. The previous Deputy Leader of the House wrote to the Department and, as the hon. Gentleman knows, I met a Minister and officials to discuss their performance. My office recently spoke to officials again. The Leader of the House has written to the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, and both she and I spoke to the Secretary of State yesterday.

Mr. Barry Sheerman (Huddersfield) (Lab/Co-op): I can tell my hon. Friend that many of us are given a very good service by most Departments, but I have one caveat: when the Cabinet Minister representing a Department is in another place, I find that I receive much slower service from the Department concerned.

Barbara Keeley: We have accepted recommendations from the Procedure Committee, and new procedures will operate in the new Parliament. There will be regular monitoring of late answering of questions, and further work will be done on challenging unsatisfactory answers. Better guidance on answering questions has already been provided for Ministers and officials, and the Prime Minister recently wrote to Cabinet colleagues reminding them of the need to answer questions both fully and in a timely manner.

Back-Bench Business Committee

21. **Dr. Evan Harris** (Oxford, West and Abingdon) (LD): What discussions she has had with hon. Members on the means of implementing the House's decision to establish a Back-Bench business committee in time for the start of the next Parliament. [321526]

Barbara Keeley: The Leader of the House will table a motion to give effect to the resolutions of the House that were agreed following the recent debate on House of Commons reform.

Dr. Harris: I think the whole House is pleased to hear that, and we should acknowledge that, but it is only half the answer to my question, which involves whether the “Wright” Standing Order will be brought forward. I hope the Deputy Leader of the House accepts that the most appropriate procedure would be to consult the Wright Committee members whose amendment, essentially, was carried last Thursday, to ensure that the detailed Wright Standing Order, and also motion 62 in the Remaining Orders and Notices—and the Standing Order tabled, too—are submitted to the House for decision. Can the hon. Lady tell us when that is likely to happen?

Barbara Keeley: The Leader of the House has to consider the motions that are required to give effect to resolutions of the House. Having looked at the motion tabled by the Reform of the House of Commons Committee, I note that some of it differs both from the recommendations in the Committee’s report and from our debates. Because there are some departures, further consideration will be necessary. However, hon. Members can rest assured that there will be motions giving effect to the resolutions of the House, as the Leader of the House told the hon. Gentleman yesterday. We ought now to be pleased with the progress that we are making.

Sir Robert Smith (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD): May I reinforce the importance of this matter, and may I ask the Deputy Leader of the House to specify the respects in which the Wright Committee’s proposals do not match what was voted for by the House? If we are to implement what was recommended by the Wright Committee and voted for by the House, a good starting point will surely be the Wright Committee’s own idea of how Standing Orders should be used to give effect to the House’s decision.

Barbara Keeley: The starting point is that some good steps were clearly taken, given that the resolutions were passed overwhelmingly. It is good that we know the will of the House. I can specify one of the details for which the hon. Gentleman has asked. Moving the power that currently resides with the Liaison Committee to the new Back-Bench business committee was not discussed during the debate. There are other differences between the resolutions that we agreed in the House last week and the detail of the motion, but the matter is being considered.

Parliamentary Questions

22. **Mr. Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): If she will bring forward proposals to provide that hon. Members may only table one question for oral answer to each Government department at each Question Time. [321527]

Barbara Keeley: As I said to the hon. Gentleman in January, the Modernisation Committee concluded that Members should not have to choose between tabling the two types of question. It is for the hon. Gentleman

to make representations to the Procedure Committee if he wants to change the way in which topical questions are processed.

Mr. Hollobone: Everybody would agree that topical questions are a very good thing, but one of the unintended consequences is that some Members get to ask a Department two questions on one day, while others get no chance at all.

Barbara Keeley: I am in danger of repeating the last answer that I gave on this subject. I understand the hon. Gentleman’s point, but in implementing topical questions, we have not forced a Member to choose between asking a substantive question and asking a topical question. A Member may have a reason for wanting to do both in one sitting. As the hon. Gentleman has said, topical questions are a successful innovation.

Mr. Shailesh Vara (North-West Cambridgeshire) (Con): It is all very well for questions to be asked and answered, but the Deputy Leader will recall that on 26 November last year during Business questions, she was refreshingly candid in saying that a Minister in the Department for Work and Pensions had been rebuked for not answering questions properly—or, rather, was questioned about his accuracy. I note that the Leader of the House has written to the Secretary of State for Work and Questions, but will the Deputy Leader consider publishing a regular list of all offending Ministers with whom there have been meetings, or to whom the Secretary of State has written?

Barbara Keeley: I am not sure that that is necessarily appropriate. We have accepted the Procedure Committee’s recommendations, and in the new Parliament there will be regular monitoring of the number of questions answered later than the conventional answering period of five days. There will also be the possibility that the Procedure Committee can challenge any answers that are considered unsatisfactory. With those two measures, we are feeling our way towards finding improvements. I know that you, Mr. Speaker, are very concerned that we should start to get this right. There has been a great deal of action, and to some extent, we will have to wait and see whether it proves to have been good action.

Mr. Vara: I am afraid that that simply will not do. The Deputy Leader of the House is on record on numerous occasions as having spoken about openness and transparency, but when she has an opportunity actually to do something about it, she fudges the issue. What is the problem with naming and shaming errant Ministers?

Barbara Keeley: I need to make it clear that I am always happy, as is the Leader of the House, to make representations to any Department on any situation that Members want to raise—and I shall leave it there. I have in the past been clear and candid about where steps have been taken. We are talking about working through issues with one Department, and the matter has been addressed.

Report Stage of Legislation

23. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield) (Con): If she will bring forward proposals for the amendment of Standing Orders to prevent programme motions applying to the Report stage of legislation. [321528]

Barbara Keeley: The House has recently agreed to new procedures for managing its own business, including establishing a House Business Committee in the next Parliament. That Committee would make decisions about scheduling business, including the Report stage of Bills. I know that the hon. Gentleman will not be here to see the new Committee operate, but I am sure that he is pleased, as we are, with our progress on Commons reform.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: Does not the Deputy Leader think it, both constitutionally and democratically, utterly wrong and unacceptable that a Bill should go to the other place with new clauses and Government and Opposition amendments undebated in this place? Members whose constituencies might be affected by the Bill have no opportunity whatever to participate in the debate.

Barbara Keeley: I have answered questions on this matter time and again. Programming does not always work perfectly, but it does serve to provide great certainty in timetabling the different stages of a Bill; it is, for instance, very helpful in timetabling Public Bill Committees. We must see these changes in the context of the other steps forward that we have taken in improving scrutiny, especially pre-legislative scrutiny and the introduction of evidence taking. Therefore, there are now many more opportunities for the scrutiny of Bills than previously.

Conduct in the Chamber

24. **Michael Fabricant** (Lichfield) (Con): What recent representations she has received on the operation of the Standing Orders governing conduct in the Chamber. [321529]

Barbara Keeley: We have not received any representations on either the current operation of Standing Orders or suggestions for amendments. The conduct of Members in the Chamber is a matter for your judgment, Mr. Speaker, not for Standing Orders.

Michael Fabricant: May I draw the Deputy Leader's attention to early-day motion 1054? In the natural hurly-burly of debate, it is understandable that a Minister may from time to time say something that subsequently turns out not to be correct—and the Minister then, quite properly, writes a letter to say, "I made a mistake in my remarks in the Chamber." Is it not right, however, that if a mistake is made in the Chamber, that should be corrected in the Chamber, rather than being the subject of a private letter?

Barbara Keeley: As I understand it, a Minister will correct information only if he was asserting that information. In the situation to which I think the hon. Gentleman is referring, the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families was challenging some figures that an Opposition Member had given, and that is not a case for correction in the Chamber. When a debate is going backwards and forwards between Members, with comments being made and assertions being made and then challenged, that is not the same as when a Minister has given figures that are then proved to be wrong.

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

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

Bellamy's Bar

25. **Mr. Edward Leigh** (Gainsborough) (Con): Whether the House of Commons Commission plans to respond to the public petition against the closure of Bellamy's bar. [321531]

Nick Harvey (North Devon): The petition has been noted, but the Commission remains of the view, reached on independent advice and after examining a number of options, that Bellamy's bar is the most suitable available site, and it is proceeding on that basis.

Mr. Leigh: The previous Speaker summoned me in for a dressing down because the Public Accounts Committee had dared to criticise the House of Commons authorities for overspending on Portcullis House. Will he accept, however, that we must insist on value for money not only in the wider Whitehall apparatus but here, and that we have to consider whether it represents value for money to spend hundreds of thousands of pounds on equipping facilities for the staff just in order to strip them out? Is there nowhere else in the House where we can deliver this unit more cost-effectively?

Nick Harvey: A number of alternative sites for the nursery were considered, including Speaker's Green, North Curtain corridor, Lower Ground Floor secretaries' area, Cloister Court and the Oratory, the Shooting Gallery, 2 the Abbey Garden basement, 14 Tothill street and 4 Millbank, but 1 Parliament street offered the most suitable accommodation, principally because of the ease of conversion and the proximity to the Chamber.

Ms Katy Clark (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman accept my congratulations on the progress that has been made in this matter? I understand there has been a campaign in this place for at least 40 years for facilities of this nature, and it will not just be staff who benefit, but many hon. Members. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that many Members will benefit as a result of these developments, regardless of where they end up being located?

Nick Harvey: I sincerely hope so. The Commission felt it was important to demonstrate to both new and current Members with small children that the House will help them to combine their parliamentary work with their family responsibilities.

Day Nursery

26. **Mr. Christopher Chope** (Christchurch) (Con): Whether the Finance and Services Committee has advised the House of Commons Commission on the cost of establishing a day nursery. [321532]

Nick Harvey: The Commission considered it important to have the nursery facility operating early in the new Parliament, before new Members had made other child care arrangements. This is a challenging time scale, and

in view of the time constraints the Commission decided it was not feasible to consult the FSC for appraisal in the usual way.

Mr. Chope: But under Standing Order No. 144, the Finance and Services Committee should have been consulted, and is it not correct that the Chairman of the Commission knows that the project is not a good use of resources, is a reckless waste of taxpayers' money, and would never have been approved by the FSC? Is that not the reason why it was never referred to that Committee, and will he ensure that it now is?

Nick Harvey: There would be no question whatever of the Commission proceeding with something that it considered reckless or a waste of public money. Competitive tendering will be undertaken for the contracting of works and for running the nursery, and a significant proportion of the work paid for by the money that has been referred to as having been spent on Bellamy's bar over the past couple of years will be reused in the new scheme.

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford) (Con): May I press the hon. Gentleman on the answer he gave my hon. Friend the Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope)? Given that the hon. Gentleman attended the meeting of the Commission, can he tell the House which member of the Commission expressly voiced the opinion that the matter would not be put before the Finance and Services Committee—because it was known that Committee was not very happy with the proposal and the cost?

Nick Harvey: No, the decision not to refer the matter to the Finance and Services Committee was simply one of timing, because we wanted to make the facility available early in the new Parliament.

Mr. Speaker: Now we come to the business question—*[Interruption.]* Order. The hon. Member for West Chelmsford (Mr. Burns) should calm himself—he has the weekend ahead, which he can enjoy—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman should calm himself.

Business of the House

11.30 am

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

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

MONDAY 15 MARCH—General debate on defence in the world.

TUESDAY 16 MARCH—Opposition Day (6th allotted day). There will be a debate entitled “The Government’s Handling of Equitable Life”, followed by a debate on access to higher education. Both debates will arise on an Opposition motion.

WEDNESDAY 17 MARCH—Second Reading of the Cluster Munitions (Prohibitions) Bill [*Lords*].

THURSDAY 18 MARCH—General debate on the Intelligence and Security Committee (annual report).

FRIDAY 19 MARCH—The House will not be sitting.

The provisional business for the week commencing 22 March will include:

MONDAY 22 MARCH—A motion to approve three statutory instruments relating to Northern Ireland devolution, followed by consideration of Lords amendments to the Child and Poverty Bill.

TUESDAY 23 MARCH—Consideration in Committee and remaining stages of the Cluster Munitions (Prohibitions) Bill [*Lords*].

WEDNESDAY 24 MARCH—My right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer will open his Budget statement.

THURSDAY 25 MARCH—Continuation of the Budget debate.

FRIDAY 26 MARCH—The House will not be sitting.

Sir George Young: The House is grateful for next week’s business.

May we have a statement from the Prime Minister on his assertion at Question Time yesterday? He said that under this Government

“the defence budget has been rising every year.”—[*Official Report*, 10 March 2010; Vol. 507, c. 291.]

That is a claim the Prime Minister made repeatedly at the Chilcot inquiry last Friday, but as he should know, spending on the Ministry of Defence was in fact cut in real terms between 2003-04 and 2004-05. The Leader of the House will know that the ministerial code requires Ministers to correct

“any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity.”

Given that the Prime Minister is at risk of inadvertently misleading Parliament, when will he put the record straight?

May we have a debate on the failures of the system of serious case reviews into child abuse? We all assumed when we read of the Fritzl case in Austria that it could never happen in Britain, but it has, despite the involvement of 100 social workers from more than 28 different agencies. It was a particularly horrifying situation and it is right that we do everything we can to protect the privacy of the victim and their families. However, as Professor Cantrill poignantly noted yesterday, every time a horrific case of child abuse leads to a serious case review the authorities pledge to learn from their mistakes,

but we never seem to. Does the right hon. and learned Lady agree that we need to debate the wider implications of publishing serious case reviews and, indeed, learning the lessons from them?

May I again press the Leader of the House on the mystery surrounding the debate on overseas aid? I have raised it several times but never had an adequate answer. We were supposed to have had that annual debate in November, but it was cancelled. It was rescheduled for February but pulled at the last minute, and now it looks as though we may not get it before Dissolution. It is an important debate, particularly given our involvement in Haiti, and I would not want anyone to get the impression that the Secretary of State for International Development is too busy strategising the election to fulfil his ministerial duties to the House.

Turning to the Wright Committee, may I welcome the enormous progress that the House made last Thursday, particularly in persuading the Government to get the Back-Bench business committee up and running by the beginning of the next Parliament as I had originally hoped? Swift work has been done on turning the resolutions into draft Standing Orders, but, as we heard in relation to Question 21, there is now some issue as to whether the resolutions on the Order Paper will have the support of the Government. Will the right hon. and learned Lady give a commitment that this issue will be debated and resolved before we rise for the Easter recess?

When will we complete the truncated debate on the Procedure Committee’s report into the election of the Speaker and Deputy Speakers? The right hon. and learned Lady will recognise the sense of dissatisfaction felt across the House about the way in which this matter has been handled. She tabled all the relevant resolutions and remaining orders, but although some were debated, others seem to have got stuck on the Order Paper. The Procedure Committee has asked for a decision to be made, but the Government are standing in the way. Is that not symptomatic of the old way of doing business that the House rejected last Thursday?

Now that we know the date of the Budget, will the right hon. and learned Lady confirm that we will have the usual four days of debate thereafter? Finally, given that it was the Prime Minister who chose to announce the date of the Budget, can I now assume that it will be the Prime Minister who will give us the date of the Easter recess? That is a bit of information that I have been seeking in vain from the right hon. and learned Lady since last October.

Ms Harman: The Prime Minister gave evidence to the Chilcot inquiry last Friday, he answered questions about defence spending in Prime Minister’s questions yesterday, and there will be a defence debate on Monday. I strongly refute any suggestion or implication from the shadow Leader of the House that the Prime Minister has in any way misled the House or, indeed, anyone else. He has been absolutely forthright about the defence budget and about this Government’s long-standing and strong commitment to ensuring that our defence forces have the resources they need. They have the full backing of the Government and, indeed, the British people.

As far as serious case reviews are concerned, we publish the findings of such reviews so that lessons can be learned. The serious case review process was itself reviewed in 2006, and I do not remember the Opposition

coming forward at that time with any suggestion that background information to such reviews and their conclusions should be published. The important thing is that the findings are published, which indeed they are in what is described as the executive summary, as well as the lessons that have to be learned. I think that we all share the absolute horror about the recent case. The lessons have been published and the Government have accepted the need to act on, and they are acting on, the issues that have arisen out of that case.

On overseas aid, the Government feel very committed to and proud of our record. Before we came into government, there was no Department for International Development. We now have DFID and we have doubled our aid budget, so we are strongly committed to overseas aid, to keeping the House informed of the Government's work on international development and to listening to Members' concerns. There is obviously an opportunity to raise questions with the Secretary of State and Ministers in DFID questions, and there have been numerous statements. I have not been able to announce a debate on overseas aid within the next two weeks, but the shadow Leader of the House will see that there is a general debate on defence. However, there will be the usual opportunity to raise issues of international development in the debate following the Budget statement.

As far as the Committee on Reform of the House of Commons, the Wright Committee, is concerned, as my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House said in answer to an earlier question, we should all be gratified with the progress that was made last week. We have agreed a major programme of reforms—the election of Select Committees Chairs by secret ballot, the election of Deputy Speakers by secret ballot, the election of Select Committee members, the ability of private Members to table motions that can be debated and voted on, and a new way of deciding the business of the House, whereby it will not be done by the Leader of the House at the Dispatch Box after a process of private discussions among the usual channels, but by a Committee of the whole House.

As my hon. Friend said, it is gratifying that there were very big majorities in the House last week to resolve this matter and move forward. We have the resolutions of the House. My task now is to make sure that the House is given an opportunity to endorse the Standing Orders that will give effect to them. My mandate is the will of the House as expressed in the resolutions. We need Standing Orders to give effect to them—nothing less. There is no suggestion that we should try to do anything less than what the House agreed to in the resolutions, because that would not be right.

It is helpful that a resolution has been tabled in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Dr. Wright) and others. We have that as a basis, and we will see whether the advice to us is that it is in exact compliance and that it does no less—but probably no more—than the resolutions of the House. Whether or not that is the case, I can assure the House that we will bring forward the Standing Orders, and there will be an opportunity for the House to endorse them before the next election.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): The problem of course is that there are not many days left now to do these things. I am waiting in particular for

the motion to dissolve Parliament. I have asked for it for the last two weeks and got no reply. I hope that the motion will be tabled very soon now.

I do not think that the right hon. and learned Lady answered the point raised by the shadow Leader of the House about whether there would be four days for the Budget debate. I hope that we will have four full days, because no one would want to suggest that the Government are attempting to cut and run after the Budget. Let us have four days, therefore, with one devoted to the position of manufacturing industry. This week's trade figures were absolutely disastrous, especially given the weakness of sterling. That ought to be a boost to exports and manufacturing industry, but in fact we are seeing the reverse, so may we have a debate on that?

A fund-raising appeal was launched this morning at Clarence house for veterans suffering from combat stress. This is a very important issue, and I know that hon. Members on both sides of the House feel very strongly about it. May we have a statement from the Ministry of Defence about the arrangements for mental health facilities for those who have fought in wars on our behalf? Their symptoms often express themselves a long time after the episodes in which they were involved. We must make sure that we make proper provision for our veterans.

Will the Leader of the House tell us when she expects to have the Second Reading of the Digital Economy Bill? That very controversial Bill was introduced into another place in November last year. It has had three months of detailed scrutiny and it completes its proceedings there next week. We must surely give that Bill at least a Second Reading here before dissolution. Will the right hon. and learned Lady tell us when?

May we have a brief debate on nuclear power? Planning permissions are being forced through by the new procedures, on the assumption that nuclear is the right answer for our energy needs. Many people feel that it is not, and we should establish a commission to look at these matters in depth.

My last point would warm the heart of the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack), if he were in the Chamber. May we have a debate on jargon? I notice that the Local Government Association this week issued a book on banned jargon, saying that the public sector

“should not hide behind impenetrable jargon and phrases”.

One of the key exhibits in the book is the word “wellderly”, which I believe was coined by the right hon. and learned Lady. It is now banned from use in local government, so may we have a debate on the use of jargon?

Ms Harman: Further to the assurance that I gave to the shadow Leader of the House that the House will be given an opportunity to make a decision on the Standing Orders giving effect to the resolutions following the House's decisions on the Wright Committee recommendations, because we will simply be giving effect to decisions that the House has made already, it should be possible to deal with those Standing Orders as part of the remaining orders of the day. Pursuant to what was raised earlier, however, I will obviously have to make sure that everybody agrees that the Standing Orders give effect as the House intended; I shall send drafts to everybody who has shown interest in the issue so that people can look at the Standing Orders, which

[Ms Harman]

will run to a number of pages. We simply want to get the science right. The House's position is clear. I am committed to getting the Standing Orders that give effect to the House's decision, and it ought to be possible for that to be done as part of remaining orders of the day.

As far as the days for Budget debate are concerned, I have announced the business for next week and the provisional business for the week after. Of course, there is no attempt to curtail any debate on the economic situation, on our determination to secure the recovery rather than putting it at risk, on making sure that we protect front-line services rather than cut them, as the Conservatives would, and on making sure that we have a fair tax system rather than an unfair one that would help a few people at the top, which is the Tories' proposal.

We look forward to having good debates that focus on all those issues, as well as the important issue of manufacturing in this country. Obviously, it is important that we support that, including through tax relief for business investment, which we want to keep going. We want to work to support not only manufacturing in this country but the expansion of the global economy. We are a trading nation and need to make sure that we work internationally, particularly with our partners in Europe, with whom most of our trade is, to ensure that there is growth across Europe. That will help our trade position.

As far as veterans are concerned, I completely agree with what the hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) said about combat stress. We have already given priority in primary care to veterans, but there is a whole range of other things that need to be addressed. We shall have an opportunity to revisit those important issues in the defence debate next Monday.

As far as nuclear power is concerned, the hon. Gentleman will have been involved in and seen the statements about our wanting energy independence and a balanced energy policy. He will be familiar with the proceedings on the Energy Bill, which has been through the House recently. He will also know about the framework laid out by the Planning Act 2008. It allows for national policy statements and then for the issues to be looked at locally. We now have a much better framework for making sure that we have energy independence while reducing our carbon emissions.

As far as jargon is concerned, the hon. Gentleman brings me extremely bad news: the word "welderly" had hardly got off the ground before being banned. I thought I was supposed to be the person who bans things all the time, but now I discover that I am the victim of an unfair banning order. The point about the welderly is that we rightly spend a lot of time in the House talking about frail elderly people and our national care service that is needed to support people in their own homes and to ensure that people can have residential care if they need it. However, we need to recognise that most elderly people are fit, well and active. They contribute to their families, often go out to work and play a big part in the community. They are the well elderly—the welderly. That is one banning order that I am not submitting to.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. At least 24 right hon. and hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. I remind the House that there is a statement to follow, as well as a topical debate and an important Second Reading debate, of interest notably, but not exclusively, to Northern Irish Members. There is much business to accomplish, so short questions and answers are required.

Jacqui Smith (Redditch) (Lab): May we have a debate about the role and independence of the excellent researchers in the House of Commons Library? This week, the shadow Home Secretary, who is a serial reoffender when it comes to dodgy crime statistics, embroiled the Library in controversy by quoting selectively from research. Would it not be better if, when using research from the House of Commons Library, all of us undertook to publish all that research, rather than selectively quoting for political advantage?

Ms Harman: I pay tribute to my right hon. Friend, who played a very big part in getting crime down in this country. As she says, the British crime survey, which is the best survey because it does not depend on reporting vagaries, shows that all crime—particularly violent crime—has gone down over the past 10 years.

Mr. John Whittingdale (Maldon and East Chelmsford) (Con): May I repeat to the Leader of the House the question about when we can expect the Second Reading of the Digital Economy Bill? Does she accept that it is a substantial, complex and controversial piece of legislation, and that it would be deeply unsatisfactory if the House were not able to give it proper scrutiny?

Ms Harman: In the usual way, I have announced only the business for next week and the provisional business for the week thereafter. Obviously, any business following that will need to await announcement next Thursday.

Mr. Robert Marshall-Andrews (Medway) (Lab): As some form of peace process starts again in the middle east, my right hon. and learned Friend will be aware that 1.5 million Palestinians remain trapped, blockaded and increasingly destitute in Gaza. Will she find time in the course of the next two weeks or before Dissolution for the House to debate that continuing atrocity?

Ms Harman: There will be an opportunity following the Budget debate to raise the question of our support for Palestinians and for a middle east settlement. I think that we all share the sentiments that my hon. and learned Friend has expressed.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): Earlier this week, on Tuesday, the Opposition held a debate about the deeply unpopular plans for unitary councils in Norwich and Exeter, and literally the next day, on Wednesday, the statutory instruments to bring the plans into force were withdrawn. That is a complete shambles, and residents in those communities need to know where they stand, so may we have a statement about what on earth is going on with the Government's plans?

Ms Harman: The Opposition were able to hold an Opposition day debate about those issues earlier this week, so I do not have anything to add to that.

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby) (Lab): Will my right hon. and learned Friend consider holding a general debate on the Floor of the House about the training opportunities that have been presented to young people? Under this Administration we have seen a fantastic rise in the number of apprenticeship programmes, in stark contrast to the Opposition's days in government, so I really would like the opportunity for a general debate to ensure that the benefits associated with those programmes are fully understood by all.

Ms Harman: I hope that my hon. Friend and many other hon. Members will find an opportunity in the Budget debate to raise the issues of protecting young people from the scarring effects that people suffered in previous recessions and of ensuring that they have a good part to play in a prosperous future. The guarantee that no person under 24 years old will have to go any longer than six months before they obtain a job and training is very important, as is the future jobs fund. I know that my hon. Friend is strongly committed to that measure, which is important in her constituency and her region, and I hope that it will be raised in the Budget debate.

Mr. Mark Lancaster (North-East Milton Keynes) (Con): May we have a debate about community health services and the undue haste with which the Government are attempting to force through changes before the general election? Milton Keynes council has been given just 12 days to decide whether it wishes to be a provider. Given the impact of the changes on vulnerable people in my constituency, why are we forcing them through so quickly? They are complex issues, so can we not have more time?

Ms Harman: On the time scale of the consultation in the hon. Gentleman's constituency, I shall ask the Secretary of State for Health to write to him and place a copy of his letter in the Library.

Gwyn Prosser (Dover) (Lab): Dover Harbour Board's plans to sell off the port of Dover to the highest bidder have been thrown into chaos and confusion this morning, following the announcement by P&O and the other major port operators that the board may have been misappropriating revenue funds, and that T2, the new terminal, might not go ahead. Will the Leader of the House consider an urgent debate about the issue so that we can look at the most inappropriate and improper present and past actions of the port of Dover, which only last year laid off 200 workers and privatised their jobs?

Ms Harman: I know that my hon. Friend, as a real champion of his constituents and, particularly, the Dover port and all the people who work there and whose jobs depend on it, has close contact with the relevant Ministers, but I shall ensure that I, too, draw the issue to their attention. Perhaps they could have a meeting with him at this particularly important point.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): The Leader of the House missed an excellent 30-minute debate in Westminster Hall yesterday, which was called by her hon. Friend the Member for Lanark and Hamilton, East (Mr. Hood), about the Royal Bank of Scotland's

lending practices. Attendance was good for a short debate, and that is clear evidence of the need for a bigger debate in this Chamber, so that Members can question Treasury Ministers about how those banks, for which we have paid, can be made to work for our communities and constituents.

Ms Harman: One reason why we ensured that we had lending agreements with banks was that it was very important for banks to lend out into the economy, to individuals for mortgages and to businesses. More money is being lent. The reason why the overall lending figures appear to be lower is that more money is being paid back, so the net lending figure is smaller than the gross lending figure. That is a good sign, and it has come about because interest rates are still low. However, we keep a hawk eye on the lending practices of the banks. They are there not to pay bonuses to the fat cats at the top, but to lend out to businesses and the housing market, which needs finance.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) (Lab): When the debate takes place next Thursday about the annual report of the Intelligence and Security Committee, will my right hon. and learned Friend try to persuade whoever is the Minister to give us information arising from the speech of the former director-general of MI5? When was any protest made to the United States about the torture carried out by that country? When did MI5 officers know? Although I may be the only Member interested in the subject, I believe it crucial that Members of Parliament know precisely what went on, bearing in mind the speech made by the former director-general of that organisation.

Ms Harman: The sentiments that my hon. Friend raises are shared by many hon. Members. All of us are concerned and, rightly, the Government's position is that we totally abhor the use of torture. We would never condone or support its use by our security services, and we would never condone or support its use by anybody else. The very points that my hon. Friend makes were raised at Prime Minister's Question Time yesterday, and the Prime Minister answered them.

Mr. Malcolm Moss (North-East Cambridgeshire) (Con): May we have an early debate about the role, performance and policies of the Driving Standards Agency? It has already closed more than 60 local test centres, and another 45 closures are in the pipeline. May I refer the Leader of the House to early-day motion 1002 in the name of my hon. Friend the Member for St. Albans (Anne Main)?

[That this House notes that, following the introduction of a new motorcycle test on 27 April 2009, Driving Standards Agency figures show that 50,000 fewer people took the motorcycle test in the period to 31 January 2010 than in the same period in 2008; further notes that 45 learners crashed attempting the new test during its first nine weeks, resulting in 12 hospitalisations; further notes that the majority of crashes occurred during the new swerve and stop exercise, which has been combined into one exercise in Module One of the new test; further notes that this is not obligatory under the European directive which prompted the introduction of the new test; further notes that the new test has resulted in a reduction in test centres, requiring longer journeys for inexperienced

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riders to access test facilities; is concerned that inaction to tackle this lack of test centres and combined swerve and stop exercise could lead to a decline in the overall number of motorcyclists and the motorcycle industry as a whole; congratulates Motorcycle News and the Motorcycle Action Group on their campaign to have these issues addressed; and calls on the Government to consider separating the two elements of the swerve and stop exercise and to investigate how the availability of test centres could be addressed.]

The policy of closing local test centres is putting hundreds of thousands of extra car miles on the road, and the new centres that are down for motorcycle testing are costing a fortune.

Ms Harman: There will be Transport questions next Thursday. The hon. Gentleman could raise his question with Transport Ministers then.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley) (Lab): May we have an early debate about the safety and security of children who are taken to Pakistan for family holidays? May we also consider the damage caused to their education when they are removed from school during term time?

Ms Harman: All hon. Members will hope for the very speedy return of the young lad of five who has been abducted in Pakistan. My hon. Friend has long campaigned for the safety of children in her constituency who were born abroad, and I shall consider the relevant Minister with whom to raise that issue.

Christopher Fraser (South-West Norfolk) (Con): Representatives of the care home industry have told me of the regulatory difficulties that they face, which get in the way of prioritising care for those people who, in the words of the Leader of the House, are not welllderly. Those representatives criticise the Government and say that they could do more to help. In light of that, and because of the debate about the future care of those non-welderly people, will the Leader of the House, as a priority, bring the matter forward for a debate before the general election?

Ms Harman: It is very important that we have really tough regulation for private residential care homes. I can remember when there was almost no regulation at all, and we had to bring it in to protect people. There were protests from Conservatives, saying that it was red tape, but protecting vulnerable people in residential care is an absolute priority and we want to ensure that the regulations do that proportionately and effectively.

Mr. Tom Watson (West Bromwich, East) (Lab): May I reinforce the concerns of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee Chairman, the hon. Member for Maldon and East Chelmsford (Mr. Whittingdale), about the Digital Economy Bill? It contains fiendishly complex copyright infringement measures that will have lasting repercussions, and I cannot be the only hon. Member who is concerned that to deal with it in a wash-up would be bad form at best.

Ms Harman: I know that my hon. Friend has put a lot of effort into, and is extremely knowledgeable about, all these issues. We want to ensure that we have fast-speed broadband in all parts of the country that can be

accessed by business and individuals, and that we have a modernised copyright system. I will report his views to the Ministers responsible.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): Can the Leader of the House ensure that the Prime Minister opens Monday's defence debate from the Dispatch Box? It is now quite plain that the Government committed British forces to two wars without adequate funding. As a result, necessary equipment was lacking, particularly helicopters, armed vehicles, bomb detection kits and body armour. As a consequence of that lack, service personnel have died. The Prime Minister has a responsibility for that and needs to be brought to book in that debate.

Ms Harman: The Prime Minister gave evidence to Chilcot last week. He answers questions every week in the House of Commons. He is strongly committed to supporting the armed forces, and always has been. There will be a defence debate on Monday, and it will be opened by the Minister who is assigned by the Government to do that.

Jim Sheridan (Paisley and Renfrewshire, North) (Lab): You will be aware, Mr. Speaker, as will my right hon. and learned Friend, of the excellent event that took place a few months ago when we invited youths from all over the country to come and sit in this place. Will my right hon. and learned Friend therefore accommodate some of our elderly folk to enable them to come here and organise a similar event in this House, so that we can get the views of some of our "welderly" people on the issues that matter to them?

Ms Harman: We could take further the very good precedent that was set by the UK Youth Parliament when, at a time when this House was not sitting, we allowed it to be here. All the Benches were absolutely packed, with half young men and half young women, and a great many wheelchair users; it was ethnically diverse and it was a fantastic debate. I think that we could do more of that. Perhaps the next thing that we could do would be to have the National Pensioners Convention here, with pensioners and retired people from all over the country coming to sit and debate and have their voices heard in this Parliament. I thank my hon. Friend for raising this; it is an exceptionally good idea, and I sense a great deal of support for it.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): May we have an early debate on the inadequacies of the UK Border Agency? Last week, one of my constituents complained to the agency; he was effectively doing a whistleblowing job on some illegal immigrants—people who had overstayed and were working illegally. He had an appointment with the agency that was then cancelled, and it said that it was indifferent to his concerns. Surely this is thoroughly unsatisfactory. People should be encouraged to blow the whistle on illegal immigrants, rather than not.

Ms Harman: Yes, I think that people should be encouraged to give information if they think that illegal activity is going on. I ask the hon. Gentleman to write to the relevant Minister. I will draw his comments to the attention of the Minister so that we can ensure that they

are looked into. If he will provide the information, it is not too late for the matter to be taken up. Nobody wants information that is given by people in good faith not to be acted on.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West) (Lab): Hypocrisy—the “do as I say, not as I do” approach—annoys the electorate. Covered bicycle racks in the courtyard outside the Members’ Cloakroom have been removed and replaced with parking for Ministers’ cars. All winter, Ministers’ lovely hybrid cars have frequently been parked in the courtyard outside your house, Mr. Speaker, with their petrol engines running, presumably to keep the chauffeurs warm. May I make my annual plea to the Leader of the House for the provision of a warm room in which chauffeurs can wait, to avoid these unnecessary CO₂ emissions?

Ms Harman: Probably the best people for my hon. Friend to raise that with are the Transport Ministers, who will be answering questions from this Dispatch Box next Monday.

Sir Nicholas Winterton (Macclesfield) (Con): Does the Leader of the House accept that it makes complete nonsense of the role and responsibilities of this House for large tranches of important public Bills to go through to the other House without being adequately debated in this House? Does she further accept that one way to stop this stupid practice is to change Standing Orders to prevent guillotines—programme motions—on the remaining stages of legislation in this House?

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman is very concerned about this, but his concerns have been addressed. He has been part of the argument that there should be a House business Committee that can deal with some of these issues. In the next Parliament, which he will not be in, these matters will be done differently, and I hope that the situation will be improved.

Derek Twigg (Halton) (Lab): May we have an early debate on the issue of hospital waiting lists, so that we can examine why waiting times have reduced from more than 18 months in 1997 to less than 18 weeks today? It is particularly important to examine what we could do to bring waiting lists down further.

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend looks back at the situation that there used to be in relation to hospital waiting lists. We should always remember that setting a target for bringing down hospital waiting lists has really made a difference. The Opposition decried targets; they may well have felt that if their constituents needed to get an operation, they should simply pay to go private. I can remember my constituents literally weeping in my advice surgeries when they had been told that they would have to wait two years for a hip replacement. This Labour Government’s targets mean that people do not have to borrow money from relatives who cannot afford it in order to go private or else have to wait in pain for months and years. My hon. Friend is right to draw attention to the fact that massive progress has made. We are going to bring in further guarantees so that, for example, people will have to wait only a week before they get referred to a cancer specialist. These issues, too, can be debated in the Budget debates, because they include questions of resourcing.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) (PC): May I refer the Leader of the House to motion 61 on today’s Order Paper and take her back to the Wright Committee debates that we had a few days ago? During those exchanges, she agreed with me that there was a need for the Back-Bench business Committee to protect the interests of minority parties as well. May I respectfully ask her to ensure that the Standing Orders that are produced will reflect the need to protect minority party interests, as well as those of everybody else?

Ms Harman: I will ensure that I send the hon. Gentleman a draft of the Standing Orders before they are tabled in front of the House. We obviously want to ensure that the main parties in the House have their say, but it is very important not to overlook the smaller parties and the independents.

Mrs. Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Keeping children safe in an increasingly complex digital world is an issue that should be high on our agenda in this House. I recently held a meeting with Microsoft and CEOP—Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre—ambassadors from South Wales police for parents from across my constituency. Should not this House be debating how we can ensure that Facebook uses the CEOP alert so that children who are afraid or fear that they are being targeted can highlight their concerns directly to CEOP? They are currently unable to do so, and are therefore placed at risk.

Ms Harman: I strongly agree with my hon. Friend. I think that this is the view of Ministers as well, not least the Home Secretary, and action is being taken in this respect. The technology is changing all the time. Compared with just a few years ago, communication among young people has been transformed. We cannot have public policy, or the policy of those in the industry, lagging behind if that means that in the meantime children are at risk. We need swift action on this, and we need to keep it closely under review all the time so that as the technology and methods of communication change, we ensure that protection keeps up to date.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) (LD): For the past seven years, I have been trying to establish how Cheryl James, the daughter of Des and Doreen James, died at Deepcut Army barracks in 1995. So far, my efforts have basically failed. I failed to get disclosure of key facts and reports, and there has been a persistent culture of secrecy and obfuscation. I believe that that is because those facts show that she was murdered. May we have a debate before this Parliament ends to disclose those facts and establish whether I am right or wrong?

Ms Harman: I suggest that the hon. Gentleman seeks to intervene in the defence debate on that point. In advance of that debate, perhaps he could tell the Minister responsible which issues he would like addressed, so that the Minister has been put on notice and knows that he needs to respond to the hon. Gentleman’s points.

Mr. Ian Davidson (Glasgow, South-West) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Leader of the House arrange for us to have a debate in the near future on the latest political utterances from Lord Guthrie, particularly the ones in which he

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has called for the scrapping of the aircraft carrier contracts—views that I understand are shared by the Opposition?

Ms Harman: Those are among the many issues that will be debated in Monday's defence debate, and we recognise that the question of procurement is very important for our industry. We are very proud of the skills base that has been able to be part of that procurement programme.

Mr. Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): According to the Campaign to Protect Rural England, 48 per cent. of people admit to dropping litter, one third of drivers admit to throwing litter while they are driving along the road and littering has increased by five times across the country in the past 50 years. May we have a debate in Government time about littering and its antisocial effects?

Ms Harman: Perhaps that is something that other hon. Members would also like to debate, so perhaps the hon. Gentleman could seek an opportunity to debate it in Westminster Hall or on the Adjournment.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet) (Lab): May we have a debate about the bidding war that is currently going on between the Government and the Conservative Front Benchers over who can set the highest standards for secondary school results and tackle the issue of secondary attainment? It would give me an opportunity to point out that in my constituency, I have seen secondary standards transformed in recent years. For the first time on the poorest estates in my constituency, I am meeting kids who talk about becoming doctors, scientists or even, heaven help them, lawyers. The problem that their schools face is that they have to climb a mountain caused by Kent's selective system of education. If we are going to set thresholds for schools, that problem has to be tackled, and so far neither side is doing so.

Ms Harman: There is not a bidding war in relation to educational standards, because we won that war long ago through, as my hon. Friend says, the massive improvement shown not only in secondary school results but in the massive increase in the number of young people going into further and higher education. In my constituency, the number of such young people, most of them from families in which they are the first generation to go into further or higher education, has more than doubled. We will continue our commitment to education both at school level and in HE.

Dr. Evan Harris (Oxford, West and Abingdon) (LD): As a member of the Wright Committee, I welcome what the Leader of the House has said about circulating a draft of the appropriate Standing Order and her declared intention to bring it forward. However, given that the historic votes last Thursday were overwhelming on everything that the Wright Committee proposed, and even on some proposals that went further than what the Committee proposed—in the case of the Back-Bench business Committee, it went against her advice and that of the shadow Leader of the House—does she agree that she would be well advised to accept the recommendation on a Back-Bench business Committee in motion 61, which was agreed *nem com* in the Committee,

unless there are simply drafting problems with it? Does she also recognise that there may still be opposition, and that she therefore cannot rely on remaining orders approval to get the matter through?

Ms Harman: People were sceptical about our trying to proceed on the basis of remaining orders on that first Monday, but out of 16 motions in the remaining orders of the day, 11 went through, so that has been tried and tested. The question is not what I supported, what the shadow Leader of the House supported or what we both supported; what matters is what the House decided. The Standing Orders that I will bring forward in draft and consult the hon. Gentleman about will be to bring into effect the will of the House, not to create fresh policy that is either ahead of what the House decided or behind it. They will put into effect what the House has decided, so remaining orders of the day are exactly the way to deal with them.

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. and learned Friend has said on a number of occasions that there will be a debate on Afghanistan with a substantive vote. When is that likely to take place?

Ms Harman: I do not think I put it in those terms. I think I said that Ministers, from the Prime Minister to the Defence Secretary, the International Development Secretary and the Foreign Secretary, were concerned to ensure that the House is kept fully up to date with Government action and is able to hold the Government to account, and that we have regular debates so that Members can air their views. Indeed, there will be a further opportunity to raise these issues on Monday in the defence debate.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): May we have a debate on today's report published by the chief inspector of constabulary, Denis O'Connor, which highlights the fact that very low-level crime has an impact on people's attitudes to their local police force? My experience is that our safer neighbourhood teams want to tackle that sort of crime, but quite often response teams are not aware of the history and do not prioritise such crime. Sometimes they do not even turn up. That debate would also offer us the opportunity to highlight the fact that our safer neighbourhood teams in London face being cut by the Mayor.

Ms Harman: The safer neighbourhood teams in London are massively valued by my hon. Friend's constituents and those of all London Members. We are strongly committed to them and are very concerned indeed that the Mayor does not understand how important they are to local communities.

Rob Marris: The Conservative Mayor.

Ms Harman: The Conservative Mayor, as my hon. Friend rightly points out.

On antisocial behaviour, it was this Government who identified that it was something that should concern the police and local councils, working together with local communities. We have taken forward the whole antisocial behaviour order regime and we need to improve it so that it really responds to people's concerns, most recently about dogs. I look forward to the fact that the ASBO can be joined by the DOGBO.

Mr. Andy Slaughter (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush) (Lab): I returned with a delegation from Gaza earlier this week. If you will allow me, Mr. Speaker, I should like to inform the House that while waiting to be called, I have learned that the British journalist Paul Martin, who has been held in custody for several weeks, has today been released following a meeting with the Justice Minister by the delegation last Sunday. I think we would all welcome that move.

In Gaza, I observed the effect of four years of the blockade by the Israeli occupation forces. It is clear that the occupiers' tactic is working, in that isolating the Palestinian population is hiding their collective punishment from the outside world. May I echo what my hon. and learned Friend the Member for Medway (Mr. Marshall-Andrews) said and welcome the Leader of the House's saying that there would be a debate on the situation in Gaza before Dissolution?

Ms Harman: I congratulate my hon. Friend and his colleagues on their efforts in respect of the journalist who was being held. Perhaps he will find an opportunity to debate these issues in the Budget debate.

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am grateful for the co-operation of colleagues, which has enabled me to accommodate everyone who wished to take part.

High Speed Rail

12.17 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr. Sadiq Khan): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I shall repeat a statement that my noble Friend the Secretary of State for Transport made a few minutes ago about high speed rail between London and the major cities of the midlands, the north and Scotland.

Travel and trade between Britain's major population and economic centres are the lifeblood of our economy and society. They require transport networks that are high-capacity, efficient and sustainable. As we grow wealthier as a nation, so we travel more and move more freight. Nineteenth-century Britain led the world in the development of railways. Serious planning for a national motorway network was begun by the War Cabinet in 1943, and the major motorways were all opened over a 32-year period between 1959 and the completion of the M40 in 1991.

Since the 1990s, increases in demand have been accommodated largely by improving existing roads and rail networks, including through motorway widening and the £9 billion upgrade of the west coast main line. The £6 billion roads programme includes investment for the five years to 2014 in widening a large part of the M25 and the extension of hard-shoulder running across the most heavily used stretches of motorway. We are also progressing with plans to electrify the Great Western main line from London to Bristol and south Wales, and with a £250 million investment in the strategic freight network.

Our preliminary assessment, published last January, was that substantial additional transport capacity would be needed from the 2020s between our major cities, starting with London to the west midlands, Britain's two largest conurbations. By then, the west coast main line will be full. By 2033, the average long-distance west coast main line train is projected to be 80 per cent. full, with routine very severe overcrowding for much of the time; and there will also be a significant increase in traffic and congestion on the motorways between and around London, Birmingham and Manchester.

The Government's view is that high speed rail could be the most efficient and sustainable way to provide more capacity between those conurbations, so last January we set up a company, High Speed Two Ltd, to analyse the business case for a high speed rail line, initially between London and the west midlands; to make detailed route proposals for that first stretch of line should the Government decide to proceed; and to outline options for extensions to cities further north and to Scotland.

HS2 Ltd reported to me in December, and I am grateful for the immense amount of expert work done by its staff. HS2 Ltd has shared much of its work and analysis with the local authorities that could be affected, Transport for London, the Scottish Executive and statutory environmental bodies. I am grateful to them all for their constructive engagement.

I am today publishing HS2 Ltd's report together with the Government's proposed high speed rail strategy, which is based on HS2 Ltd's analysis. In summary, the strategy is for the development of an initial core high speed network that would link London to Birmingham, Manchester, the east midlands, Sheffield and Leeds,

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with high speed trains running from the outset through to Liverpool, Newcastle, Glasgow and Edinburgh. That Y-shaped network of about 335 miles in total, with branches north of Birmingham running either side of the Pennines, would be capable of carrying trains at up to 250 mph and could be extended to other cities and to Scotland.

There are six principal reasons why the Government are proposing this strategy, the first of which is transport capacity. The extra capacity provided by a high speed line would more than treble existing rail capacity on the west coast main line corridor. That is not only because of the new track, but because of the far greater length of train that high speed lines and stations make possible, and the segregation of high speed trains from other passenger and freight services.

By contrast, the most ambitious conceivable upgrade of existing rail lines to Birmingham would yield less than half that extra capacity, at greater cost—in terms of both money and disruption—than a high speed line, and without most of the journey-time savings. That analysis is critical to the argument on whether investment in high speed rail unjustifiably diverts investment from the existing railway. The most likely alternative over time is to spend more achieving less. That accords with the experience of the recent £9 billion upgrade of the west coast main line, the benefits of which, although considerable, were essentially incremental and came after years of chronic disruption to passengers and businesses.

Furthermore, by transferring long-distance services to the high speed line, large amounts of capacity would also be released on the existing west coast main line for commuter and freight services, including services to key areas of housing growth around Milton Keynes and Northampton.

Secondly, the journey-time savings from such a line would be significant. The journey time from London to the west midlands would be reduced to between 30 and 50 minutes, depending on the stations used, with Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield all brought to within 75 minutes of London, down from almost 2 hours 10 minutes now. Through services from Glasgow and Edinburgh to London would be down to just three and a half hours.

However, thirdly, the connectivity gains of high speed rail come not only from the faster trains, but from the new route alignments that comprise the proposed Y-shaped network of lines from London to Birmingham, and then north to Manchester, and north-east to the east midlands, Sheffield and Leeds. That new network would provide a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to overcome the acute connectivity limitations of the Victorian rail network, with its three separate and poorly interconnected main lines from London to the north, each with its own separate London terminus.

By contrast the high speed line, routed via the west midlands, would not only slash the journey time to London from Manchester, Leeds and Sheffield, but nearly halve journey times from those cities to Birmingham, so the east midlands, the north-west and the north-east gain dramatically improved connections within the midlands and the north, as well as to London. Those connections

would be further enhanced by the northern hub proposals to upgrade the trans-Pennine route from Manchester to Leeds.

Fourthly, the high speed network would enable key local, national and international networks to be better integrated. In particular, by including on the approach of the high speed line to central London an interchange station with the new Crossrail line just west of Paddington, the benefits of both Crossrail and the high speed line are greatly enhanced. Such a Crossrail interchange station would deliver a fast and frequent service to London's west end, the City and docklands, giving, for example, total journey times from central Birmingham to Canary Wharf of just 70 minutes, and from Leeds to Canary Wharf of just 1 hour 40 minutes. That Crossrail interchange would also provide a fast, one-stop Heathrow Express service to Heathrow, in place of the long and tortuous journey to the airport currently experienced by passengers arriving at Euston, Kings Cross and St. Pancras. Similarly, an interchange station close to Birmingham airport would provide an efficient link to the M6 and M42, the west coast main line, the wider west midlands and the airport itself.

Fifthly, high speed rail would be a sustainable way forward. High speed trains emit far less carbon than cars or planes per passenger mile, and the local impact of high speed lines is far less than that of entirely new motorway alignments in terms of land take and air quality. For those reasons, the Government take the view that high speed rail is preferable both to new inter-city motorways, and to major expansion of domestic aviation, even if those were able to deliver equivalent inter-city capacity and connectivity benefits.

Finally, HS2 Ltd assesses that all those benefits far outweigh the estimated costs. With the project yielding more than £2 of benefit for every £1 of cost, HS2 Ltd estimates the capital cost of the first 120 miles of the line from London to the west midlands at between £15.8 billion and £17.4 billion. That is broadly similar to the cost of Crossrail, which is being built over the next seven years. The cost per mile beyond Birmingham is then estimated to halve, taking the overall cost of the 335 mile Y-shaped network to about £30 billion. That cost would be phased over more than a decade after the start of construction, which would not begin until after the completion of Crossrail in 2017. Indeed, the high speed line would be the transport infrastructure successor project to Crossrail, deploying its skill base and project management expertise, and with a similar annual rate of spend.

I now turn to the specifics of the recommended route. As with any major infrastructure project, there will need to be extensive and detailed consultation, particularly with the local communities affected. Significant time will be needed to ensure that that consultation is properly conducted and considered before the finalisation of Government policy and the introduction of a hybrid Bill. Subject to that consultation, the London terminus for the high speed line would be Euston; the Birmingham city centre station would be at Curzon street; and there would be interchange stations with Crossrail west of Paddington and near Birmingham airport.

HS2 Ltd's recommended line of route between London and Birmingham is also published today. The Government endorse that route, subject to further work on mitigation that I have commissioned, and to subsequent public

consultation. HS2 Ltd's recommended route would pass in tunnel from Euston to the Crossrail interchange west of Paddington, and leave London via the Ruislip area, making use of an existing rail corridor. It would then pass by Amersham in tunnel towards Aylesbury, before following the route of the A413 past Wendover.

North of the Chilterns, the recommended route would follow in part the disused Great Central rail alignment before passing Brackley and entering Warwickshire. It would then skirt to the east of Birmingham, to enter the city via a short link alongside an existing rail line beginning in the Water Orton area, with the main line extending north to the west coast main line near Lichfield.

In developing its route, HS2 Ltd has been very conscious of the need to minimise the local impacts while achieving the wider objectives of the high speed line. The company will be publishing a full appraisal of sustainability, including noise and landscape impacts, before formal consultation begins, and I am today publishing details of a proposed exceptional hardship scheme for those whose properties may be directly affected. I would like to assure the House that only once full public consultation on the Government's proposed strategy and recommended route is complete, and its results fully appraised, will the Government make firm decisions.

I turn now to the issue of Heathrow. It is important that Heathrow be connected to any high speed line. A prime purpose of the proposed Crossrail interchange is to provide such a connection, via an 11-minute direct service to Heathrow. However, the overwhelming majority of passengers on a high speed line south of Birmingham would be going to or from London, which is the other reason why the Crossrail interchange station is so important. Crossrail, which is a very high capacity line, will provide fast services direct to the west end, the City and docklands, catering for an estimated one third of all the passengers travelling on the high speed line. Without this interchange to Crossrail, congestion on the tube from Euston would be exacerbated, and passengers would be severely disadvantaged in getting in and through central London.

The question is whether there is a case for an additional station at the site of Heathrow itself. HS2 Ltd, after thorough analysis, advises that the business case for such an additional station appears weak, given the estimated cost of at least £2 billion for the additional tunnelling required to serve the site. Furthermore, Heathrow is not a single place; it is an airport with three widely dispersed terminal centres.

I am conscious, however, that, as foreshadowed in the Government's January 2009 decision on adding capacity at Heathrow, there may be a strategic case for a high speed station at Heathrow, particularly in the light of that planned expansion. I have therefore appointed Lord Mawhinney, a former Transport Secretary, to advise on the best way forward, having fully engaged with all interested parties. A complex decision of this nature should not be taken in a knee-jerk fashion, but after a full analysis of the facts and options.

There are many other benefits of a high speed project. An estimated 10,000 jobs would be created, with benefits too for UK companies competing abroad. Regional economic growth and regeneration would also be boosted, with released capacity on the west coast main line supporting housing growth. All this is set out in the Command Paper I am publishing today and laying in the Libraries of both Houses.

High speed rail is a long-term strategic project to equip Britain with the transport infrastructure it needs to flourish in the 21st century. Now, as we emerge from recession, is the right time to be planning. The Government's view is that high speed rail could play a crucial role not only in meeting reasonable future transport capacity requirements, but in transforming the connectivity between our major cities, regions and economic centres. It could help to boost the economies of the midlands and the north in particular; help to overcome the historic north-south divide; strengthen the ties that bind Scotland and England; and, through connecting to the channel tunnel and High Speed 1, reinforce our links with the European mainland where high speed rail networks already extend from the north of France to the south of Spain and Italy, and to the east of Germany.

High speed rail is a policy of huge strategic significance for the country. The time has come to create a credible plan, and for this to be a national cause. This is the spirit in which I set out today's proposals, and I commend them to the House.

Mrs. Theresa Villiers (Chipping Barnet) (Con): I thank the Minister for advanced sight of the statement.

Less than three years ago, the then Secretary of State for Transport stood at the Dispatch box and presented a 30-year strategy for the railways that had no place for high speed rail. The Conservative party refused to accept that because we believe it is vital to start catching up with the high speed revolution on which much of the rest of Europe embarked more than a generation ago. The Conservative party totally transformed the debate with our promise to build a north-south high speed rail line as the first step towards the creation of a national network connecting major cities across England, Scotland and Wales.

Ever since then, the Government have been running to catch up with the lead we have set and the momentum we have generated. So we welcomed Labour's change of heart on high speed rail with their establishment of HS2, but we made it clear that we regretted the fact that the remit they gave to HS2 lacked ambition and focused only on the west midlands as stage 1, whereas we want to go further and faster with our guaranteed, costed and timetabled commitment to take high speed rail to Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds—as that crucial first step to a national network. The second step should, of course, be a connection with Scotland.

We need to test Labour's last-minute conversion to high speed rail with some searching questions. Will they match our commitment to start work immediately on taking the line beyond Birmingham to Manchester and Leeds, as part of stage 1? Will they set a timetable, as we have done, for delivering a line to the north? Why will they not match our commitment to start construction by 2015? What guarantees can they give that fares will be kept within the reach of ordinary families on modest incomes? Will they match our promise to review the blight rules to see whether we can do more to help those affected by whichever route is ultimately chosen? And will they guarantee that the communities affected will have the chance to make their voices heard?

Let me make it clear that we are not prepared blindly to accept the route that Labour propose, and let me also say that when it comes to Heathrow, Labour still does not get it. If we are to get the full environmental

[Mrs. Theresa Villiers]

benefits of high speed rail, it is crucial that we make it as easy as possible for people to switch from the plane to the train, with the carbon benefits involved. It was a major setback when HS2's chairman confirmed that modal shift from air was not to be a key objective in its report. Now we know that the closest HS2's proposals will get to Heathrow is about 10 miles away, at Old Oak Common.

Although we do not rule out use of that site for dispersal, the idea that some kind of "Wormwood Scrubs international" station is the best rail solution for Heathrow is just not credible. It is bizarre that the party elected on a mantra of delivering an integrated transport system is proposing to leave our most important airport out of an upgrade to our transport network that, under Conservative plans, would become the most important for half a century.

At the eleventh hour, however, we have the promise that the Government will think again about the points we have been making for years about the importance of integrating Heathrow with high speed rail. We therefore welcome their decision to appoint Lord Mawhinney to try to find a solution that will command the cross-party consensus we all want.

Although the Conservative party is part of the growing consensus backing high speed rail, we are adamant that Britain's high speed solution must be the right one for the environment and for the economy. In leaving out Heathrow and setting out plans that do not give costed, timetabled and watertight guarantees to take the line north of the midlands, Labour's plans are flawed, lack credibility and are undermined by their inability to grasp the basic truth: that high speed rail should be an alternative, not an addition, to a third runway.

The decisions we make now will have a profound impact on our transport system for generations to come, and I can assure the House that a Conservative Government would have the energy, leadership and values to deliver high speed rail's full potential for this country.

Mr. Khan: I find that incredible! I am shocked by the hon. Lady's response. If ever evidence was required of why that lot are unfit to form a Government, she has provided it. Last Sunday, her leader boasted that he is proud to be a salesman. This is the same person who, at the same time as ending the cold war, so he claimed, was planning high speed rail.

Let us be clear: on the one hand, the hon. Lady says that she wants work to begin immediately, which is confirmation—if it is required—that the Conservatives' plans and route are written on the back of an envelope. That route is: London, Birmingham, Manchester and Leeds. They want to begin construction work in 2015, but they also claim to want to consult. How can they consult as fully as possible with the people affected, follow the guidelines and advice and go through a hybrid Bill—and still start construction work in 2015? They claim to have done the work, but most of the costs will come when construction begins, whether in 2015 or—as we plan—2017. It is quite remarkable that the hon. Lady is asking us to accept 2015 as an ideal start date for any construction, when chapter 5 of the High Speed 2 Ltd report gives a detailed explanation of the work that needs to take place between now and the beginning of any construction.

The hon. Lady also raised the issue of Heathrow. It beggars belief that she has not understood what the people who looked into the report said—I have the evidence here, and it is slightly thicker than the back of an envelope—in working out the value-for-money case for a station at Heathrow, bearing in mind that most people in London, as well as most people coming into London from Birmingham or elsewhere north of the capital, do not want to be delayed by going to Heathrow. She completely rules out the possibility of an interchange station to the west of Paddington at Old Oak Common, at the same time that Hammersmith and Fulham, and Ealing councils are lobbying for an interchange station there. She says that there should be an interchange at Heathrow airport, and goes on to say that this is the most important priority for her party—

Mr. Speaker: Order. May I interrupt the Minister of State for a moment? This has been a most curious exchange so far. First, the statement was a bit on the long side, although it was highly informative to the House, and I am sure that hon. Members appreciated that. Secondly, rather unusually, the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs. Villiers) did not pose any questions in her response, which is the norm—[*Interruption.*] Order. She responded as she thought fit, and I was happy to allow that, but there did not seem to be a series of questions, which is the proper way to proceed in these matters. I fear that the Minister of State is now following suit and devoting quite a considerable amount of time to a dissection of the Opposition's policy as he sees it, but I know that he will now return posthaste to the Government's policy.

Mr. Khan: I said that I was surprised by the response of the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs. Villiers), and I will end with a question: are this lot fit to form a Government?

Norman Baker (Lewes) (LD): I thank the Minister for today's welcome statement. Britain has trailed behind Europe for a long time on high speed rail. I also very much welcome the fact that something for which we have been calling for years—long before the Conservatives, while they were still winning the cold war—has finally been brought forward by the Government. Can the Minister confirm that the Government's high speed rail scheme will provide extra capacity for the railways, enable modal shift from air, and help economic development in the regions? Will he also confirm that it will be very popular, as I think it will be, given the enormous response to the Javelin trains in the south-east?

I acknowledge the cross-party attempts by the Secretary of State to involve all parties in the House in a constructive dialogue on the issue and to make it a national project. I thank the Minister for the access I have had to HS2 and for the private briefing the Secretary of State gave me a few weeks ago, which for some reason the Conservatives apparently rejected. Does the Minister agree that we are talking about a matter of national importance that requires consensus in the House, and that all parties ought to approach it in that way? Does he therefore share my concern at the Conservatives' attempt to create a kind of synthetic candy-floss row, rather than trying to move forward in a sensible, constructive way? They appear to be putting short-term politics before the long-term interests of the country, which brings into question their commitment to high speed rail.

Will the Minister acknowledge that funding is a difficult issue, given the current state of the public finances? Will he consider the suggestion put forward by my hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Dr. Cable), the Lib Dem shadow Chancellor—the construction of a national infrastructure bank, perhaps using pension funds, which will help to guarantee stability in the funding for such major national projects? Does the Minister also agree that it is important when such projects are under way that there should be no cuts in existing rail budgets that are designed to promote the network in other ways for passengers? Will he give an undertaking—as my party will, and as all parties should—that other rail budgets will not be raided to pay for high speed rail?

I congratulate HS2 on producing a route that, I think, minimises environmental damage while maximising the usefulness of the line. Obviously the route is a matter for consultation, but what we have now is a useful start for consultation purposes. Can the Minister also confirm that there is a long-term commitment to get to Scotland, and not simply with high speed trains on conventional lines but with a high speed network? Does he have any idea when that will feature in the time scale of the current project?

Will the Minister say something about the link between HS2 and HS1, which he referred to obliquely in his statement? It is important that people should be able to get to Paris and Brussels directly from Manchester and Birmingham, without having to change in London. Lastly, does he accept that if the route goes through Heathrow, there will be a 15-minute penalty for those coming to London from Birmingham or Manchester, which would be severely disadvantageous for the economics of high speed rail?

Mr. Khan: That is how you do it, Mr. Speaker.

The hon. Gentleman is right that having 1,100 passengers in 400-metre trains will not only lead to more passengers being able to use high speed trains, but release capacity on the west coast main line to start with, and, when the line goes to Leeds, on the east coast and midland main lines. That increase in capacity will help the housing growth channels north of London, too.

As for modal shifts, the figure for those who will shift from domestic aviation to high speed rail is between 8 and 11 per cent. There will also be a shift of 57 per cent. from conventional rail to high speed rail, which deals with the hon. Gentleman's capacity point as well.

The hon. Gentleman was also right to ask about the benefits of high speed rail to the regions. All the evidence—he has been through the HS2 report—is that it will regenerate parts of the country. There is evidence from parts of France that have benefited from high speed connections, such as Lille and elsewhere.

The hon. Gentleman also paid tribute to the work that High Speed 2 Ltd has done in engaging with stakeholders; let me join him in that. He mentioned that he spoke to HS2 Ltd and met the Secretary of State to discuss the plans and proposals. I am sure he will be disappointed that the cross-party consensus broke down recently, and that there seems to be an attempt, in the lead-up to a general election, to create artificial dividing lines that should not be there.

The hon. Gentleman was also right to ask me about the history of high speed rail in the UK. What he was alluding to, I think, was the fact that when other European countries were building high speed trains, the Government in this country were distracted from doing so because of their ideological obsession with privatising the trains.

The hon. Gentleman asked an important question about funding. All options are being considered. One option, which he will be interested in, is to work with Infrastructure UK to try to reduce the costs. As he knows, construction in the UK tends to be more expensive than in Europe. Why is this? We need to change that and ensure that the costs are reduced.

The final two points the hon. Gentleman made are very important. He asked about Scotland. He will be pleased to know that, in the first instance, high speed trains will connect with existing conventional lines, so that journey times from Glasgow and Edinburgh will be reduced by half an hour from the first phase of HS2. He will also be interested to know that the HS2 Ltd report talks about the benefits of the high speed line going up to Scotland and other parts of the country.

The hon. Gentleman's final point was about international connections, which are important. Our interest, as I referred to in my long statement, Mr. Speaker, is in connecting HS2 with HS1, and connecting them with Europe. We have asked HS2 to look into the possibility of connecting Euston with King's Cross St. Pancras, and we hope to report back later on how we can do that cost-effectively.

Mrs. Louise Ellman (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): I am delighted that the vision that the Select Committee on Transport called for is now being translated into reality, but when does my right hon. Friend expect the economic regeneration that, together with the northern hub, is at the heart of his proposals to become a reality?

Mr. Khan: The HS2 report sets out a timetable for the next few stages, with the formal consultation to begin in the autumn and construction to begin in 2017. I suspect that those considering investing in various parts of the country will see that a high speed line is coming and will start investing now, so we could see some benefits sooner than we would otherwise expect. May I also thank the Transport Committee for its vision?

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. No fewer than 26 right hon. and hon. Members are trying to contribute on this extremely important matter, so short questions and short answers are required if a large number of Members are not to be disappointed.

Mr. David Lidington (Aylesbury) (Con): The Minister will appreciate that for many of my constituents, today's statement will come as a pretty devastating blow. What, therefore, in his view, are the environmental benefits of the scheme that will outweigh the environmental costs both of driving a new railway very close to the homes of many hundreds of my constituents—in Aylesbury and Stoke Mandeville—and of destroying countryside that successive Governments, Labour and Conservative, have designated as of outstanding national importance?

Mr. Khan: The hon. Gentleman raises a really important point. We have asked HS2 Ltd to look into what further mitigation can be done. It will be no comfort to those of his constituents who will be affected, but about 50 per cent. of the High Speed 2 line will use or be sited next to existing or disused rail lines, or be sited in existing transport corridors. We need to minimise the disruption caused to the hon. Gentleman's constituents, and we are carrying out as much consultation as we possibly can to mitigate the damage caused. That includes having meetings now, before the formal consultation begins, to see how we can address some of the serious, legitimate concerns that are being raised.

Frank Dobson (Holborn and St. Pancras) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend accept that, whatever the merits of the proposal as presently drafted, the choice of the Euston terminus would have a devastating impact on my constituents? The railway engineers would treat it as though it were a greenfield site, but greenfield it is not. Does he acknowledge that the present proposals would involve six or seven blocks of affordable housing being demolished, and a small park being virtually concreted over? Will he ask the engineers to go back to their computers, and to be more imaginative in getting a lot more of what is needed into the existing curtilage of Euston station, a great deal of which is presently wasted? Will he also bear it in mind that, when the self-same engineers came up with the proposal to put the high speed link from the channel tunnel under King's Cross station, I suggested that they should use St. Pancras? That was a much better idea than the one the engineers came up with.

Mr. Khan: We are keen to learn the lessons from the channel tunnel experience, and that includes listening to my right hon. Friend's representations, as he often has very sensible ideas. I can give him an assurance that we will ask the engineers to try to rationalise the plans as much as they can. He will appreciate that about 27 sites in London were considered as possible termini for the high speed line, but all the evidence suggested that Euston was the best one. He made a good point when he suggested that more could be done to minimise the disruption to his constituents. He has been an advocate of ensuring that there is minimal disruption, and we will continue to work with him to alleviate some of the concerns he has raised.

Damian Green (Ashford) (Con): My constituents benefit from the existing domestic and international high speed links, but they suffered blight, disturbance and stress during the planning and building phases. May I recommend that the Minister and his successors learn those painful lessons so that individuals and businesses are not left to suffer planning blight for many years, as they did in the past? Will he also ensure that the initial compensation offers to those who are to lose all or part of their property are pitched at a realistic level? If he does those things, it will make a huge long-term difference to the acceptability of the project.

Mr. Khan: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his comments, and I take on board everything he has said. An example of the lessons that we have learned is that we have started consulting today on an exceptional hardship fund, so that there will be non-statutory as well as

statutory blight provisions. We have also set up an inquiry line that people can ring if they have concerns about where the line will go, for example. We have deliberately chosen a preferred route, rather than four or five different routes, which could cause unnecessary concern and blight. There is a huge amount of detail on the website as well, but I take on board everything the hon. Gentleman has said. I hope we have addressed most, if not all, of the concerns and learned the lessons from the previous exercise with High Speed 1.

Mr. Eric Martlew (Carlisle) (Lab): I congratulate the Minister on these excellent proposals, and on rejecting the Conservative proposal for the line to go from Manchester to Leeds, cutting out all of Cumbria and south-west Scotland. Having said that, can we talk about the fork? When they get to the fork, do the Government plan to build both lines at the same time, or one after the other? I suspect that the west coast line is more congested. Also, does he agree that it would be nonsense to run a high speed line 90 miles through Cumbria and not permit it to stop anywhere in that county, especially in Carlisle?

Mr. Khan: I suspect that whatever answer I give on which line goes first will lose me the support of half the House. That is one of the things HS2 will be looking into when it considers the next phase in relation to Manchester and Leeds. My hon. Friend is right to remind the House that other parts of the country will benefit from the project. On having a stop in Carlisle, it is worth pointing out that one of the choices we have to consider is having fewer stops, and therefore faster trains between areas of mass population, which would free up capacity on the trains that do go to Carlisle.

David Tredinnick (Bosworth) (Con): There will be real concern in parts of the east midlands such as Hinckley and Leicester that the connections to the new link might not be adequate. If the usage of the west coast main line were to decrease, the usage of the lines that feed into it could also decrease and the lines could possibly close. Can the Minister give me any reassurance on that?

Mr. Khan: All our forward projections tell us that usage is going to go up on the railways. Capacity is the biggest challenge we will face over the next two or three decades. I can give the hon. Gentleman an assurance that we will work with him to ensure that his concerns are not realised, and that there is no reduction in conventional rail services as a result of what we hope will be the success of high speed rail.

Mr. James Plaskitt (Warwick and Leamington) (Lab): Can my right hon. Friend tell me more about his Department's analysis of the interaction between this proposal and the Department's aviation strategy? The proposal to have a link at Birmingham International could significantly transform the way in which people think about the use of Birmingham airport. That link could also provide a fast link into London. Is he absolutely sure that these plans are consistent with his Department's intentions for Birmingham airport and with its national aviation strategy?

Mr. Khan: As ever, my hon. Friend makes a good point. When High Speed 2 Ltd was looking at where the interchanges would go, it also considered any unintended consequences. Its report clearly states that, rather the project fuelling demand for aviation, it will result in a shift from domestic aviation to high speed rail of between 8 and 11 per cent. It will also lead to better journeys for people travelling to airports further away.

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West) (LD): I welcome the statement; the project will be good for jobs, for the economy and for the environment. Does the Minister agree, however, that high speed rail really comes into its own for longer journeys? Many people travel from central Scotland to London by air at the moment, with 60 per cent. of the flights from Edinburgh airport going to other UK mainland cities.

Mr. Khan: At least 10,000 construction jobs will be created, along with a further 2,000 permanent jobs. The hon. Gentleman is right to say that the real benefit of high speed rail is felt on the longer journeys, and we are optimistic that people will choose to go on a high speed train that is almost as quick as, and more environmentally friendly than, the alternative options.

Mr. Clive Betts (Sheffield, Attercliffe) (Lab): I give an absolute welcome to the proposal for a direct line to Yorkshire through the east midlands. That is great news for Sheffield. May I return to the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Carlisle (Mr. Martlew)? Will the Minister look carefully at developing sufficient capacity in the rail construction industry so that, come 2017, we shall be able to develop both legs of the Y simultaneously? It would be invidious for cities on either leg to have to wait for the other line to be completed before they could get the benefits of high speed rail.

Mr. Khan: One of the reasons why it would be daft to begin construction of the high speed rail in 2015, while Crossrail is still under construction, is that we would not be able to use the transferrable skills or build the necessary expertise. One of the advantages of the high speed rail project following on after Crossrail has been finished is that we shall be able to use that expertise and have a sustainable form of work using British expertise. If British companies know that we have made a commitment to high speed rail over the next two or three decades, they will invest in the facilities and skills necessary to ensure that they get the work. All the evidence from High Speed 2 Ltd suggests that British companies will also be able to compete for work overseas when European countries decide to build their high speed lines. Finally, my hon. Friend would not have the high speed route going through his patch if someone else had their plans realised.

Mrs. Cheryl Gillan (Chesham and Amersham) (Con): On this side of the House, we have always supported the principle of high speed rail because of the economic benefits it can bring to the United Kingdom. I am glad, however, that my hon. Friend the Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs. Villiers) has reserved our position on the route. My constituents will be as devastated as those of my hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr. Lidington) by the announcement today, and by the plans for tunnelling

under Amersham, which would cause considerable disruption if they were to go ahead. What assurances can the Minister give me that my constituents, and all the relevant organisations and councils, will be fully engaged and consulted throughout the process? Will he arrange for me to meet the Secretary of State to discuss the plans in more detail?

Mr. Khan: I am happy to commit my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State to a meeting with the hon. Lady. He and I are happy to meet any Member who thinks that their constituency will be affected by the plans. A lot of the tunnelling will be done in order to reduce the devastation that would otherwise arise in areas of outstanding natural beauty. One of the reasons why we could not rush in and start the construction within five years is that we need properly to consult. We need to go through all the hoops and loops to ensure that everyone is consulted, and we are not committing to a route until that consultation has taken place.

Dr. Gavin Strang (Edinburgh, East) (Lab): May I congratulate my right hon. Friend on his statement about what might well be our most important transport project this century? Does he agree that it is understandable that we will want high speed trains coming into Edinburgh and Glasgow as soon as practicable? In that context, of course we accept that the first line will have to start at London and move north, but will the Minister do all he can to help us achieve what we want? It is a little bit of a disappointment—not a major issue—that he is still talking in terms of moving on to the conventional track before the high speed link to Edinburgh and Glasgow is built.

Mr. Khan: My right hon. Friend knows a lot about this, as in 1997 he had to pick up some of the pieces of privatisation. He is right to suggest that we want to go forwards as soon as possible to allow our colleagues in Scotland to have a high speed link. The initial intention is for the first phase of high speed to be connected to conventional railways. The intention—High Speed Two Ltd is quite clear about this—is to have high speed lines going to Scotland, and indeed Wales, as soon as that is practical.

Dr. Andrew Murrison (Westbury) (Con): The Minister of State missed the very important point made by the hon. Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) about the potential for high speed rail to divert funds from the rest of the regional rail network. Will the Minister address that point head on, and comment specifically on the south-west, which he did not mention at all, and its need for electrification and dual tracking? It would be a pity if those projects were put at risk, as they represent only a small sum, relatively speaking, of the budget he has discussed today.

Mr. Khan: I give the hon. Gentleman the reassurance he needs—that if this party forms the next Government, we will make sure that the promises we have made to electrify those lines will carry on.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): This announcement is really good news for the west midlands. The creation of a new station at Curzon Street will be an excellent gateway to the region, while an additional

[Richard Burden]

interchange close to Birmingham airport will help to establish the west midlands as the beating heart of England on the international stage. Given that short-term political games are now being played with this project by the official Opposition, what can we do to ensure that political consensus and confidence in the scheme are not jeopardised by those Conservative games?

Mr. Khan: What I advise my hon. Friend to do is to get from me the press briefing put out by the Opposition, to print out the comments of the hon. Member for Chipping Barnet (Mrs. Villiers) as recorded in *Hansard* and then to ensure that every member of the public sees them both and votes the right way whenever the election is called.

Mr. John Randall (Uxbridge) (Con): While welcoming the Government's conversion to high speed rail, I am very disappointed, as are many thousands across the country, that this does not mean the end of the Government's plans for a third runway at Heathrow. To raise a key item for my constituents in Uxbridge, south Ruislip and Ickenham, has the Minister any idea how much wider the existing Chiltern line will have to be?

Mr. Khan: The second part of the hon. Gentleman's question is important. This is dealt with in the HS2 Ltd report, which is available in the Library today. If he cannot find the information and lets me know, I will send him the details about the width of the line, which is an important issue in respect of the blight caused to his constituents.

Jeremy Corbyn (Islington, North) (Lab): I am delighted that this scheme is coming up and I fully support the principle of the high speed rail network. Will the Minister of State say more about the sources of the capital funding going into it? We have put £9 billion into the west coast main line and huge benefits have been made from it, partly by Virgin Trains. Will he indicate who is going to run the trains when the service begins? Will it be a publicly owned company?

Mr. Khan: The current projections are for an average of £2 billion to be spent on construction each year. At the peak, about £3.9 billion will be spent on construction; it is comparable to Crossrail, on which £3.9 billion will be spent at peak. As to the details of timetabling and who is going to run which lines, information will be phased out over the forthcoming period. The important thing now is to get the pre-consultation ready to ensure that consultation begins this autumn. A timetable in the HS2 Ltd report sets out the phases of what needs to take place before we can open the first high speed line in 2026.

Jeremy Wright (Rugby and Kenilworth) (Con): Will the Minister of State reassure us that the consultation process on the line of route will not be just for show, but will be a genuine and open consultation process, allowing for the prospect that the route can be changed? In particular, will he take account of the sensitivities involved, for example, in what happens to narrow belts of green-belt land between urban areas such as between Coventry

and Kenilworth in my constituency and to sites of strategic interest such as the Royal Agricultural centre at Stoneleigh park?

Mr. Khan: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. It would be no good and it would serve nobody if the consultation were a sham, which is one reason why I deliberately couched my statement and subsequent comments in the context of the proposals being subject to consultation. Whether the scheme goes ahead at all, let alone the preferred route, depends on consultation. We are spending some time before the formal consultation begins in the autumn to make sure that we get the process right. I say genuinely to the hon. Gentleman that both the Secretary of State and myself would be happy to meet him to discuss any specific—and I mean specific—concerns he might have about the line. A CD-ROM is available from today, showing where the plans suggest the route might go, which should help him to come up with some questions to put to us.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley) (Lab): I thank my right hon. Friend for his excellent statement, which is very welcome. The Leeds line will have connections into my constituency. However, is this not a bad time for Network Rail to announce hundreds of redundancies of trackside maintenance workers—at the very time when the rail network is about to expand?

Mr. Khan: My hon. Friend raises a very good point. We are keen to invest in the future. One chapter in the report deals with investment in the future and the new jobs that will be created. It is unwise to shed jobs when there is good news around the corner. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs. Ellman) also asked earlier about investment in the regions. If potential employers know that a high speed line is coming, it may well change their attitude.

Adam Price (Carmarthen, East and Dinefwr) (PC): The Minister has stressed the economic benefits from HS2, but surely the corollary is that under his proposals, Wales will be the only nation in this island that will remain unconnected to the European high speed network, so it will be economically disadvantaged as a result. Will he explain to the people of Wales—they have, after all, loyally supported his party in successive elections—what they have done to deserve from this Government a policy of brazen and malign neglect?

Mr. Khan: I am disappointed by the churlishness of the hon. Gentleman's question. Wales currently has less than one mile of electrified lines. As a consequence of our announcement last year, electrification of the Great Western main line will shortly take place—and at a huge cost. I have already said in response to questions after my statement that HS2 Ltd is quite clear that the intention is for all parts of the country to benefit from high speed in future—and that includes Wales.

Tony Lloyd (Manchester, Central) (Lab): I unequivocally welcome my right hon. Friend's statement, but can he guarantee to people in the north of England that the interconnectivity of northern cities—Manchester, Leeds, Liverpool, Sheffield and so forth—will not be put in jeopardy by a crowding out of the capital and other resources needed for the high speed link? It would be bizarre if it were quicker to travel to London from Manchester than to go to Sheffield.

Mr. Khan: One real benefit of the high speed line is the interconnectivity between northern cities and the regions. It is one of its huge strengths. One problem stemming from the Victorian lines and the through lines going from London to northern cities is that there may be decentish south-north connections, but not very decentish east-west connections. My hon. Friend knows about the trans-Pennine improvements being made. One of the huge benefits of high speed rail is the improved connections between different northern cities. Once he has seen the details—he has not yet had a chance to do so—I am sure that he will be even more welcoming of the plans announced today.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): Of course, I am delighted for the regions that will benefit from this announcement, but I remind the Minister that an awful lot of the country lies west of Reading. Can he give me a date for the electrification of the route to Bristol and tell me when any action is going to be taken to improve the Great Western line via Frome and Castle Cary down to Devon and Cornwall, which seems to be the big loser so far as these announcements are concerned? It used to be God's wonderful railway; it is not that any more.

Mr. Khan: I shall be happy to write to the hon. Gentleman specifying the date on which the Bristol electrification will begin. As he said, his constituents will not benefit immediately from high speed rail, but I remind him and the House that they will do so shortly if the right party wins the next two or three elections.

Ms Katy Clark (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): I strongly welcome the Government's announcement, and the Minister's earlier reply to my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) about job losses. As he will know, Network Rail is proposing 1,500 job losses, and 12,000 Network Rail maintenance staff announced today that they would strike in an attempt to prevent them. Will the Minister intervene, and explain to Network Rail that the loss of 1,500 skilled staff will not help this project or the long-term future of our railways? Will he take this opportunity to try to prevent those job losses?

Mr. Khan: I hope that my hon. Friend will forgive me for not being on top of the details. I shall be happy to look into the matter and write to her.

Mr. Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): Given the length of High Speed 1 and the proposed High Speed 2, it must be extremely frustrating that their respective central London termini are only a few hundred yards apart. Would it not be worth considering establishing a single central London terminus to facilitate high speed traffic both north and to the Continent?

Mr. Khan: HS2 Ltd considered 27 sites in London, including St Pancras. One of the questions that it will consider now is how easy it will be to move passengers from Euston to St Pancras and vice versa. There could be a rail link, or some other form of people-mover. It would be fairly expensive as things stand, but HS2 will examine the details to establish the best option.

Ms Gisela Stuart (Birmingham, Edgbaston) (Lab): I particularly welcome the Minister's announcement that the Birmingham city centre station would be the new Curzon Street station. That means, of course, that

Snow Hill, New Street and Curzon Street stations need to be connected effectively. Is the Minister aware that Centro is ready to start work on the city centre metro extension, which would link those stations if only it were given the go-ahead? Will he take a careful look at that project?

Mr. Khan: My hon. Friend never misses a trick when it comes to lobbying a Minister.

I am really excited about Curzon Street station. Members may not be aware that the original Birmingham station was in grade 1-listed Curzon street, which is the oldest railway monument. We are going to bring it back to life. Would it not be great if we could also have another arch at Euston station, so that it could look as it did originally in 1838?

As always, I am happy to be lobbied by colleagues, and I shall continue to discuss the issues raised by my hon. Friend with her outside the Chamber.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West) (Lab): Will High Speed 2 carriages be large enough to be duplex carriages, like the double-decker carriages on continental trains? May I also ask the Minister to ensure that the trains have enough capacity to take bicycles? Such capacity is sadly lacking in the United Kingdom. If we want a modal shift, that is one development that we should try to build into the design of the rolling stock at an early stage.

Mr. Khan: As ever, my hon. Friend has made a couple of good points. The double-decker issue has been taken into account by HS2 Ltd, which plans to build two 200-metre connections. As for the point about bicycles—which, as far as my hon. Friend and I are concerned, is even more important—I can reassure him that in aiming to design and build a railway service fit for the 21st century, we will make certain that we do not make a mistake and build a railway service that is not fit for purpose.

Sir Peter Soulsby (Leicester, South) (Lab): It is clear from what other Members have said that high speed rail is the future, but it is not, of course, the immediate future. Is it not important for investment in the conventional rail network to continue in the meantime? Does my right hon. Friend agree that if the east midlands is to gain the full benefit of high speed trains, the midland main line needs to be electrified so that it can carry those trains and provide the necessary interoperability?

Mr. Khan: We will be investing £15 billion in the conventional rail system over the coming period, and we are still considering the possibility of electrifying the midland main line. If that is to take place sooner rather than later, my hon. Friend should continue to lobby.

Jim Sheridan (Paisley and Renfrewshire, North) (Lab): I, too, welcome the statement, but yet again, when a good, positive statement has implications for Scotland, Scottish National party Members are posted missing. Will my right hon. Friend speak to the Scottish Government, and share his vision of a properly funded transport system with an Executive who consistently deny the opportunity for a direct link to be provided between Glasgow airport and the good city of Glasgow?

[Jim Sheridan]

Mr. Khan: It is worth my pointing out to the House that on a day when we have announced high speed rail for a 335-mile link, the Scottish Government cannot even agree to the upgrading of 9 kilometres of existing track and the laying of 1.9 kilometres of new track for the Glasgow airport rail link. However, I am sure that they will have heard today's announcement and will want to follow the example that we have set at Westminster.

Stephen Pound (Ealing, North) (Lab): The case for the high speed rail route has been made passionately by Ealing council and persuasively by my right hon. Friend. I do not wish to be accused of being parochial, but we are elected by parishes. I am happy to see regeneration ripple out from Old Oak Common lane, but not at the cost of paying for Perivale. Will my right hon. Friend tell me what average speeds, average track widening and acoustic impact he expects, and will he also provide me with a detailed map showing precisely where in beautiful Perivale we are proposing to run these trains?

Mr. Khan: I shall be happy to provide my hon. Friend with all that information. The trains will speed up and slow down when they leave the interchange next to his constituency. For the benefits of the constituents who are lobbying him, I shall send him information about the track widening and acoustic impact. We have asked the consultants to try to mitigate some of the noise nuisance. I shall also be happy to accompany my hon. Friend to that fantastic, salubrious part of his constituency to assess the potential implications of the high speed link, including its potential benefits.

Mr. Andy Slaughter (Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush) (Lab): I welcome the statement, including the news that the London interchange will be at Old Oak in my constituency and will provide the Crossrail station for which I have long campaigned. This is an excellent opportunity for practical regeneration of a brownfield site, but the work should be done only in a way that protects the quality of life of local residents and the delicate ecology of Wormwood Scrubs. When my right hon. Friend has finished talking to people in Perivale, will he talk to my local residents about protecting the local environment? Will he also use his best endeavours to persuade those on the Tory Front Bench to act with everyone else, including Tory councils, to—

Mr. Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman is a bit of a cheeky chappie. He asked one question, and I was very happy to hear it, but he should not take advantage. We have heard the thrust of what he wanted to say.

Mr. Khan: One of the reasons for High Speed 2's choice of Old Oak Common was the interchange with Crossrail, the Heathrow Express and the great western main line. It will lead to a huge amount of regeneration in that part of the city, which is why the two councils have been working with my hon. Friend the Member for Ealing, Acton and Shepherd's Bush (Mr. Slaughter) to ensure that the interchange is provided. I think it would be insulting to my hon. Friend's constituents, and to the efforts he has made, to call the station "Wormwood Scrubs International", and I will ensure that any negative impact on his constituents is mitigated.

Clive Efford (Eltham) (Lab): I too welcome the statement—especially the news of the Crossrail link with the new high speed rail link, which will enhance the hub that will be created by the Crossrail station at Woolwich—but was High Speed 2 able to assess the impact of the running of freight trains on the same lines as passenger trains north of Birmingham? Perhaps separating freight from passenger trains would be a more effective way of speeding trains up in the long term.

Mr. Khan: High Speed 2 considered using freight on the high speed line, and one of its conclusions was that it would slow down high speed passenger trains. It preferred the idea of allowing longer high speed trains to run on high speed lines, thus enabling more freight to be carried on the conventional route.

Many people in London suspect that one of the reasons the Conservatives at Westminster support the interchange at Old Oak Common is their opposition to Crossrail.

John Battle (Leeds, West) (Lab): Although I welcome his far-sighted statement, the Minister would expect me to continue to press for the Leeds link, as that city makes the third largest contribution to the United Kingdom's economy. May I ask him to insist that the lines from Birmingham, west and east, are developed simultaneously, to ensure that further economic development west and east of the Pennines is not jeopardised or disadvantaged in any way in the future?

Mr. Khan: The alternative to a high speed connection to Leeds would be to go via Manchester, which we think would be daft. My hon. Friend raises an important point about simultaneous development. I will look into the issue, which clearly is one of resources and availability of the construction expertise required. I have been lobbied by other colleagues and I will go away and look at it.

Points of Order

1.20 pm

Mr. Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (Cotswold) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I tried to raise the issue of the day nursery during questions to the spokesman for the House of Commons Commission. One of the important areas surrounding this whole affair is that the staff—

Mr. Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman must resume his seat. The hon. Gentleman did indeed ask a question on the matter, to which he received a reply. Unfortunately his question was a bit on the long side, which is why I had to cut him off. *[Interruption.]* Order. If the hon. Gentleman has a point of order, I am happy to hear it. What I am not prepared to have is Members extending question time and debate through abuse of the point of order procedure. That must not happen.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: I think that you will find that this is an important point of order, Mr. Speaker. The facts surrounding the proposal are that the important staff of the House have not been consulted about the proposal. There are no alternative facilities proposed, and as well as the loss of the restaurant and the Astor suite—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry; this is not a point of order. Unless my memory fails me, the hon. Gentleman entered the House in 1992 so he has now been in this place for 18 years. I am sure that he should know by now what is a point of order and what is not. Starting up or continuing a debate and expressing a view about a particular proposal is not the way in which to proceed so far as points of order are concerned. My own suspicion that what he is saying is not a point of order has been confirmed by advice.

Mr. Christopher Chope (Christchurch) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I refer you to Standing Order 144, under which there is provision that there

“shall be a select committee, to be called the Finance and Service Committee, to consider expenditure on and the administration of services for the House.”

We heard earlier from the hon. Member for North Devon (Nick Harvey) that in view of the time constraints, it was not feasible for a particular item of expenditure—namely the replacement of facilities at Bellamy’s bar

and elsewhere in 1 Parliament street with a day nursery—to go to the Finance and Services Committee. In your understanding, is it compliant with Standing Order 144 that on such an important issue, involving major expenditure, the Finance and Services Committee can be bypassed?

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. The answer is that a decision was made, in an entirely orderly way and after extensive consideration of sites, by the House of Commons Commission. That was a proper responsibility discharged by the Commission and the Commission certainly complies with the Standing Orders of the House. If the hon. Gentleman is worried that in some way the Standing Orders of the House have been breached, I can reassure him that that is not the case. Whether my answer will satisfy him is open to doubt and conjecture, but that is the factual answer to the hon. Gentleman, who need not trouble himself with a further point of order on it today.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker.

Mr. Speaker: Order. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman should resume his seat. I say very clearly and explicitly to the hon. Member for Cotswold (Mr. Clifton-Brown) that he would be very unwise to try to continue the argument on this matter when I have ruled upon it and when I have already had to advise him that his attempted point of order simply did not meet the test. I will give him one brief go; he had better not make a mess of it.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: Further to that point of order, Mr. Speaker. Could you advise me, under Standing Orders, what is the point of the Finance and Services Committee if it is not to consider important matters of finance concerning this House?

Mr. Speaker: The matters are set out in the Standing Orders and, as I have just explained to the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope), there are important responsibilities that fall to the House of Commons Commission, which has been discharging those responsibilities. It is of course open to the hon. Gentleman to form his own view as to the way in which those responsibilities have been discharged. It would be difficult to be clearer or more explicit in response to the further point of order raised by the hon. Gentleman.

International Women's Day

1.25 pm

The Minister for Women and Equality (Ms Harriet Harman): I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of international women's day—women's representation.

[Relevant documents: The Final Report from the Speaker's Conference (on Parliamentary Representation), Session 2009-10, HC 239-I, the Government response, Cm 7824, and the First Special Report from the Conference, HC 449.]

I am pleased to open the debate and want to raise two issues: the Equality Bill and the massive change in public attitudes to equality. For decades, those of us who believe strongly in women's equality and representation have been told that we are on an eccentric fringe—that we suffer from “political correctness gone mad”. But all of the things that we have fought for so hard over the years—for women to have an equal say in all areas of life—are now in the mainstream of public opinion.

We carried out a poll last week in the run up to international women's day. It showed that the public have turned decisively against men-only decision making. They think it is important that men and women have an equal say over business decisions that affect the British economy. They think that should be the case even when men have more experience. They think that men and women should have an equal say over the political decisions that affect the way Britain is run. That is strongly our point of view and why we have increased the number of Labour women MPs up to 95.

People think that international political decisions should be taken by men and women having an equal say. That is strongly our point of view and why we are pressing for the establishment of the new UN women's agency this year. It is the same for decisions about the workplace and local services. That view backs up our commitment to new rights at work, a strong role for trade union equality reps and more women councillors, particularly black and Asian women councillors. We do not have a benchmark for public opinion on an equal say for women 20 years ago, or even 10 years ago.

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): The Minister refers to the need for women to have representation at an international level and to the setting up of a new United Nations committee. Why have the Government chosen not to nominate UK representatives to CEDAW, the convention on the elimination of all forms of discrimination against women?

Ms Harman: It is a question not of British women being nominated and standing in all posts, but of British women being part of an international network of women that is working to deliver for women in our own country, while also backing up the women who are struggling for development internationally and in their own countries.

There has been a sea change in public attitudes. I do not think that we would have got anything like those answers to the survey 10 or 15 years ago. This change of public attitudes to women is matched by changed opinion about gay and lesbian partnerships—controversial at the outset and now accepted and celebrated in civil partnerships. The change in public attitudes is matched

by changed opinion about older people. There is real annoyance about how older people—especially older women—are written off. The change of attitude is reflected in changed opinion on representation—that, in a multicultural society, we should not have, as we used to, an all-white Parliament. There is a big, and long overdue, change in attitudes to disabled people.

Mrs. Ann Cryer (Keighley) (Lab): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that had it not been for the vast number of Labour women Members, we would not now have the forced marriage unit or the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007? I do not think that my predecessor, a Conservative male MP, was aware that there were such things as forced marriages.

Ms Harman: That would not have been possible without Labour MPs, including my hon. Friend, raising the issue. She has boldly raised issues that were swept under the carpet and particularly affected women, but also men. I pay tribute to the work that she has done, and all the women on the Labour Benches backed her strongly in making such changes.

People see how equality is important for each and every individual. They know that equality is critical for a thriving and prosperous economy and meritocracy. They recognise that fairness and equality is the basis for peaceful and cohesive communities. That shift in public opinion poses a challenge for everyone, including all the political parties, the captains of industry and the public sector, but it is a helpful challenge and a mandate for yet further progressive change. This is essentially an argument about modernity and a future that is fair for all, in which all are fully represented and have an equal say.

Jim Sheridan (Paisley and Renfrewshire, North) (Lab): My right hon. and learned Friend will be aware of the negative comments in the press and elsewhere about the appointment of Baroness Ashton, mainly because it is claimed that she is an inexperienced woman. Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that there would not be such negative comments if the person in question were a man?

Ms Harman: I think Baroness Ashton will prove them wrong. We have all got full confidence in her. She will ignore all the sneering and detrimental remarks, and she will get on with her job and do it brilliantly.

Our Equality Bill provides the platform to make equality a reality. It is nearing its Royal Assent.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): Will my right hon. and learned Friend confirm that that Bill will complete its passage through the House before the general election?

Ms Harman: We expect the Equality Bill to continue its progress and finish its stages in the House of Lords, and I do not anticipate there will be any amendments that this House will have any difficulty with, in which case we should be able to approve it. It will be a landmark Act when it receives Royal Assent; when it reaches the statute book, it will mark a major step forward on all the issues my hon. Friend has campaigned for over the years.

The Equality Bill is not just the consolidation of a maze of existing laws; it also contains a great range of new powers and obligations to help the drive towards equality. On equal pay, it will make large employers publish their pay gap. Good employers will have nothing to fear, but bad employers will have nowhere to hide. To tackle men-only decision making in businesses and the public sector, there will be a new opportunity to take positive action at the point of recruitment or promotion. It will be possible to say, "We want you for this job because you're a woman."

The lesson from the progress of the Equality Bill is that that was only possible because of the strong Labour women in this House. Women in the House of Commons have not only changed the face of Parliament; they have also changed the agenda of politics. Because of women in this House, tackling domestic violence and rape, extending maternity pay and introducing flexible working are all on the political agenda and part of the mainstream of our political debates.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) (Con): While celebrating the work of women in politics, will the right hon. and learned Lady also accept that Conservative organisations such as the Primrose League in the 19th century provided the initial spur to women's suffrage? By 1905 that organisation had as many as 1.5 million members. They went out into the political arena and did all the hard work on the ground that was needed for women, and they were Conservatives.

Ms Harman: I think it is very important for women not only to have the right to vote, but to be able to vote for women and men to sit in this House of Commons. Therefore, I warmly welcome the proposals from the Speaker's Conference, and I thank the Speaker and his deputy on the conference, my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg), who is present in the Chamber. The Speaker's Conference proposals will help us make further progress towards equality of representation in this House.

The Equality Bill already extended the power for political parties to have all-women shortlists. We are carrying on with that in Labour's selections in advance of the general election, and 58 per cent. of our newly selected candidates are women. We have accepted the Speaker's Conference recommendation that political parties should be required to report on the diversity of their candidate selection. We need to expose under-representation, so that it can be clearly seen where action needs to be taken. This is not just a matter for our political parties; it is a question of the legitimacy of our democracy through this House.

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest) (Con): In this debate a year ago, the right hon. and learned Lady agreed with me that if we are to encourage more women to enter the House, which is what we all want, it is essential to address the financial background of how a Member of Parliament can conduct their life, office and work, and the practicalities of how women who are also mothers can combine the jobs of mother and MP. Will she undertake to stand up for women and ensure it is possible for them to be both mothers and Members of Parliament, as she did a year ago?

Ms Harman: One of the different perspectives women have brought to the House is an understanding of the importance of family life, and of the issues facing people who have the major responsibility for caring for children or older relatives. We want that kind of experience in this House, and it is therefore very important that the allowance system ensures that we can continue to make progress in having more women in the House of Commons, balancing their work and family responsibilities in the same way as do women throughout the rest of the country.

Many of the women who first entered the House in 1997, and who have, therefore, served for 13 years, are standing down at the next election. Each and every one of them has blazed a trail and made a difference in their constituency, and has paved the way for the dynamic new women candidates who will be taking their place. They have their place in history, and it will be remembered, and I pay tribute to them. They are not "Blair's babes"; they are their own women, and I am proud of what they have done.

Ms Patricia Hewitt (Leicester, West) (Lab): I thank my right hon. and learned Friend for what she has just said about the '97 intake of women MPs, of which I was one, of course—and I am delighted to be succeeded in my constituency by another Labour woman candidate.

My right hon. and learned Friend has referred several times to the problem of all-male decision making. Does she agree that much more needs to be done to ensure that women are properly represented at the top of all organisations, private as well as public sector, and that the experience of Norway in particular has shown that getting more women on to the boards of private companies improves the quality of decision making and the performance of those companies?

Ms Harman: I entirely agree, and I pay tribute to the work my right hon. Friend has done, especially when she was Secretary of State for Trade and Industry, when she drove through the right to request flexible working for family members. That was a very important contribution, among many others she has made.

Looking to the future, there are three key areas for further action. First, we will have to ensure that we implement and enforce the Equality Bill. It is a framework, but we must put it into practice. Secondly, we will make even more progress in helping families balance work and family responsibilities. Women still do the lion's share of family caring.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton) (Lab/Co-op): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that that especially applies to the women in families of deployed service personnel? Does she think that the Equality Bill or any other Government measures will assist in ensuring that the families of service personnel have equal access to dental, health and education services, and to life opportunities as well?

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend has been a great champion of service families, as she represents the naval city of Plymouth. She also serves on the Select Committee on Defence, of course. She has precipitated a lot of work in respect of the Ministry of Defence, and we and the Government Equalities Office have joined in to ensure

[Ms Harman]

that the wives of military men do not miss out on all the things on which progress has been made for women in this country, such as more child care and training and employment opportunities. As she knows, we have produced a Command Paper looking at these issues, and a further announcement was made yesterday. The wives of military families have been very much part of the agenda that I, my team of Ministers and the GEO have been working on.

Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): I conducted some research on the difference that women had made in Parliament. One of the responses that struck me was a comment by a Clerk on the Defence Committee, who said that it was not until there were women on that Committee that the families of service personnel were ever discussed. In the old days, when it was an all-male Committee, it discussed the size of the weapons the Army used, not the families who kept the soldiers brave and able to do their job.

Ms Harman: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. I remember her research. There was a great deal of criticism of the women who came into Parliament in 1997. It was immediately asserted that they had made no difference. Her research shows the massive difference that women have made in the House of Commons: Sure Start children's services, child tax credits, the minimum wage, which has done so much to help women, flexibility for families, the new laws on domestic violence and the work on human trafficking, in which she played a massive part. All those issues show the difference women have made in Parliament, but we are still a small minority and we need to make further progress.

Women still do the lion's share of family caring. Since 1997, we have doubled maternity pay and leave, and there are twice as many nursery places in my constituency as there were in 1997. That is the same in all parts of the country. There is flexible work for carers and more respite care, but we still have further to go.

Thirdly, I think we shall see a new era in international relations. In every continent and in most countries, there are now women in senior positions in government and in their Parliaments as never before. Last September, the United Nations agreed to bring together the four parts of its work on women into one single, coherent and effective UN women's agency. The new UN women's agency will help to ensure that international relations can be women working together across continents and countries, rather than just men. Together, we might just be able to help solve some of the problems that male diplomacy has yet to crack.

At the next election, the country will face a big choice. If women and men want a party that will fight for greater equality, and if they want a party that believes, and has always believed, in taking the controversial decisions to cut through inequality and to empower women as equal, there is only one choice—the Labour party.

1.41 pm

Mrs. Theresa May (Maidenhead) (Con): I am pleased once again to speak in a debate to mark international women's day. It is an important debate, which we should

be having even were it not for the fact that earlier this week we celebrated the 100th anniversary of international women's day. However, I am deeply disappointed that the Government have chosen to make this not a full day's debate but an hour and a half topical debate. Last year, for the third year in a row, we saw the UK slip further down the World Economic Forum's gender gap list. We now find ourselves behind countries such as Latvia and the Philippines, yet sadly the Government have not only decided that our debate should last only for an hour and a half, but perforce—perhaps—they have restricted its scope, which means that there are limits to the number of very real issues that affect women internationally that we can raise. I am particularly sorry about that because as Leader of the House, the Minister for Women and Equality is in the very position to ensure that once again we have a full day's debate. I hope that is not a sign of her waning dedication to equality, as we saw recently in her lack of commitment to all-women shortlists—at least when it came to the selection for Birmingham, Erdington. I am not quite sure what led the right hon. and learned Lady to suggest that a man might have been better for that seat.

The Minister spoke about the Equality Bill, which we have broadly supported. I am happy to make it absolutely clear to the House that we want it on the statute book. It is not only an important measure in its consolidation of equality legislation, guidance and regulations, where there is multiplicity at present; it also raises and brings together a number of new issues. We do not support the Government's approach in some aspects of the Bill—for example, we think that our approach is preferable on issues such as the gender pay gap. None the less, we want to see the Bill on the statute book and we hope that it will be an Act before the general election.

It is important for Government and the public sector to set a good example. Businesses are told by the Government that they must tackle the gender pay gap, or face measures being taken by the Government; yet average earnings for full-time male employees in the civil service are still 14 per cent. higher than for women. Businesses are told that they must address the glass ceiling in law firms, the City and the professions, yet the Government have failed to meet all their equality and diversity targets for the senior civil service, with women filling just 32 per cent. of senior positions.

Employers are told by the right hon. and learned Lady and the Government Equalities Office that they must offer employees more part-time work, yet only 5 per cent. of people in her Department work part time. Those are areas where the public sector should lead, not lecture.

Jim Sheridan: On gender pay, I assure the right hon. Lady that it was never an issue until women in the trade union movement got involved, and not just on gender pay—women in the trade union movement pushed for maternity pay, paternity pay and the minimum wage.

Mrs. May: I am happy to record the fact that many women in areas of public life generally have taken up the issue of gender pay, but sadly, despite the fact that we have had legislation on the statute book for more than 30 years and that for the past 13 years we have had a Government who said they wanted to do something about the gender pay gap, we still have one. We still need

to find the right way to resolve it. It is partly about legislation, but other issues are involved too—for example, the advice given to girls and young women about the sort of careers they should be pursuing. A multifaceted approach is needed.

It is a sign of our commitment to equality and diversity that the issue of women's representation in politics and public life lies at its heart.

Lynda Waltho (Stourbridge) (Lab): The right hon. Lady talks much about leading by example. Can she tell us how many women there are in the shadow Cabinet?

Mrs. May: Yes indeed. There are six, and the proportion is higher than in the Government's Cabinet.

The issue of women in politics has been at the heart of the fight for equality since the beginning and I believe that the Conservative party has a proud history of getting women into Parliament. A number—*[Interruption.]* The Leader of the House says there are 17 of them. I remind her that courtesy of the by-election in Norwich, North last year, when I seem to recall that the Labour party was defeated, the Conservatives not only have another woman in the House, but the youngest woman in the House.

I was about to remind the House that the first female MP to take her seat in the House was a Conservative. The first female Prime Minister of this country was a Conservative and the first female chairman of a major political party was a Conservative—I ought to know, because it was me.

In 2005, in his first speech as Leader of the Opposition, my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) made clear his determination to bring more Conservative women into Parliament. Since then we have been making significant progress in the selection of women candidates to fight the next general election. I am very happy to acknowledge that we want to go beyond our current 18 women MPs. Today, about 30 per cent. of our candidates are women—*[Interruption.]* From the Treasury Bench, the Solicitor-General is muttering something that may indicate that she thinks we will not get many women into the House of Commons at the next election—*[Interruption.]* She says they are all in hopeless seats. No, they are not all in hopeless seats. What is crucially different this time is that we have a better proportion of women in winnable seats. If the Conservatives win the next general election, even by one seat, we will go from 18 women MPs to about 60 women MPs.

The problem for the House is that a significant number of Labour women MPs represent marginal seats, so whatever happens at the next election the overall number of women in the House may not change much. We will increase the number of women on the Conservative Benches, but the number of women on the Labour Benches may decrease.

Fiona Mactaggart: In many ways, the right hon. Lady has made the point I wanted to make. Does she accept that even though 60 is historically a huge number for her party, it would not be for the governing party, because it is less than the number of women in the current governing party? There will, therefore, be a disappointing result if—as I do not expect—her party wins, because fewer women's voices will be heard in Parliament and the number of women here will be reduced from its current 20 per cent. or so.

Mrs. May: I assure the hon. Lady that the women's voices heard from the Conservative Benches after the election will make a first-class contribution to the House and to decisions taken by the Government. As she said, I have made the point that, for Parliament as a whole, there is still an issue about getting more women represented in the House. That lay at the heart of the Speaker's Conference, at which a number of matters were highlighted as needing to be addressed. This issue still needs to be addressed by all parties in the House. It is not simply a question for the Conservative party, as the Leader of the House sometimes tries to pretend.

Mrs. Laing: Does my right hon. Friend agree that it is sad—I really mean that—that so many women on the Labour Benches who have made a great contribution to the House in the past 13 years are deciding voluntarily not to stand at the next election? That is one reason why the number of women in the House is likely to diminish, and it is sad that they are choosing to leave. That is testimony to the fact that it is still much more difficult for a woman to carry out the duties of a Member of Parliament than it is for a man.

Mrs. May: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that contribution. She raises a very important point, which she also raised as a challenge to the Leader of the House.

The House is starting to consider this important issue, which will remain an issue for hon. Members, particularly after the next election when I think there will be an increased number of MPs with young families who will need to juggle family considerations and their work in the House. That is an issue for both women and young fathers.

Mrs. Cryer: I know that the hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) punches above her weight, but I want to correct the record. I am 70 and that is why I am retiring, not because I am disillusioned by anything in the House or with my party. I want to clarify that.

Mrs. May: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for clarifying her position, and I am happy to echo the tribute that the Minister for Women and Equality paid to her for her work on a number of important issues that relate particularly to women, such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation. We need to keep a focus on those issues because, sadly, there are still too many such cases in the UK. We need to keep taking strong action if we are really to make a change to those young women's lives.

The need to elect more women MPs does not arise from some politically correct desire for equality. It is necessary because Parliament will make better decisions if it has a greater diversity of people within its ranks. Debates will be better informed if a wider group of people with different experiences take part in them. That relates not only to having more women in Parliament, but to having more black and minority ethnic MPs and more disabled people in Parliament. Women tend to approach challenges and conflict in different ways to men. We also bring a fresh perspective to problems, and identify new and alternative priorities. Having more women would bring a more rounded approach to the big issues of the day and would put new issues on the

[Mrs. May]

agenda that have previously been neglected. That has to happen, not just for the sake of fairness and progress, but for the sake of Parliament itself. Having more women in Parliament could help to overcome the alienation that people now feel between themselves and Parliament and between themselves and politicians, which has been exacerbated by the expenses scandal of last year. If we were to have a true cross-sectional representation of society in the House, rather the domination by white, middle-class men that still exists, that would help to increase people's feeling of connection to politics and Parliament.

Ms Katy Clark (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): The right hon. Lady spoke about the difficulties for women in particular of juggling the role of an MP with family life. Has it made her hang her head in shame in the past few days when she has heard some MPs' interventions about the proposal for a nursery in this place? Most women MPs who have had young children recognise how difficult it is to be an MP and to juggle the hours of the work and the constant last-minute requests made on one's time. It might be impossible to get child care that meets those requirements. Will she put on the record her support for having child care in this place and her party's commitment to ensuring that that happens as quickly as possible?

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): Order. With no disrespect to the hon. Lady, I hope that the right hon. Lady will forgive me for pointing out that there is an elasticity in Front-Bench speeches in these debates and that hon. Members who make interventions should realise that they might be taking precious moments from the opportunity for them to contribute later in the debate.

Mrs. May: Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It is important to have child care facilities in the House, but there is also a genuine issue about removing staff facilities without consulting staff. It is a question of balance and how the matter has been approached, but it is, of course, important that child care facilities are available to staff and Members of the House.

A report by the Electoral Commission in 2004 found that women are significantly more likely to turn out and vote for a woman candidate, and that if women are represented by women they are more likely to feel connected to the Government and to politics in general. The opportunities that an increase in the number of women Members of the House would present us with are huge, because that could be part of reconnecting with a disillusioned and apathetic electorate and convincing them that we are here to listen to and represent them.

The narrowing of the debate to one about women's representation—

Ms Harman: That is not a narrow issue.

Mrs. May: The Leader of the House may say that, but we are not able to have a full debate exploring issues such as forced marriage and female genital mutilation. Neither can we debate the Conservatives' flexible parental leave proposals, which would give much greater flexibility

to parents in dealing with bringing up their children than would the Labour party's proposals. Our intention to extend to the parents of children up to the age of 18 the right to request flexible working would be an important move, as would our proposals to tighten up legislation on the gender pay gap, and other proposals that I mentioned, such as having greater provision of careers advice for young women.

I conclude by picking up a comment that the Leader of the House made about the work that the Government have done on removing inequality. The National Equality Panel, which was set up by this Government, reported in January and has shown that inequality is higher now than at any time since the second world war. That is not a record of which any Government could be proud and it certainly is not a record of which this Labour Government should be proud. They have decreased social mobility and have presided over a period of increased inequality. The Conservative party is committed to increasing women's representation in the House so that women can take their full part in the life of the Government, this Parliament and public life generally.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let me explain the dilemma of the Chair to the House. I am going to call the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Lynne Featherstone) next. After her speech, we shall know how much time there is left. It is quite apparent, given the number of hon. Members who wish to contribute to the debate, that 10 minutes is too generous a limit, so I give notice that I am going to reduce it to six minutes so that we can get the widest possible participation in a time-limited debate and so that we can be fair to Back Benchers, for whom such debates are principally intended.

1.58 pm

Lynne Featherstone (Hornsey and Wood Green) (LD): Thank you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I shall endeavour to be as succinct as possible. I am pleased to take part in this debate on international women's day. The reasons for the lack of women in the House are manifold, and I am sure that most of us in this place understand perfectly what they are.

I give credit to the Labour Government for having so many women on their Benches. It is a shame that a forcing mechanism was needed to make that sort of step change, but that is the reality. For liberals, there is a contradiction in terms between forcing mechanisms, localism and liberalism. However, my right hon. Friend the leader of the Liberal Democrats has said that my party expects to increase the number of women in this House after the election. Should that fail to be the case, he has said that he will consider an appropriate mechanism, because there does come a point when one will be needed.

A few years ago, at Christmas time, I was listening to the radio and I heard Bob Geldof say that he could not wait to get home to his wife who was doing womanly things in the kitchen. I do not know whether she was cooking or making curtains, but that was the sort of remark that usually makes me feel a bit ill. However, on thinking about it, I decided that he was merely saying that women make the world a better place, wherever they are. Obviously, that goes for Parliament too.

As we have heard, the importance of women in decision making cannot be underestimated. I was chair of transport at the London Assembly before I came to the House, and I was struck very forcibly by where and how decisions were made. I determined then that, as a woman, I should look hard at getting my hands on the levers and at being present when decisions about budgets and so on were being made.

I wanted to be able to move the agenda forward. Too often, women are pigeonholed as wanting some softer option. I noticed that there was a lot of argument in the London Assembly about who had the longest train or the biggest airport. The debate was all about setting and using budgets, and I was determined to be part of it. I am a great supporter of infrastructure projects such as Crossrail, but a great deal of decision making is about “home to work” and “work to home”. When women are absent from those debates, too little representation is given to the wider issues of “school to home” and “home to school”.

Domestic work patterns are important. It is not that men cannot speak for women, or that women cannot speak from a male perspective: the problem is that the absence of the female voice on issues means that half of the agenda remains almost entirely unexpressed.

Christopher Fraser (South-West Norfolk) (Con): Given what the hon. Lady has just said, is she as disappointed as the rest of us that not one female Liberal Democrat Back Bencher is present for this afternoon's debate?

Lynne Featherstone: I am not going to criticise colleagues for not being here—

Christopher Fraser: We have got some on our Benches, and so have the Government.

Lynne Featherstone: Indeed, and I have my hon. Friend the Member for Edinburgh, West (John Barrett)—

Christopher Fraser: He is not a woman!

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. May I appeal to the hon. Member to desist from sedentary comments, which are not helping?

Lynne Featherstone: That goes to the heart of some of what is wrong in this House, and of why there are so few women in it. One gets ridiculous point-scoring like that, for absolutely no reason.

If the Leader of the House were still in her place, I would have shocked her by saying that I totally agree with her: if there had been women in the boardrooms of all the banks we might not be in the financial crisis that we are in today. The lack of women in the decision-making and the power-broker positions is partly why we are in the state that we are in.

I want to move on to speak about the atmosphere in this House. It is a very hostile environment. We all learn to play the game, because there is no alternative, but women who are thinking of entering the House find it very off-putting. For instance, in my view Prime Minister's Question Time is too often adversarial nonsense that is more about testosterone than rational decision making.

John Barrett (Edinburgh, West) (LD): When I was a member of a council group, 50 per cent. of it was male and 50 per cent. female. However, almost none of the women wanted to stand for Parliament, for the reason that my hon. Friend gave.

Lynne Featherstone: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. How do we begin to change the atmosphere? That is the question. When I rise in the House, I try not to follow the practice of scoring points just for the sake of it. The adversarial, jeering, bullying, public-school atmosphere is very off-putting.

I turn now to the problem of getting a seat, which is not necessarily the easiest thing for all women—or all men, for that matter. I am a single parent, and I faced a Labour majority of 26,000 because I could not go anywhere else. I have no parents and no support network, so I had to fight where I live and where my children were at school. There was no alternative.

How just is the Conservative proposal for a married couples tax allowance? It drives me mad. I was left alone to raise children and get on with my career to the best of my ability, so why should the tax allowance be given to my ex-husband? I might say that I am very friendly with him, as our split was amicable, but he has remarried. Why should he have the tax allowance, when I am doing my best to bring up my children on my own? It seems so unfair.

There is no level playing field in getting a seat. Obviously, Liberal Democrat policies on parental leave are very far-reaching but I want to talk about a problem in the Equality Bill to do with equal pay. Women's financial position holds them back terribly from taking part in the parliamentary process, and I am deeply concerned about the proposal for four years of only voluntary equality in pay.

When one asks a group of students in a classroom who wants to be Prime Minister, the boys will mostly put up their hands and say that they do, but the girls just sit on their hands, even though they know that they could do a better job. There are issues with how women are educated and trained, and how they approach learning to debate and make an argument.

As I said, my party expects there to be more women in Parliament after the election, but we have many women in councils, in the London Assembly, and in Scotland and Wales. The problem is with Parliament, and perhaps the electoral system. That is what leaves us so short on these Benches at the moment—although I am sure that it is just for the moment.

2.6 pm

Miss Anne Begg (Aberdeen, South) (Lab): I am delighted to be able to speak in this debate. I am vice-chair of the Speaker's Conference, and the debate gives me my first opportunity to say thank you to all the people who came to give evidence. I also want to thank the Clerks who arranged the details that allowed the conference to travel around the country, which meant that we were not just taking evidence in the bubble that is Parliament and Westminster.

The remit of the Speaker's Conference went much wider than the representation of women, as we also looked at the under-representation of people from ethnic minorities, and of disabled people and people from the

[Miss Anne Begg]

lesbian, gay and transsexual communities. However, I shall confine my remarks this afternoon to our examination of women's under-representation in Parliament.

We did not think that there should be more women in Parliament just because that seemed like nice idea, or because it might make the Chamber look more colourful. We came to that conclusion because if Parliament is to reflect society outside and do its job of scrutinising the Government—and if the Government are to do their job of making good laws—there is an imperative to get more women into the House. That goes without saying, but I felt that I had to reiterate it today, given some of the comments that have been made about the recommendations of the Speakers Conference report. Some of those comments suggest that some people still do not “get it”—they do not understand why it is important to have more women in Parliament.

I also want to thank the three main political parties—it is a pity that none of the others are represented here this afternoon—for submitting their responses in time for the debate. I am also grateful to the Government for their response to our recommendations in the Speaker's Conference report. I should also like to thank the House authorities, the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority and the Senior Salaries Review Body for their comments on our report. I admit that I thought my work would be finished once the report was published, but that has not proved to be the case.

At the moment, just under 20 per cent. of the House of Commons are women. That is a lot better than the 9 per cent. that we had in 1997, but it still means that this Parliament is only 69th in the inter-parliamentary league table of women's representation.

In the report, we identified that there were a many supply-side barriers to women's entering Parliament. Some have been mentioned today, and the report discusses many of those barriers in a lot of detail; there are restrictions on the time that I have to speak, so I cannot go into them in detail. However, we know that we need to do a lot more in respect of the education of girls and the role that they can play in political activism.

We also need to do a lot more encouraging; women, perhaps, need more encouragement than men to put themselves forward for election, not just to this place but to any of our levels of government. Furthermore, there are barriers in this place, to do with the way in which we do business, the hours and the difficulties for those—both fathers and mothers—with young families, if they are to operate effectively in this place.

There is also a problem on the demand side. Perhaps political parties are not putting enough emphasis on the importance of and need for women. As the hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Lynne Featherstone) said, there is no doubt that the all-women shortlist is the only proven mechanism for improving the representation of women in this place. It has worked effectively.

The mechanism was controversial when the Labour party introduced it ahead of the 1997 election; I think that I was one of the last to be selected under it before two male Labour party members took the party to an industrial tribunal. If my selection had been ruled out of order and I had had to go through the process again, I would by that time have had the courage and confidence

to take on anyone, but I certainly did not have that courage or confidence when I started the process; at that time, I needed encouragement even to think of throwing my hat into the ring. I think many women would fall into that category.

I thank the party leaders for appearing before the Speaker's Conference. That was brave of them; it was a precursor to the debates that we are about to see, although they were not together at the same table. At least, however, they were willing to give evidence. All three party leaders said the right things about women's representation. Despite their warm words, however, they have not perhaps been able to persuade their own parties that all-women shortlists work. In 2005, 300 of the 646 constituencies had only male candidates. That was ridiculous, and the situation may not be any better next time, although one constituency, Brighton Pavilion, will have an all-women shortlist—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order.

2.13 pm

Mrs. Eleanor Laing (Epping Forest) (Con): It is a genuine pleasure to speak after the hon. Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg). From time to time we all complain about the obstacles that we have to overcome in looking after our children, caring for elderly relatives and so on while carrying out our duties as Members of Parliament. The hon. Lady is an icon to us all, given the amazing way in which she overcomes practical obstacles. Sometimes we should remind ourselves not to complain; the hon. Lady has set a wonderful example, not just to women but to everybody who wants to come to the House for genuine and good reasons and who will not let any obstacles stand in their way. I hope she does not mind my saying that.

I thoroughly support what the Leader of the House said earlier. It is a great pity that she is not here for the rest of the debate. We all realise that she has a great many titles and a great many jobs to do, but this debate lasts only an hour and a half. I echo the words of my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) in saying that in previous years we have had long debates on international women's day, which allowed us to explore all sorts of different aspects of women's lives and representation. It is a great pity that we have only an hour and a half today and that the Leader of the House could not be here for the whole debate.

The fact is that women do things differently from men. We should not be afraid to say that. The nature of female representation changes this place, and Parliament should reflect the society that it purports to represent. We have made considerable progress in recent years but we all know that we have a lot further to go. Most of us are working day in, day out to try to enable us to do so.

This debate is in recognition of international women's day, so I want to say a quick word about the international aspects. Last year, I attended a United Nations conference on women in New York. Many countries were represented, most of which had very good percentage representations of women—many of them better than what prevails here. But everybody at the conference agreed that in many countries no real difference will be made until women get to positions of power—until they are Finance Ministers and hold the purse-strings. I am sure that is the situation here in the UK.

I shall now discuss women's representation in the House. I believe that a woman without family responsibilities is in just the same position as a man without family responsibilities as far as being able to be a Member of Parliament is concerned. The difficulties arise when one tries to balance being a mother—or a father, or someone who looks after elderly relatives, for example—with the responsibilities of a Member of Parliament.

I make an appeal to those who are at present deciding the new financial regime for the remuneration of Members of Parliament. Whatever happens, we must make it possible for someone to be a mother and a Member of Parliament and do both those jobs properly and to the best of her ability. I make no apology for making a distinction between mothers and fathers on this point; we all know that fathers have responsibilities as well, but given the very short time that I have left and for the sake of brevity, I shall leave out that bit of my speech and make one thing absolutely clear. A mother can properly be a mother and an MP only if she has her children here with her in London.

People say that it is all right if the children are 25 miles or 10 miles away, but they might as well be 100 miles away. I challenge anyone who has not tried to do it to prove the opposite. The only way that the system can work is if a mother can be in this place for most of the day but be able to pop out for half an hour here and there. She could go to her child's school for an hour or go home at bedtime, before the 7 o'clock vote or just afterwards. She should be able to juggle her time, and that is possible only if her children are here. Those who say that Members of Parliament should live in one-bedroom flats and that it is not for the House authorities or the taxpayer to take any responsibility whatever for women Members' family responsibilities are simply wrong. They would make things impossible for us. That would not be fair on the children of Members of Parliament, and this place should not be based on an unfair system.

I shall run out of time. The day nursery is a good idea but it does not go nearly far enough; it only papers over the cracks. We need to see the reality of what it is to balance families with representational duties. At present, it looks as though that is not being done. I beg those who make these decisions on our behalf to take real and brave steps to make sure that women can balance their responsibilities to the House and to their families.

2.19 pm

Mrs. Claire Curtis-Thomas (Crosby) (Lab): I, too, regret the fact that we have such a short time today for this very important discussion.

I wonder whether my colleagues have been to Prague. I went there last year, and it really is a beautiful city. I visited the Jewish sector and was immediately struck by the written legacy of the survivors of the Prague scouring of Jews, which took place during the war. Women had written about their experiences, and about just how awful their lives had been. Then I thought about all the women on the continent of Africa who have been involved in terrible wars and the most appalling atrocities over the past 20 years, and how little exists of their experience. What is left for their families and societies to learn? If individuals read about what has happened to

women on that continent, they read accounts by people living in America or members of the diaspora living in the UK, but very few from the women in Africa themselves. The reason is obvious: those women are illiterate.

I regularly visit Sierra Leone, the poorest country in the world, where only 25 per cent. of women can read. During the rebel war that gripped that country in the 1990s, there was barely a woman who escaped some form of rape or torture, yet little remains as a record of those experiences. There is very little for their children to learn about, and there is very little for us to embrace, reflect on and base our policies on in order to ensure that it does not happen again. So many women's lives have been left unaccounted for, and because there is no account they appear to be valueless.

I am retiring at the next general election, but I appeal to everyone whom I leave behind in the House to remember the importance of illiteracy and its profound effect on women when they think about the funding of countries and provide Department for International Development funding or intervention. Illiteracy in Sierra Leone means that women there experience the highest incidence of maternal mortality, and one quarter of their children die under the age of five, because the country's limited medical resources cannot stretch to providing any written guidance, and even if it were available nobody would be able to read and understand it anyway. Women who have been given notices on how to prepare dysentery medication leave them to one side and their children die of dysentery.

Women cannot represent themselves in any sphere. They cannot go to the police with complaints or create their own bank accounts, because they simply cannot read. That paucity of written material means that many women never enter Parliament or become a part of their local democracy, so it is difficult for them to call on resources in order to escape that position. DFID funds Sierra Leone, but it funds the army and police. Although that is important for ensuring the security of individuals, it will not liberate women or their potential, and we have a duty to those women, who cannot speak for themselves.

There are wonderful organisations in this country which are trying to do something about that problem. I chair an organisation called the Construction and Development Partnership, and I know of others, such as Build on Books, which are dramatically trying to change the face of literacy in poor countries. The private sector is not interested. No great opportunity exists to make a lot of money in such countries; they are poor, so there is no great return on any investment, and it is left to charities in our country and throughout the world to pick up the cudgels and move forward.

Those charities in this country are essentially managed by women, directed by women and for women. So, when decisions are made about intervention in those countries, I hope that colleagues will reflect on the support that women in this country provide to women in other parts of the world, and remember the illiterate women of the world, who depend on our voices and days such as this. They depend on us to promote their cause of concern—advocate women who are more literate than they and ensure that there is funding to make them so, so that they can advocate on their own behalf and write their own histories. That is really important.

2.24 pm

Mr. Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): It is a pleasure to follow the thoughtful contribution by the hon. Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas). I believe she has more academic qualifications than any other Member of the House, and certainly more letters after her name. Her informed contributions to debates such as this will be missed.

On this occasion of international women's day, I want to raise the difficult subject of Islamic full-face veils—specifically, the niqab and the burqa. I am sure we can all agree with the Leader of the House's remarks—we all want to empower women in being equal. In my view and that of my constituents, the niqab and the burqa are oppressive dress codes that are regressive as regards the advancement of women in our society. I want to make it clear that I am talking about the niqab and the burqa, not the hijab, the khimar or the chador.

I have been concerned for some time about the niqab and the burqa, but it was not until I took my children to the play area in my local park recently and saw a woman wearing a full burqa that it came home to me how inappropriate and, frankly, offensive it is for people to wear that apparel in the 21st century and especially in Britain. In my view and that of my constituents, the burqa is not an acceptable form of dress and banning it should be seriously considered.

As I was sitting on the bench in the playground watching my children play on the slides, I thought to myself, "Here I am, in the middle of Kettering in the middle of England—a country that has been involved for centuries with spreading freedom and democracy throughout the world—and here's a woman who, through her dress, is effectively saying that she does not want to have any normal human dialogue or interaction with anyone else. By covering her entire face, she is effectively saying that our society is so objectionable, even in the friendly, happy environment of a children's playground, that we are not even allowed to cast a glance on her." I find that offensive and I think it is time that the country did something about it.

We will never have a country in which we can all rub along together and in which people of different backgrounds, different ethnicities and different religions all get along nicely if one section of our society refuses even to be looked on by anyone else. As I thought more about it, it struck me that the issue is not the clothes that someone wears but the fact that the face is covered. Lots of people wear what others might feel is inappropriate clothing. That is, of course, everyone's choice. The issue with the niqab and the burqa, however, is not that they are just another piece of clothing but that they involve covering the face either in its entirety or with just the eyes showing.

The simple truth is that when a woman wears the burqa, she is unable to engage in normal, everyday visual interaction with everyone else. That is indeed the point of it. It is deliberately designed to prevent others from gazing on that person's face. The problem with that is that it goes against the British way of life. Part of the joy of living in our country is that we pass people every day in the street, exchange a friendly greeting, wave, smile and say hello. Whether we recognise someone as a person we know or whether we are talking to

someone for the first time, we can all see who the other person is and we interact both verbally and through those little visual facial signals that are all part of interacting with each other as human beings.

If we all went round wearing burqas, our country would be a sad place indeed. Indeed, if we were all to be wearing burqas in this Chamber, Mr. Deputy Speaker, how would you know who to call? I also feel very sorry for women who wear the burqa, as it cannot be very nice to go around all day with only a limited view of the outside world. Of course, many of these women are forced to wear the burqa by their husband or their family. The resulting lack of interaction with everyone else means that many are unable to speak or learn English and so will never have any chance of becoming integrated into the British way of life.

The other issue with the burqa is security. Of course, that problem arises with some other forms of face covering and I do not see why those wearing the burqa should be treated any differently. Bikers wear crash helmets for their own safety, but they are required to take them off in banks and shops. If one were to travel on the tube wearing a balaclava, a police officer would ask one to take it off.

Many of my constituents have contacted me to say that when they visit Muslim countries they respect the dress codes in those countries and wear appropriate headgear. The phrase that has been given to me time and again is, "When in Rome, do as the Romans do." This is Britain; we are not a Muslim country. Covering one's face in public is strange, and to many people it is intimidating and offensive. I seriously think that a ban on wearing the niqab or the burka in public should be considered.

2.30 pm

Mrs. Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): I am pleased to follow the thoughtful contribution by the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Hollobone). I suggest that he look at one of the most socially progressive countries in the Muslim world—Morocco, where, thanks to the personal intervention of King Mohammed VI and his insistence on increasing the status of women in that Muslim country, women's political representation, in just one year, went from two members of its Parliament in 2001 to 35 in 2002. He also ensured that in 2006 the first class of women imams graduated. There are Muslim countries that are moving forward, and it is important that we acknowledge that.

It is also important that we acknowledge how little progress, in some respects, we have made in this country. My mother is 96; she was four before women got the vote. So in my mother's lifetime, women have been empowered. In 1945, there were 24 women Members of this Parliament, yet by the 1980s there were only 23. We have not progressed and moved on as we should. I have been particularly concerned by the fact that when I talk to young women they have a negative view of politics and are disengaged from politics. I cannot, for the life of me, understand how a woman can be disengaged from politics, but then I would not be here if I did not feel like that; I appreciate that fact.

In 2001, only 39 per cent. of 18 to 24-year-olds voted; in 2005, the year I was elected, that figure had gone down to 37 per cent. We are told that young people

engage in different ways, and we need to show them that there are different ways in which they can engage in politics. I turned to an organisation that many do not see as the radical organisation that it is—the Girl Guides movement. That organisation, in which I was involved as a young woman, can empower women and show them a different way of being and acting in the world. In 2008, it did some research entitled “Political Outsiders: we care but will we vote?”; I suggest that hon. Members take a look at it. We are talking about active citizens—girls who are committed volunteers and who care deeply but are largely sceptical about politics and getting involved in it. They felt that there was little information; they did not think that the issues we address were important to them; and they did not feel that younger people had prominence in this House.

Ninety-six per cent. of the girls who were questioned were engaged in some sort of volunteering, but only 45 per cent. had any involvement with politics. They gave the following reasons for non-engagement: that it was not worth the effort, that there were more important things to do, and that it would not make any difference. Well, I can promise those young girls that sitting at home and not voting is the way to not make a difference, but how do we get that message out to them? They do desire to see change, and in fact the issues that the respondents were concerned about are ones about which every woman in the House has shown concern, such as making a difference to the lives of girls, women and young people and stopping domestic violence. Is there a woman in the House who is not engaged in that?

More than half the respondents were also concerned about young people in gangs and people who carry knives. Standing up to bullying was an issue of concern for 39 per cent., and career opportunities for women were mentioned. Interestingly, so was people not being forced into having sex before they are ready. I particularly liked the fact that 27 per cent. felt there was a need for a ban on the airbrushing of models—I have written in my notes “and political poster boys”, but perhaps that is just my view, not theirs.

We need fresh policies to engage young people, and I honestly believe that it is the responsibility of every Member of the House, particularly the women, to get into our schools, engage with our young women and ensure that they understand that women offer role models and exemplars for how to achieve the change that they want for their lives with their children.

One thing the respondents mentioned was the need to offer work experience placements to 14 to 20-year-olds to give young people access to our world. That is a critical issue that we need to address. The criticism about unpaid interns is stretching employment budgets, which is a difficulty that we need to talk about. It is important that the House address the needs of young people.

2.36 pm

Mr. Mohammad Sarwar (Glasgow, Central) (Lab): I wholeheartedly welcome this debate taking place in the House. It is a sign of the progress that we as a nation have made and a testament to the unwavering commitment of my right hon. and learned Friend the Leader of the House to achieving equality, particularly for women.

I am sure the whole House will agree that women have made, and are making, tremendous contributions in all fields, both in this country and abroad. For example, in the United Kingdom we have had a woman Prime Minister and a woman Speaker of this House, Ladies Thatcher and Boothroyd respectively, in honour of whom we have named two Committee Rooms. Although I did not take part myself, in the debate back in 2008 Opposition Members complained that no one on the Labour Benches had mentioned Lady Thatcher. I therefore wish to make a point of recognising her contribution as the first woman to become Prime Minister of the UK, despite our political and ideological differences.

In my native country of Pakistan, we have had the late Shaheed Mohtarma Benazir Bhutto, who rose to become the first Muslim woman Prime Minister of her country. She was a great leader whose tragic death was a great loss to the people of Pakistan and the international community, and a personal loss to me as she was a very close friend of mine. Elsewhere abroad, in Kuwait we have seen for the very first time four women elected as Members of Parliament. I am vice-chair of the all-party group on Kuwait, and my office regularly takes on interns from Kuwait, the last two of whom have been talented young Kuwaiti women.

I have always campaigned vigorously for, and sought to encourage, women from minority groups, particularly Muslim women, to come forward and run in both local and national elections, so that there is better representation in the House. I am pleased and proud that the Labour party has selected four Muslim women in winnable seats, and I am sure that after the general election we will have Muslim woman Members of Parliament in this House.

At home, there is the completely unacceptable issue of the trafficking of women for domestic servitude and/or sexual exploitation. In today's global age, we rightly take great pride in our ability to work with other countries in tackling common problems. I therefore believe that we must do all we can to bring that shocking criminal activity to an end by working with other countries and establishing greater cross-border co-operation. I pay tribute to the work of the all-party group on the trafficking of women and children, and its chair, the hon. Member for Totnes (Mr. Steen) who, like me, will be leaving this House at the next general election.

I must also mention her excellency, Her Royal Highness Princess Lalla Jamala Aloui, who was recently appointed as the ambassador of the Kingdom of Morocco in London. Her excellency has been doing a wonderful job, not only as head of the Moroccan mission in London, but as an ideal role model to all Arab women. I will be working closely with her to bring the famous Fès festival of sacred music to London.

The hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Hollobone) raised the issue of the burqa and the hijab. I must tell him that some Muslim women in this country wear the hijab and some do not—I have taken the opportunity to visit many Muslim countries—but very few wear the burqa or the niqab. However, I believe that today's debate is about empowering women, and what a woman wants to do in life is her choice. Action should be taken against those who force women to wear the niqab, but it is not a big issue in this country, and there is no need for the matter to be debated here.

[Mr. Mohammad Sarwar]

Finally, one issue that is very close to my heart—my hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) raised it—is forced marriages. That must be addressed. In 1996, three young Muslim women, who were at school, were taken for holidays to my native country, Pakistan, and forced into marriages and detained against their will. When that was brought to my attention by the school and social workers—those were very powerful people—I flew to Pakistan and intervened with the police authorities and the judiciary. I was glad and proud to bring the women back. That sent a very clear and strong message that that type of behaviour is unacceptable in our country. We should all work together to ensure that such cases do not happen here.

2.42 pm

Ms Katy Clark (North Ayrshire and Arran) (Lab): It is a privilege to have the opportunity to contribute to what has been a short but healthy debate on women's representation. I strongly welcome the fact that it is taking place in the week of international women's day.

We have spoken about some of the physical barriers to women getting into Parliament, including the problem of child care and the other caring responsibilities that women in our society disproportionately have. We have also spoken about how to enable women who are interested in coming here to do so. As someone who is involved in the Labour party, I know that women in the party have been wanting to get to this place for a very long time, but it has been more difficult for them to do so. Only as a result of that experience did the party decide to go to women-only shortlists. Although they are controversial, they have been the most effective way of getting more women on to the Labour Benches, which is why they are now being considered by other political parties.

The other question is this: why do we bring up girls in our society in such a way that they do not feel that coming to Parliament is an option for them? Every political party—the Primrose league in the Conservative party has been referred to—has many women who are actively involved, and women also play prominent and active roles in other political organisations, be it third-world campaigning organisations or voluntary or charitable organisations. Many of them, however, never consider coming here to be one of the options available to them, so we have to ask some serious questions about why women do not put themselves forward for these positions and why they need so much encouragement to do so.

The points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) about education are central to the debate. The education of women has been their liberation and will continue to be so, so I pay tribute to organisations such as the British Youth Parliament and the Scottish Youth Parliament, which are going into schools and actively trying to get young people involved in political issues, the issues affecting them and the big issues of the day. I believe that, through getting involved in such organisations and actually starting to believe it is possible to do things such as become a councillor—or stand for the Scottish, Welsh or European Parliaments, or this Parliament—more women will get into this place.

Our young people, especially our young women, are our hope and future. The fact that we have more women in this place, and prominent women in all the political parties, is vital to presenting role models for women. For many of us, when we were young, we saw very few women politicians, and it seemed a daunting prospect to come to this place. All of us—of all political parties—have a role to play in deciding how we move forward and make people feel that it is a real option for them.

This place is important not only because of the legislation it passes. Many of us are frustrated about the lack of legislative progress and would like far more ambitious legislation passed, especially in the equality arena. We want the equal pay legislation that has been in place in this country for more than 30 years actually to become a reality, because women here do not have the same kind of economic independence as men.

In my view, women's economic independence will be a foundation stone in our efforts to give women the confidence to take on all aspects of life, and I consider the benefits system to have been an incredibly important factor over the past century in giving women more options. It meant that they did not need to stay with a man for financial reasons. At the end of the day, if they felt unable to continue with such a situation, the state would provide some assistance—even if it was not as generous or adequate as it could be. In many ways, it has enabled women to have some kind of independence.

There are practical issues to consider. The nursery issue is a concern for the moment, and if we get some form of child care in this place, it will be a step forward. We also need to look at the expenses system. At the moment, there is some help for Members with dependent children, but it has been proposed that that be taken away and that there should be no transport assistance for them. We need to consider those issues, but we also need to look at why we are bringing up young women who do not aspire to be here. We all have a role in ensuring that we try to connect with those people and make them believe that if they get involved in politics, they can change things and deliver on the issues that are important to them.

2.48 pm

The Solicitor-General (Vera Baird): I want to take a minute or two to thank everyone who has participated in the debate, male and female. It is good to welcome our brothers, whether or not we agree with them—I do not agree with the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr. Hollobone). None the less, it is good to see them participate fully in a debate that centres on women's issues. Once they are raised, everyone sees them as human issues and carries them forward.

There have been contributions thoughtful, spirited and provocative. The hon. Member for Hornsey and Wood Green (Lynne Featherstone) was sensitive, in a way that was second to none, to the attitudinal barriers in this place to women's arrival here in greater numbers. I agree with her that it is very easy to pick up some of those attitudinal ways—I am guilty of doing that myself.

My hon. Friend the Member for Crosby (Mrs. Curtis-Thomas) has built an international reputation, most particularly in Sierra Leone, to which she referred, and we will miss her greatly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Keighley (Mrs. Cryer) is much praised by all, and rightly so. She has taken steps to celebrate and champion the rights of women that could have made her extremely unpopular, but she did not hesitate to take them.

The hon. Member for Epping Forest (Mrs. Laing) and I have a tradition of growling at each other across the Chamber and slapping each other on the back outside it, so let me slap her on the back inside the Chamber for a change. She was brave and right to say what she did, which is that the allowances system for MPs must ensure that MP parents spend time with their children, and it will be women who will lead that drive forward.

The right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs. May) and I simply growl at each other all the time, but that is the way it goes, I am afraid. I want to—*[Interruption.]* That was not a growl; it was a mistake. Let me tell her that the National Equality Panel has made it clear, if one reads what it said closely, that all our equality measures have moved things in the right direction, even though there is still a long way to go, and that what we picked up was a huge legacy of inequality brought about by an earlier era, which was of course a Tory era. That is clear.

The right hon. Lady asserted her support for the Equality Bill, and I am glad to hear it. However, what she said is extraordinary, because she led the debate in trying to vote it down on Second Reading. Funky as her pink boots are, to be true to herself, she probably ought to be wearing flip-flops today.

I want to pay tribute to the Government Equalities Office and to the dynamic and strong leadership of my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham (Ms Harman) and the chief executive, Jonathan Rees. I also want to make special mention of the Equality Bill team, Wally Ford and Melanie Field, and the other members of their excellent team. The GEO was only set up in 2007, and it is a tiny department. However, people think it must be huge because of the great work it does across government, and because of its impact in government and across the country for disabled people and people of whatever gender. The GEO drives through a great swathe of equality initiatives from a tiny base. It is a very good department indeed, one we should be devoutly grateful for.

Labour women MPs have been here long enough to have made a significant impact, and they have done just that. We have fought, and will fight, for an equal chance for women at work; for employers to acknowledge caring and family responsibilities; and—this is particularly close to my heart—for domestic violence, violence against women and rape to be taken very seriously indeed: in fact, to be taken deadly seriously. I pay particular tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Aberdeen, South (Miss Begg) for the role she has played in the Speaker's Conference in emphasising that, as we have all said, this House needs to represent the women of this country as well as the men. All of us on the Government side of the House have worked, with intermittent support from the Opposition, for all those aims, and we will work further for women to have an equal say in every area of life.

The poll to which my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for Camberwell and Peckham referred indicates that we are succeeding in changing public opinion in the direction of equality. That is an outcome devoutly to be wished for, and for which we will continue to persevere. Labour people live by the ethic of equality, and we will go onward—and in government, too—to ever greater achievements towards equality, working hard for a future fair for all.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That this House has considered the matter of international women's day—women's representation.

Business without Debate

CONSOLIDATED FUND (APPROPRIATION) BILL

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 56), That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

Question put forthwith, That the Bill be now read the Third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill accordingly read the Third time and passed.

Northern Ireland Assembly Members Bill [Lords]

Second Reading

2.54 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Paul Goggins): I beg to move, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

After the long negotiations at Hillsborough Castle and the drama of Tuesday's vote in the Assembly, we now come to what I expect—or perhaps I should say “I hope”—will be a rather more low-key debate on the setting of salaries and allowances for Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly. I want to begin by congratulating Northern Ireland's politicians on taking the decision on Tuesday to transfer policing and justice powers on 12 April. I also want to thank again all those who have an interest in Northern Ireland affairs, wherever they sit in the House, for their support for the devolution process. I particularly want to thank colleagues who speak for the Opposition parties on these matters; whenever we can, we try to work towards a consensus. Putting power into the hands of local people is the answer and the way forward. As we debate the orders that were laid yesterday to facilitate the completion of devolution, I am confident that we will continue to see cross-party consensus here at Westminster.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) (LD): From my Back-Bench position, may I reciprocate by offering my praise to the Government for what is probably their most successful Department? Twelve or 13 years ago, many people did not think that it was possible to secure a lasting peace, but I am sure the Minister would agree that the transfer of policing powers pretty much guarantees that we will never go back to the dark days of the troubles.

Paul Goggins: We have just over three hours for this debate, and in that time, it would not be possible for me to give a full list of all Labour's achievements in government. However, I am happy to accept the comments of the hon. Gentleman, who played a considerable part when he spoke from his Front Bench on Northern Ireland matters.

The Bill before the House today will enable the Northern Ireland Assembly to delegate control of its salaries and allowances to an independent body. At present, the Assembly is explicitly prevented from delegating such functions under section 47(7) of the Northern Ireland Act 1998. The Bill will remove that restriction and enable the Assembly to confer the functions of setting salaries and allowances for Assembly Members on an independent body. In keeping with the spirit of devolution, the Bill does not place a duty on the Assembly to change its system of determining salaries and allowances; rather, it leaves it up to the Assembly to decide what type of system to adopt. Presenting the Assembly with the power of delegation is not as straightforward as merely removing section 47(7) of the 1998 Act. The Bill therefore expressly provides that the Assembly may delegate control of its salaries and allowances, and also makes a number of important technical consequential amendments.

The Bill, however, is short. It consists of only three clauses and no schedules. Clause 1 amends section 47 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to enable the Assembly to delegate the power of determination in relation to the setting of salaries and allowances. The clause introduces two new subsections to the 1998 Act. Proposed new subsection (2A) will make it possible either for the Assembly to determine salaries or allowances payable to Members or for those salaries and allowances to be determined by a person other than the Assembly. Proposed new subsection (2B) makes it clear that different salaries may be set for different jobs, such as those of Ministers or Whips.

Clause 2 makes consequential amendments to section 48 of the 1998 Act. That clause deals with pensions, allowances and gratuities for persons who cease to be Members of the Assembly or who cease to hold certain offices but continue as Assembly Members. Clause 3 deals solely with the short title and commencement, with sections 1 and 2 of the Bill coming into force by commencement order. It will, of course, be a matter for the Assembly to take this matter forward following the passage of the Bill, and I understand that a Bill will be brought to the Assembly that will establish an independent body to set salaries and allowances. I am also told that the intention is to have the Assembly legislation in place prior to the next Assembly election, which is scheduled for 2011.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) (Con): Is it understood and accepted that when someone is in the position of having a dual mandate, a reasonable case exists for that person to receive both salaries on the grounds that they are doing the work? I know that there are constraints on public expenditure and some issues of principle as well, but it seems difficult to understand why a person doing work in two Assemblies should not be paid for both jobs.

Paul Goggins: I do not know whether the hon. Gentleman had an advance copy of my speech, but I was at that very moment about to come to the question of dual mandates. When the Bill was first published, it dealt simply with whether the Assembly should set allowances and salaries or whether they should be delegated to an independent body. Certain amendments, however, including a Government amendment, were considered in the House of Lords, suggesting that the salary of the Assembly Members should reduce to zero, if they received a salary as a Member of Parliament or indeed as a Member of the European Parliament.

If I understood the hon. Member for Stone correctly, he argues that if someone is carrying out a dual mandate, they should receive a salary for carrying out both functions. The Government's view—I think that this was also the consensus view in the House of Lords—is that they should not receive the salary for the second job, but should continue to receive the allowances for both functions, because their constituents should not suffer from any loss of service. The consensus view in the other place—and I hope and expect in this place, too—is that when someone claims a salary as a Member of Parliament, they should receive no salary for being a Member of the Legislative Assembly.

Mr. Cash: The issue does not arise in my case and is never likely to. As it happens, I still do not understand the logic behind the position, although I do understand

the dilemma. When the person receives an allowance, the Minister says that it is for the constituents, but the reality is that the work is still being done, so a salary is still relevant. The issue remains a real problem.

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): That is the Cash question!

Paul Goggins: I do not think it is given what the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) said. Although it is true that two different institutions are involved when the Member of Parliament is also a Member of the Assembly and that secretarial and other support should be provided to serve constituents in both areas, there are only so many hours in the day and there are only so many constituents—thus the Member should be paid one salary.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) (Lab): There are two jobs, but what about Ministers?

Paul Goggins: I feel a helpful intervention coming on from my hon. Friend.

Andrew Mackinlay: It will certainly not be helpful.

This business about there being only 24 hours in a day is absolutely right. It seems acceptable in the UK to have two casts of MPs and Members of the Legislative Assembly, while Ministers are on a very significant and disproportionate salary in comparison with that of the legislators. That is unhealthy and, human nature being what it is, it militates against principled resignations. At the time of the Wilson Government and before it, there were far more principled resignations. The disparity between the salaries of Ministers on the one hand and of MPs and MLAs on the other is unhealthy and it runs against principled resignations. I want to put that on the record.

Paul Goggins: I am glad that my hon. Friend has had the opportunity to put that on the record. While the hon. Member for Stone and I have had an exchange about whether one or two salaries should be paid, the key point is that everyone recognises that we are dealing with an interim period here. The Kelly report made clear the expectation that dual mandates would end by 2011 or by 2015 at the very latest, so in any event we are seeing the beginning of the end of dual mandates. The days of someone being both an MP and an MLA, as described by the hon. Member for Stone, are almost over.

Sir Patrick Cormack *rose*—

Andrew Mackinlay *rose*—

Paul Goggins: I give way first to my hon. Friend, who I suspect wants to follow up his earlier point, and then I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Andrew Mackinlay: I preface my remarks by saying genuinely that I mean no disrespect to any hon. Members from Northern Ireland or those who represent Scottish constituencies. The question of allowances, however, seems perverse. In the House of Commons, the same office cost allowance applies irrespective of whether a Member represents Scotland, England or Northern Ireland.

Yet health, housing, transport and education are dealt with by the MLAs. How can it be right for a Member representing England to receive exactly the same office cost allowances as his colleague from Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland, while an MP who is also an MLA is given additional resources to do the same kind of work? Either English Members of Parliament are not being given enough resources, or those who represent Scottish, Welsh and Irish constituencies are being given too much.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Michael Lord): Order. The debate is in danger of widening beyond its remit.

Andrew Mackinlay: He started it—the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash).

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. Let us not worry too much about who started it. I am more concerned with who ends it, and that is me.

Paul Goggins: Thank you for that clarification, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

My hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) has not only widened the debate, but taken me beyond my responsibilities. However, it may interest him and other Members to learn that the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission has said that from the beginning of the next Session of the Assembly, the office costs allowance of an Assembly Member who is also a Member of Parliament should be halved, which reflects the amount of additional work carried out.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I do not particularly want to pursue the “Cash question”, but I wish to put down a marker for the Minister’s consideration. I understand the logic employed by those who argue that the dual mandate is wrong, but ultimately it is not for us to prohibit but for the electorate to decide. If the electorate decide that they are best represented in this place by someone who also represents it in a regional Parliament, is it not a little odd for us to prohibit that?

Paul Goggins: As the hon. Gentleman says, it is ultimately for the electorate to decide who represents them in this place, in the Assembly, or anywhere else; and it is for political parties to determine whether it is appropriate for people to stand as candidates for different legislatures. I think that there is now a consensus on that.

We can understand why dual mandates arose in a part of the United Kingdom that was riven with conflict, and where people encountered difficulties in standing for political office. We respect those who did stand for election to councils, to the Assembly and, indeed, to this place, but we are moving on from those times, and with that maturity comes the opportunity to focus attention on the one legislature to which people are elected.

Mr. Cash *rose*—

Sir Patrick Cormack: Is it the Cash question again?

Mr. Cash: No, it is to do with the constitutional arrangements in the context of devolution. As was pointed out by my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack), for as long as there is one United Kingdom and one sovereign Parliament with jurisdiction over the other UK countries, the issue

[Mr. Cash]

of the dual mandate—even in the context of increased devolution—will continue to be an issue of constitutional importance and significance.

Paul Goggins: I am sure that the hon. Gentleman is pleased to have had an opportunity to put his views on the record.

It will, of course, be for the Assembly to implement all these measures following the passage of the Bill. I understand that a Bill establishing an independent body to set salaries and allowances will be presented to the Assembly, and I am told that it is intended to be in place before the next Assembly election, in 2011.

The Northern Ireland Assembly is the only devolved legislature that is unable to delegate control in relation to the setting of salaries and allowances. The Welsh Assembly has an independent review panel to consider pay and allowances, and although the salaries of Members of the Scottish Parliament are linked to Westminster salaries, the Scottish Parliament also has power to delegate control of allowances. The Bill will create independent control of salaries and allowances for all the devolved legislatures. From the correspondence and discussions that I have had with the Speaker of the Assembly and with politicians of all parties, I know that there is a firm intention to take this matter forward once the Bill passes through the House.

It is important that we make these changes. It is a change to primary legislation—to the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to facilitate the choice being available to Members of the Assembly. To conclude, the Government believe that it is right to move towards independent control of salaries and allowances in the Assembly.

3.10 pm

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): I join the Minister by saying how pleased Opposition Members were to see the Northern Ireland Assembly agree to the devolution of policing and justice measures, which we see as the final piece in the jigsaw of devolution. It will enable the parties in Northern Ireland now to concentrate on the everyday issues that affect people in the Province; education being one of the most important. We look forward to the orders coming before the house on 22 March and we will support them.

I also agree with the Minister that it is useful when we can work together on these issues. He and I have had a number of meetings on the Bill. It is a short Bill—only three clauses—but we have had at least that many meetings on it and probably more. But I think that that has been useful; I say that to inform the House, if I needed to, that there is bipartisan support for what is going on in Northern Ireland. The issue are too important to be discussed in a party political way; they are bigger than that and we try as far as we can to work together with the Government. We do not always agree but when we disagree, we do so in a civilised way, which is the way forward.

We welcome the Bill, which addresses two of the main issues of concern. The fact that politicians—not just in Northern Ireland—do at present set their own salaries and allowances is looked upon by the public with some incredulity. I am pleased that that is changing

for the Westminster Parliament and it is right that we introduce the Bill to give the Northern Ireland Assembly the ability to change that arrangement as well. There were good reasons for the Bill being introduced originally as it dealt with double jobbing, which I will come to in a moment. Things have moved on—the Minister is right—and it is only right that we look at the Bill again.

I entirely agree that an independent body should set the salaries and allowances of Assembly Members. That is a start towards trying to restore at least some trust and faith in the political process. That is the way we have gone here in Westminster—I believe rightly—and the principle is right. As the Minister said, the Assembly cannot delegate such responsibilities at the moment, but the Bill brings Northern Ireland into line with Wales and Scotland.

We felt—it was certainly the case in the other place—that the proposal was slightly weak in that it did not require the Assembly to move in the direction outlined but merely gave it the competence to do so. The noble Lord Glentoran tabled an amendment to require the Assembly to delegate the decision making to a separate body. The Government, and the Liberal Democrats for that matter, did not support the amendment, so we are where we are. But I am heartened that the Minister believes that a Bill will be brought before the Assembly to make that move before 2011 when the next Assembly elections will be held. That is a good thing; I will not make too much of that in the debate as we understand that progress will be made in that respect.

The second part of the Bill deals with the removal of the salary of Assembly Members if they also sit in one of the Houses of Parliament or the European Parliament. Again, we support that move and believe it is a step in the right direction. The Minister briefly referred to Sir Christopher Kelly's report on MPs' salaries and expenses. Its recommendation 40 states:

“The practice of permitting a Westminster MP simultaneously to sit in a devolved legislature should be brought to an end, ideally by the time of the elections to the three devolved legislatures scheduled for May 2011.”

That is a very clear statement, and we entirely agree with it for a number of reasons, which I shall come to later.

In an article in the *Belfast Telegraph* in May 2009 my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition pointed out that being an MP is not a part-time job, and I think all Members of this House would agree. I fully understand the points made by my hon. Friends the Members for Stone (Mr. Cash) and for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack), but it should be pointed out that if people are physically sitting in the Northern Ireland Assembly, they cannot also be physically sitting here in this Chamber, and they cannot at the same time be attending Committees both here and in the Assembly. I think that the public—our constituents—have the right to see that at least we are available for parliamentary business on a regular basis, and that is simply not possible if people are required to serve in two places.

Sir Patrick Cormack: However, does my hon. Friend not agree with me—and, indeed, the Minister—that if there is to be a prohibition, it is okay for organised political parties to choose to adhere to it, but there should not be a provision in law? At the end of the day, it is up to the electorate to decide.

Mr. Robertson: I entirely understand my hon. Friend's point, and I have thought about this issue at length. May I return to his question in a moment, however? First, let me say that when the Northern Ireland Assembly was originally set up, it was right for us not to outlaw dual mandates, because that would have meant that Assembly Members and Ministers could have been very inexperienced. Through having the dual mandate, people who have become Ministers are, by and large, quite experienced politicians, and not necessarily just in Northern Ireland, but here in Westminster as well. I therefore think there were good reasons for not outlawing dual mandates at the start, but we have moved on now.

Let me now directly answer my hon. Friend's question as best I can. This issue is not only about whether people are able to spend sufficient time both in the Assembly and here—and I have personally witnessed occasions when it has been impossible for hon. Members from Northern Ireland to serve on Committees here, which is not a good situation, as I do not think that allows them to do both jobs properly. There is a further point to make, about people's ability to serve two masters. Westminster MPs should be able to take a dispassionate judgment on the workings and performance of the Northern Ireland Assembly, but I do not think they are entirely able to do so if they also sit on that Assembly. Therefore, I do not think this is merely an issue of time; I think it is also about whether one person can serve two masters.

Sir Patrick Cormack: This is a very important issue in the Northern Ireland context, because, after all, five Members who have been elected to this House have never taken their seats. When they appealed to the electorate to elect them, their constituents knew they would not take their seats, but, nevertheless, they were returned. If we go down the road my hon. Friend suggests, the logical consequence is surely not to allow people who are not prepared to take their seats to stand for election.

Mr. Robertson: My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) takes me on to a slightly different issue. I understand that when Sinn Fein candidates stand before the electorate at a general election, they say to the electorate that they will not take their seats if they are elected.

Christopher Fraser (South-West Norfolk) (Con): They do take their expenses, however.

Mr. Robertson: Yes, they do take their expenses.

I am very unhappy about the situation that my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire raises. I agree that Sinn Fein Members tell their electorate that they will not take their seats, and the people who vote for Sinn Fein might accept that. However, people who vote for the Social Democratic and Labour party—or the Democratic Unionist party or the Ulster Unionist party—have a right to be represented in this House, so I do not think that is acceptable for those who are elected not to take their seats. I would much rather that Sinn Fein Members take their seats in this House. I do not know whether I have fully satisfied my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire, but I have given the reasons why our party's Front Bench

spokesmen oppose the practice of holding a dual mandate. The Bill was too narrow in scope to include an amendment that would have corrected that situation and we should have liked to amend it to outlaw the practice. But we are where we are, and in the Lords the Government tabled a compromise amendment that we were happy to agree to.

A Conservative Government would revisit the issue, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition has said. We recognise that most Members of Parliament from Northern Ireland are engaged in two jobs, but many of them agree that things have moved on and they have to change. If elected to Government, before introducing legislation, we would try to come to a voluntary agreement—a negotiated settlement whereby the practice does not continue; but my right hon. Friend has said that if necessary, we would consider introducing legislation to bring it to an end. We feel that is what the public require. They also want a separate body to set allowances and salaries in Northern Ireland, rather than the Members who receive them. For those reasons, I am happy to support the Bill.

3.21 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): As a Member of this House who has also been elected to the Northern Ireland Assembly and sits there, I begin by declaring the appropriate interest.

The Bill is welcome because it will help to discharge the agreed wish of all the parties in the Assembly—to make sure that we move beyond the strict provisions of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which obliges the Assembly to be responsible for setting its pay and pension arrangements, to appoint an independent body. Because the Assembly is bound by the 1998 Act, legislation is needed in this Parliament to enable the Assembly to do that. As the Minister indicated, that is the clear wish and intent. The Speaker of the Assembly and relevant officials have committed themselves to providing a Bill. We know that Bills are often promised and we commit ourselves to all sorts of reforms and schemes of legislation in Northern Ireland that are often delayed. I hope that that Bill will not be one of them, because it is important.

I recall the 1998 Act and the issues that determined the drawing up of the rules. Northern Ireland Office Ministers at the time felt that that was the way to do it. They did not want to open up other issues. They thought that setting up other bodies might be more complicated and could give rise to other questions. That was then. We are all in a different place now and are looking at the issues in the light of different considerations and different public attitudes.

This Bill has been given welcome amendments to make further moves on the question of the dual mandate. I stated my personal position in the Assembly as far back as February 2009, in a debate on dual mandates: if I was re-elected to this House it would be on the basis that I would stand down from the Assembly. I did not believe that the dual mandate was sustainable, particularly if we achieved the devolution of justice and policy and had a more complete and settled Assembly, freer from some of the duplication of business that goes through this place and also plays out in the Assembly. Such things gave rise to parties needing people to perform a dual mandate, with particular obligations on those in

[Mark Durkan]

leadership positions to be in both the Assembly and the House at Westminster. The more the business in both Chambers becomes distinct, and the more complete and settled the process, the more the case for such transition juggling disappears. I set out clearly in personal terms that that was the case.

My party made those points in submissions to the Assembly and Executive Review Committee as far back as late 2007. We said that all parties needed to agree and commit to either a fixed date or a point in the electoral cycle when dual mandates should end. Unless we get a fixed position on that from all the parties, one party will use what another party is doing as its excuse for having to continue the dual mandate, particularly when leadership figures in one party have dual mandate and make that claim on the basis that there is some justification for it, by way of advantage or influence. Other parties would also feel compelled or justified in doing the same, so it needs to be set.

There have been motions and debates in the Assembly on this issue—not just the one in February that I have mentioned but another last November when the Ulster Unionist party tabled a motion that highlighted the Kelly committee recommendation that 2011 would be a desirable end-date for the dual mandate. My party supported that motion and opposed the Democratic Unionist party's amendment that 2015 should be the backstop, so we were saying that the dual mandate should be terminated sooner rather than later. Unfortunately, the DUP, Sinn Féin and the Alliance party combined to go for the later date—the Alliance completely confounding the position that had been taken up on its behalf, based on its previous position, by the Liberal Democrats, including by Members of another place and this House who had raised that issue in early-day motions. So, the Alliance party confounded its position—all, as we know, in pursuit of other gains, offices and privileges. [Interruption.] It changed its position on that. We, at least, have been consistent on that issue and others, and we have not embarrassed our friends or ourselves in anything that we have done in that regard. I say that to the hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) who is making remarks from a sedentary position.

The amendment tabled in another place to end the practice by which someone who has a dual mandate receives a third of the salary of an MLA if they are also an MP is welcome and we agree with it. Indeed, that is one of the things that we suggested as far as back as the submissions that we made to the AERC in November 2007. However, the steps to reduce the dual pay, or the fraction of dual pay, should not, of itself, be seen to deal with or discharge the question mark over dual mandates per se. For reasons that other hon. Members have touched on, I believe that the issue still needs to be clearly and cleanly resolved in its own terms.

The amendment perhaps does not go far enough, because although the Bill allows people to be Members of the Assembly and not be paid as MLAs, it still allows them to be Ministers or other office holders in the Assembly and to be paid as such. I believe that a Minister in an Assembly should be full time, accountable and available to that Assembly and should not also be in another place. That is my position and that is why I

did not take up an appointment as a Minister in the current Executive when I could have done so when devolution came in 2007. Having been a Minister before, when I was not an MP, I knew the pressures, issues and difficulties of the work, so I made that choice. I still think that that is an issue to consider and I would welcome a further amendment to the Bill on that. If there were such an amendment, I would accept an exception, if Members wanted one, for the posts of First Minister and Deputy First Minister, which should of course be elected by the Assembly, although they currently are not in what is a departure from the Good Friday Agreement, under the St. Andrews agreement. If we were to revert to having the Assembly elect the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, then I would say, in the same spirit as the comments of the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack), that the Assembly should have the choice to elect whomsoever it chooses as a Member. Otherwise, there should be that restriction on the role of Ministers as a matter of principle.

People have been able to justify the dual mandate until now because of all the circumstances, transition and change. Some of us, including the hon. Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson), have been able to use our different roles in a complementary way—in changing credit union regulation, for example. We both used our positions on a Committee in the Assembly to address the issue there, and we are also using our positions here to take forward the other side of that issue. There are other examples about which we can say that we have been able to use the roles in a sensible and complementary way, but I do not believe that those good examples can be stretched any longer into a general rule of justification for dual mandates.

I believe that the business that will confront this House in the next term will be big enough and that it will touch on the lives of many people in Northern Ireland. It will interface quite heavily with devolution. I do not agree with my hon. Friend the Member for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) that there is such a neat and total separation between all the public business that is conducted in this House and the strict confines of devolution, given the budgets and laws that are set here. In many ways, they have consequential implications and direct impacts on the discretion and choices available to the Assembly and the Executive. However, I believe that we need to move into a situation where the people of Northern Ireland know clearly that their MLAs are full time, committed and active in the Assembly and its channels. The same must be true of MPs here.

The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) referred to this House's status as a sovereign Parliament. However, I must point out that legislation has been passed in this Parliament—not in this term, but during the peace process—to amend the previous restrictions that meant that a Member of this House could not also be a member of the Oireachtas, either as a TD or as a member of Seanad Éireann. The restrictions also meant that a person could not be a member of the Assembly in Northern Ireland and a member of the Oireachtas. They have been lifted, but the Bill does not deal with the question of what happens when a person is a member of the Assembly and of the Oireachtas. People are now legally entitled to belong to both, so what happens now? If we are going to look at things in their totality, that should be borne in mind as well.

3.32 pm

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): May I join others in expressing my pleasure at taking part in a debate on what is, for once, a fairly non-contentious piece of legislation? We have come through yet another period in Northern Ireland politics when the debate has been occasionally fraught and sometimes even febrile, so dealing with a Bill that is essentially the subject of consensus—among the parties, if not necessarily always within them, apparently—is indeed a pleasant change.

When he introduced the Bill, the Minister said that it was short and that he could be short in speaking about it too. I think that perhaps I can be even shorter. Along with others, I think that the Bill was framed and conceived to be permissive rather than directive, and that giving the power to delegate allowances from the Northern Ireland Assembly to a free-standing body is a sensible way to proceed.

That approach understands the nature of devolution. It would be entirely wrong for this House to start telling the Assembly what it ought to be doing. In any event, and for all intents and purposes, it is pretty clear that that is the intention of those who currently sit in the Chamber in Belfast, so it appears to me that we will all end up at the same destination, whichever route we take.

The only element worthy of some debate today is the question of dual mandates. I have long taken the view that the continuation of dual mandates is unsustainable; perhaps I am informed particularly by the fact that I represent a Scottish constituency. If the situation is unsustainable for a Member of the Legislative Assembly in Belfast, it must surely be unsustainable for a Member of the Scottish Parliament. Only one person holds such a dual mandate and I hope that after the general election there will be no others. As the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) eloquently explained, it is simply not sustainable for people to seek to represent constituents in two separate Chambers at once.

There is a different issue in respect of somebody who is a Minister in Belfast and also represents constituents here—that much is understood. However, there is a distinction to be drawn. Being a Minister gives extra responsibilities to a person while they are in London, but being a Member in Belfast and London, or Edinburgh and London, requires people to be in three places at once, rather than just two—we have to add in the constituency at the same time.

As others have said, the situation arose for good and understandable reasons. It is a mark of the progress that we have made that we should now regard the Northern Ireland Assembly as sufficiently mature for the question of dual mandates to be able to be consigned to the history books rather than being a feature of contemporary politics. I agree with the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) that we should eventually look to an abolition *de plano* rather than merely the removal of the salary. However, the provisions represent a helpful and necessary first step; at the very least, there should not be a material advantage to those who seek to use the system to acquire a second or third job by being a Member here as well as in one of the devolved institutions.

There is very little with which we would take issue in the Bill. Perhaps some further teasing out of these

issues will be allowed in Committee, but this is a sensible measure that commands a broad consensus. We are pleased to be part of that consensus.

3.37 pm

David Simpson (Upper Bann) (DUP): I should like to start by making reference to the Minister's welcome for the decision taken by the Assembly at the vote on policing and justice. I have to put it on the record that there is a lot of disappointment in Northern Ireland today at the stance of the Ulster Unionist party, now a sister party of the Conservative party. It did not support policing and justice. That seems very hypocritical and it is very sad that the party should have taken that decision. But we are where we are.

On the face of it, the Bill is short and fairly technical. It amends section 47 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 to allow the Northern Ireland Assembly, if it so wishes, to delegate responsibility for the salaries and allowances of its Members. I think, and my party believes, that that is a wise move that will be widely welcomed. Politicians should not be responsible for setting the level of their salaries or allowances.

The Bill makes another important amendment to section 47. Clause 1(5) will amend section 47 to ensure that a Member of the Legislative Assembly who is also a Member of either House of this Parliament or of the European Parliament will not receive a salary from the Assembly. That is already my party's position; it has made that very clear. Even before that proposal, the Democratic Unionist party had, of its own volition, stated that any Member of this House who would be a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly after this election would not take any salary whatever from the Assembly. I therefore warmly welcome the proposed change, which will put into legislation what we had already said we would do voluntarily. Other parties had not set out their position as clearly. If a Member of this House is also a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, he or she should not be paid for the latter. For my part, since being elected to this House I have donated my Assembly salary to many causes and youth organisations in my constituency. That is on the record in the Assembly and in the press, and I am glad to say that this year alone my elected friends and my donations have contributed well over £20,000 to Upper Bann.

The reputation of this Parliament, of the United Kingdom's Assemblies and of politics in general has been seriously damaged by the recent controversy and the heated debate throughout the nation about politicians' expenses and so on.

Christopher Fraser: Does the hon. Gentleman agree with Sir Christopher Kelly, who told the Assembly's Standards and Privileges Committee that any new body appointed to regulate salaries and allowances should also have the power to investigate any alleged wrongdoing without a formal complaint being made? That will add to the transparency and accountability to which the hon. Gentleman refers.

David Simpson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. Of course, I agree 100 per cent., and our party is on the record as having said that.

Every political party has had cause to be embarrassed by the events of last year. Sometimes that embarrassment has been the result of guilt, and on other occasions it

[David Simpson]

has been the result of wrongdoing, but none the less politicians need to understand that the world has changed. Expectations have changed. Politics and politicians need to change, too, and some time ago my party set out a series of proposals that were aimed at reform. Our suggestions incorporated salaries, allowances, accommodation, the employment of staff, MPs' outside employment and the operation and oversight of the Fees Office. We were attacked by our political opponents even as we did so, yet many of those who attacked us were content to take little or no action themselves. We made a full submission to the Kelly inquiry, and we are totally committed to supporting the implementation of its recommendations in full.

The DUP remains fully committed to ending dual mandates, and we have taken the lead on that matter. Unfortunately, other parties in Northern Ireland have not committed themselves. Ours is a growing and thriving party, and many in the ranks of the DUP have the potential to play a significant part in politics in Northern Ireland. We want to nurture and develop that rich and diverse pool of talent, and that is what we are doing.

It is clear that we have already embraced the spirit of the Bill. We are already moving towards implementing one of its core provisions—and going beyond it. The same cannot be said for other political parties in Northern Ireland. While they snipe at the Democratic Unionist party, they are, it seems, quite prepared to maintain a double-jobbing mentality. The Ulster Unionist party contains in its ranks several representatives who have more than one job. Some are farmers, some are antique dealers and their party leader is a councillor and an MLA. Indeed, in the past we had double-jobbers, such as my predecessor, Lord Trimble, who was an MP, an MLA and the First Minister. Not a single person ever raised a single criticism of him on that matter from these Benches—not one. There are, however, many people back at home in my constituency of Upper Bann who are very critical of the fact that despite holding so many offices and having access to many allowances, he decided that a single part-time constituency office on double yellow lines at the busiest set of traffic lights in the town of Lurgan in my constituency was sufficient constituency provision. As can be seen from that, there are serious issues about in how many Chambers politicians represent their constituents. However, there are also very important issues about the level of provision and the kind of representation politicians give to their constituents.

In conclusion, as I said at the start of my speech, the Bill is a step in the right direction. More steps will be needed, whether we make them through legislation in this House or through some other mechanism for another day, but I and my party are on record as welcoming this step forward and I am more than happy to support the Bill.

3.46 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): Everybody who has spoken up to now supports the Bill, and so do I. May I begin, as others have, by congratulating those who voted as they did in Stormont, including the party of the hon. Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) and that of the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan), on Tuesday night? I deeply regret the fact

that the Ulster Unionist party did not feel able, at the very least, to abstain. I warmly commend my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition for the efforts that they made to persuade the Ulster Unionist party to support the provision. No criticism can be levelled at them, but I believe that the UUP took a regrettable decision and I want to put that on the record.

I also want to say to my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury, who approaches his tasks with a wonderfully genial approach, that I do not disagree with him on the subject of dual mandates any more than I disagree with any other colleague. It is just a question of how one comes to the solution; that is all. I believe that the dual mandate has played a real part over the past few years in getting us to where we are today. I think that we would all say that the presence of Northern Ireland politicians in this Chamber who have been struggling to create and then to recreate an Assembly in Belfast has enriched our deliberations and continues to do so.

I do not think that the dual mandate is the ideal solution in perpetuity. I personally think that it is entirely commendable that the parties are seeking to outlaw within the party rules the dual mandate and so I have no disagreement with my hon. Friend on that, nor with my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition. It is just a question of how we arrive at the solution, because at the end of the day the electorate must be in a position to elect people whom they wish to send here in the knowledge of all the shortcomings.

I cited the example of Sinn Féin and I deeply regret the fact that its Members do not take their seats here. I deeply regret that there is no Sinn Féin Member on my Select Committee. I have pleaded with them to alter that state of affairs. I have not succeeded and I do not think that there will be any chance of success in the foreseeable future, but am I the one to say that they should not be eligible to stand? They have made their position plain to the electorate. There will be many people in each of their electorates who deeply regret that and vote for other parties, but unless we have proportional representation, which I do not personally favour, I am afraid that those who support the DUP, the UUP and the SDLP and who live in Sinn Féin constituencies will be, to a degree, disfranchised. We have to face up to these facts of politics in Northern Ireland.

I hope that we can move to a situation where all the individual parties have a common line on the dual mandate. I do not have terribly strong views on whether that happens this year, next year or the year after that, but we need to move towards it.

What is much more important is that we need to ensure that the fragile institutions of the Assembly and the Executive are sustained: that is crucial now that they are about to take on the extra responsibility of policing and justice powers. They need good and firm friends in this House, and in the new Parliament, to ensure that they succeed. I entered the House when all the Ulster Unionists, who were virtually the entire representation of Northern Ireland, sat on the Conservative Benches and took the Conservative Whip. We have moved a very long way from there. We have had some extremely difficult and troubled times that I do not wish to go

back to—none of us does. We have to ensure that what has now been established is reinforced, built on and supported.

The most heartening feature over the past troubled decades in Northern Ireland has been the bipartisan nature of politics. As I have said before in Select Committee sittings and elsewhere, the Minister of State is an exemplary Minister who is highly regarded throughout the Province, and rightly so.

Andrew Mackinlay: So is his deputy.

Sir Patrick Cormack: I am speaking of the Minister of State. That is not to cast any aspersions on the Secretary of State; I am talking about the Minister of State because he is the Minister who is here today to reply to this debate.

The Minister has been exemplary in the way that he has fulfilled his duties. He would be the first to admit, however, that his job has been made easier by the constructive support that he has received from my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State and, indeed, from the successive spokesmen for the Liberal Democrats. *[Interruption.]* Of course he has had support within Northern Ireland, but I am talking about this House, where he has had the support of the major UK parties. That must have made his task pleasanter and easier, and long may it continue. Whoever has responsibility for Northern Ireland in this House in the new Parliament—if it is a Secretary of State, they will be a Secretary of State shorn of many of the powers that the present one had when he first came to office—needs that cross-party, bipartisan support to ensure that we build on the achievements of recent years.

This is a modest Bill, but I think a good one. It is, rightly, permissive in giving Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly the right to decide how they will have their affairs regulated. There is one appeal that I would make to them. We have had a troubled year in the history of this Parliament; it has been the saddest year of my political career.

Andrew Mackinlay *indicated assent.*

Sir Patrick Cormack: I can see the hon. Gentleman nodding vigorously, and I know that you share those views, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

It has not been a good year. I do not want to make any criticisms of anyone in particular, but to a degree this House has been panicked into making certain decisions and setting up certain bodies. I am glad that our pay and allowances will be regulated and decided upon by an outside body, but the way in which we rushed to this means that I am not entirely convinced that those who are in charge of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority completely understand what it means to be a Member of Parliament. I would say this to our friends in Northern Ireland: you have time to avoid that problem, so if you are going to have an independent body, be it an offshoot of IPSA or a wholly different body based in and drawn entirely from the Province itself, for goodness' sake make sure that you take your time and that you are not bounced into a series of rules and regulations that could infringe upon the sovereignty of your Assembly just as I fear that some of the rules and regulations that are being drawn up will infringe upon the sovereignty of this Parliament. I will not be part of it, any more than the hon. Member

for Thurrock (Andrew Mackinlay) or my hon. Friend the Member for South-West Norfolk (Christopher Fraser) will be. Nor, indeed, will you, Mr. Deputy Speaker. I know that I can speak for all of us in saying that we will miss this place enormously, because we all love it, but it is passing into uncharted waters. It is terribly important that those who regulate our financial affairs do not do so in a way that deters those who are determined on public service and militates against the family man or woman of modest means. We are in danger of making those mistakes here, and I hope that those who represent their constituency in the Assembly in Northern Ireland will learn from our mistakes and take their time in deciding upon and setting up any independent institutions.

With those words of caution, which I hope are entirely relevant and which are meant to be entirely helpful and constructive, I commend the Minister and the Bill. I wish all those who will have to wrestle with these problems in Stormont every possible success in so doing.

3.56 pm

Paul Goggins: This has been a good, thoughtful and short debate—

Mr. Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman needs the leave of the House.

Paul Goggins: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I should like to respond briefly to what has been a thoughtful, if short debate.

I am grateful again for the support of the hon. Member for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) for devolution in general and for this particular Bill. He is right that we have discussions outside the Chamber, and I would encourage any Minister and Opposition Front Bencher to do that whenever possible. As my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said yesterday, on a number of occasions when there is common ground between us, we should seek out that ground and occupy it together. I was pleased that his noble Friend Lord Glentoran was able to join us for some of our discussions, because he had fair, legitimate questions to ask about the Bill and other matters. The hon. Gentleman is right that there was initially a sense that the Assembly should perhaps be forced to take the action set out in the Bill, but the reassurances that we received from the Assembly's Speaker and the Northern Ireland Assembly Commission helped persuade his noble Friend and others that the Assembly was serious about the matter and could be allowed to get on with exercising its legitimate choice.

The hon. Gentleman, and every other Member who spoke, referred to the dual mandate. There were a range of opinions on that, and through discussions the Government brought forward a change that I believe satisfied everybody, at least to some extent, by reducing to zero the salary of a Member of the Assembly in the given circumstances. We are all clear that we are in a period of transition in relation to dual mandates, and we have had a good airing of the discussion about that this afternoon. Importantly, we remembered that the core purpose behind the Bill was not to end dual mandates but to facilitate a choice for the Assembly.

My hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) referred to the fact that often Bills are promised and then delays occur, but I cannot envisage Members of the Assembly seeking re-election or fresh election without

[Paul Goggins]

the matter having been resolved beforehand. I am confident that it will have been dealt with before the next Assembly elections. He also made the important point that whichever legislature an individual is elected to, they should focus strongly and entirely on the matters before that particular legislature. As he said, it is perfectly legitimate for a Member of Parliament elected by constituents in Northern Ireland to come to this House and focus entirely on the matters that come before it. He himself takes a great interest in a range of issues, and there are matters from fiscal policy to foreign policy in which MPs from Northern Ireland should participate fully.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) rightly made the point that the Bill does not tell the Assembly what it has to do but gives it a choice. I endorse his comments on dual mandates, about which he feels very strongly, and I am pleased that he had the chance to express his views. I entirely agree with him: the fact that dual mandates are beginning to come to an end in Northern Ireland is a sign of political maturity and we should all welcome it.

The hon. Member for Upper Bann (David Simpson) clearly set out his party's view on the Bill and on dual mandates generally. He made a number of party political points, on which, as I am sure he will understand, I do not particularly want to comment. However, I recall one important phrase that he used on the need to nurture the pool of political talent. That is something that every political party in the United Kingdom needs to do, but it is particularly important in Northern Ireland. We want a new generation of politicians to come along and build on the tremendous achievements of this generation of Northern Ireland politicians. He is entirely right to say that that should focus the minds of all political parties.

David Simpson: In case I did not put it on record at the beginning, I want to make it very clear that I am also a Member of the Legislative Assembly of Northern Ireland.

Paul Goggins: Forgive me—because of another message that was coming my way, I did not quite catch the hon. Gentleman's intervention.

David Simpson: I made the point that I am also an MLA.

Paul Goggins: Ah! The hon. Gentleman was declaring the same interest as my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle.

We will all miss the contributions of the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) to debates in this House on a range of issues, but particularly on Northern Ireland. He has always taken a great and serious interest in Northern Ireland. It has been great to see him exercise that interest in his chairmanship of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee over a long period. His contributions are at times robust and at times supportive, but they are always appropriate for the topic in hand. We will miss him, but I am sure that others will come to take up those interests, and it is important that they do so. He made his views on dual mandates very clear, and the House heard them. Again, the Committee's interest in a range of democratic

accountability issues, including the importance of devolution of the institutions and ensuring that they are as strong as can be, has been important. We will all reflect on the points he made.

In the hon. Gentleman's conclusion, he made the extremely important point that although we have seen tremendous achievements over recent months and even in recent weeks, we should not just assume that everything is now completed. He referred to the Assembly as a fragile institution. It is still early days, and the culture of governance needs to develop further in Northern Ireland. As welcome and as important as those developments are, Northern Ireland politicians, whether they represent Northern Ireland constituencies in this House or in the Assembly, will still need friends in this place to take an interest, and to show support and solidarity with them. I believe he said that Northern Ireland will need good and firm friends, as indeed it will. However, we can look back over this week and recent months, and indeed the 12 years since the Good Friday agreement, with some satisfaction at what has been achieved.

I endorse what the hon. Gentleman said about all-party support. Although the process has happened under this Government, it has happened with all-party support for what we have done. He asked rhetorically whether the current situation could have been achieved as it has been without all-party support, and he is right that it could not. Our achievements have required the all-party consensus that we have sought to achieve here. That is not to say that the hon. Member for Tewkesbury does not ask difficult questions in Committee or in debates on the Floor of the House—that is the purpose of scrutiny in this House—but we have retained a consensus when possible, which has been essential to the progress that we have seen in Northern Ireland. I commend the Bill to the House.

Question put and agreed to.

Bill accordingly read a Second time.

NORTHERN IRELAND ASSEMBLY MEMBERS BILL [LORDS] (PROGRAMME)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Northern Ireland Assembly Members Bill [Lords]:

Committal

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

Proceedings in Committee, on consideration and Third Reading

2. Proceedings in Committee, any proceedings on consideration and proceedings on Third Reading shall be completed at one day's sitting.

3. Proceedings in Committee and any proceedings on consideration shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour before the moment of interruption on the day on which those proceedings are commenced.

4. Proceedings on Third Reading shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion at the moment of interruption on that day.

5. Standing Order No. 83B (Programming committees) shall not apply to proceedings in Committee and on consideration and Third Reading.

Other proceedings

6. Any other proceedings on the Bill (including any proceedings on consideration of any message from the Lords) may be programmed.—(*Lyn Brown.*)

Question agreed to.

Sustainable Communities

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

4.4 pm

Adam Afriyie (Windsor) (Con): I rise to speak about the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 and the impact it might well be having on Windsor fire services and their evolution. The Berkshire fire authority has been using a piece of software to calculate where it ought to have fire stations around Berkshire. This magical piece of software, so much cheaper than the democratic process, has decided that it ought to close Windsor fire service and perhaps locate services to Wokingham, under the model that has been designed. More coverage seems to be needed in suburban developments in Wokingham and elsewhere in the county.

Far be it from us in the House of Commons to challenge the wisdom of magical software—even though I spent 20 years in the industry! Indeed, the day may come—although I hope not—when all of us in the House will be replaced by automated devices. And I am not just referring to the House of Commons—it might even happen in the European Commission.

There are obvious flaws, however, in the software's reckoning. Newly developed areas need more fire cover, that is for sure, but they also contain low-density housing. The main risk is from domestic fires and road incidents, and because such houses will be new, many of the more modern fire and safety regulations will be enforced in those properties, and potential victims will be limited to individual households or vehicles.

Windsor is much more vulnerable, in many ways. It is vulnerable to air traffic incidents. We are under the Heathrow flight path, and with the burgeoning number of flights from that airport—under the Government, it has risen to 480,000 a year—there is a danger of an air incident. The boundaries of my constituency are only yards from Heathrow's northern runway and the flight path crosses directly over the town. It is not the noise disturbance that is relevant but the danger of an incident occurring nearby—there have been many such incidents over the past couple of decades, which may have had an impact.

Windsor is also vulnerable to terrorist attack. The royal family are often resident, there are two army barracks in the town and the units within those barracks regularly rotate to Afghanistan, so there could be some tensions there making our area a particular target. We also have 12,000 domestic properties at risk of flooding from the Thames. The lower Thames works have taken place as far as the constituency, but do not protect areas in the lower part of the constituency and further on down to the Thames itself via Teddington. So there are risks of flooding that have not necessarily been mitigated by the previous works on the river.

Not only is Windsor more vulnerable to such incidents, but single incidents could be far more catastrophic because there are lots of people living close together. Windsor is full of multiple occupancy buildings. We have many hotels, boarding schools, guest houses and dwellings converted to multiple flats. Windsor has 8 million visitors, 750,000 of whom stay overnight in the town. Furthermore, the local economy sustains 7,000 registered businesses—twice as many as Reading, which has a footprint that is five times larger.

There are also irreplaceable elements of our national heritage. Windsor contains nine historic parks and gardens, 17 scheduled ancient monuments and no fewer than 941 listed buildings. One of those buildings is Windsor castle—but no one thought to programme the terrible fire in 1992 into this new piece of software. The Windsor castle fire may as well never have happened for all the impact it is having on the policy in Berkshire.

As I said before, it might be right to increase cover in other parts of the constituency and county, but it is not sensible to reduce Windsor fire cover further. A major incident is more likely there, and is more likely to be highly lethal—to say nothing of the disruption to the national heritage.

The software decided that Windsor could be covered from Slough's fire station, but there are three problems with that. First, Slough fire station is the busiest station in east Berkshire. Indeed, I would argue that Slough was already overburdened with incidents. The second problem is that even if the fire station in Slough is available, its response times will be three to 10 times longer than Windsor fire station's. The difference between three minutes to attend a fire and 10 or 12 minutes can be a matter of life and death. Thirdly, the calculations for attendance times from Slough apply to good conditions on the roads. The route from Slough fire station to Windsor passes through the junction 6 interchange on the M4. In bad traffic the roundabout and the roads on both sides become badly congested, as anyone who uses the M4 will testify. If a major incident occurred in Windsor during peak traffic—for instance, a collision between junctions 6 and 7 on a Friday evening—critical time, and possibly lives, could be lost.

Those are the reasons why my constituency has rallied behind the outstanding campaign run by Michael Rowley of the Windsor branch of the Fire Brigades Union. He has set up a website, windsorfirestation.co.uk, and I am pleased to say that even our party leader came down to visit Windsor fire station to meet red watch and green watch and show his support for keeping the fire station open 24 hours a day. As a result, the fire authority agreed not to shut our fire station completely, but to shut it for only 12 hours a day, which was a great victory for the campaign. However, the closure of the station overnight remains unacceptable to Windsor residents. The royal borough of Windsor and Maidenhead is a Conservative council—not that that is particularly relevant: the points I am making apply to all councils—but all parties on the council are united on this matter. We are not talking about a party political issue at all; in fact, there is an active local campaign, involving local activists, local residents, the political parties and councillors, to keep the fire station open 24 hours a day.

Negotiations with the fire authority and a judicial review have so far proved fruitless, so the royal borough's outstanding council leader, David Burbage, turned to the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 to see whether that could do the trick. The original intention of the 2007 Act was to provide a mechanism to shift power between levels of local government in an area, provided that there is firm support from the local community. Under the SCA, the royal borough applied to take over fire responsibility for the borough from the county fire authority, and was even prepared to pay whatever extra it might take to keep the Windsor fire station open. It was therefore not a matter of resources; it was a matter

[Adam Afriyie]

of the will of the people in the area. The royal borough expects that it could run a fire service more cheaply because it is a much bigger authority than the fire service and could easily incorporate the personnel, recruitment, and health and safety systems at a lower cost, potentially, than that which the existing fire authority pays.

However, in practice, if the authority assumed responsibility for the Windsor fire service, it would probably seek tender from neighbouring fire services. That could easily mean Berkshire fire service being contracted back to run fire cover in Windsor and Maidenhead, but on terms that kept Windsor fire station fully operational. Two former chief fire officers helped to draft a proposal, and there was extensive consultation. The results were pretty clear: local people and the various bodies consulted supported the idea. When presented with a range of options, two thirds of respondents preferred the service to be managed by the local authority, while only 12 per cent. chose to keep the service with the Berkshire fire and rescue service. However, the fact that local residents want Windsor to keep its fire station open overnight—local activists, local councillors, local voluntary workers and the local faith community all want it, and I have been campaigning for it for the past four or five years—counted for nothing with the Local Government Association.

As an official selector under the SCA, the Local Government Association turned down the application, saying that it was unviable and unsustainable. I would argue that that decision was highly questionable. We are not convinced that the process was conducted in a thorough fashion. It has been suggested that, as the application by the royal borough of Windsor and Maidenhead had already passed, it ought to have been happy with what it had been given.

There are several smaller fire authorities in existence that are perfectly viable, sustainable and highly graded. The LGA's argument—it was not a big argument; it was almost a one-liner—was that the Windsor and Maidenhead fire service was too small to be manageable or viable, but those other small fire authorities have been highly graded. An example is the Isle of Wight. No one would suggest that that fire service is unviable or unsustainable. So the case that ours was too small does not really hold water. Neither does the argument that the rest of Berkshire would be too small without Windsor being part of it.

Section 2 of the SCA specifically enables transfers of responsibilities between public authorities. There is therefore a suspicion that the LGA made a political decision, in order to avoid upsetting vested public sector interests. If that is the case, it is deeply worrying. The use of the SCA is perceived as a threat to those in locally appointed quangos such as combined fire, police and transport authorities, as they could lose their jobs to elected councils. Those bodies are often officer-led, remote and unresponsive to the electorate. The public have negligible influence or scrutiny over them, and they tend to be fairly unpopular. That is why my party is committed to introducing directly elected police chiefs, who would be more responsive to local people. It might be relevant, therefore, that the LGA has no fewer than 31 fire

authorities as members, one of which is Berkshire. Fire authorities form a significant block of stakeholders and fee payers in the LGA.

The LGA's decision also seems to depend on a narrow interpretation of the SCA. The intention of the SCA was purely to enable the level of local services to be determined by local people. The transfer of responsibilities between levels is clearly empowered by section 2. The Windsor case becomes even stronger for those who followed the Bill's passage through Parliament. My hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Hurd), who introduced the Bill, said that he was planning to use it to enable Northwood police station to stay open longer hours. The Minister who saw the Bill through from the Government Benches, the hon. Member for Oldham, East and Saddleworth (Mr. Woolas), talked about an elected council using the threat of an SCA application to bring police authorities round to its point of view. A clause that would have justified the LGA's interpretation, by denying a council the ability to make applications regarding services of a "wider or national significance", was struck down in Committee and did not appear in the Act.

It would seem that it was not our borough's application that was unsustainable but the fire authority's case against it. It cannot be right that local democracy, empowered under the SCA, should be thwarted by a public sector cartel. The LGA has effectively blocked the will of the people without giving a clear explanation. If the decision is allowed to stand, I fear that the SCA might be a busted flush, at least in regard to major extensions of democratic control.

In addition to local residents, activists, politicians and elected officials, an array of local celebrities has also been campaigning for Windsor fire station. This shows the strength of feeling on the issue. I would like to press the Government to confirm that transfers of responsibility from appointed, single-purpose authorities to democratically elected councils are encompassed by the Act, where appropriate. Was it the intention that the Act would enable such transfers of powers in regard to fire and police services, as well as other, similar public services?

I would like to reopen the question of the Local Government Association remaining as the selector under the Sustainable Communities Act 2007. How can an organisation paid to protect the interests of 31 fire authorities credibly stand in judgment over bids to secede from those same authorities? There is a vested interest at stake there, which I do not think would be allowed in any other area of public life. I respectfully urge the Government to restore faith in the SCA by considering what other bodies could fulfil the selector role more credibly than the LGA, the current occupant. How might this change take place? What powers do the Government have under the SCA to appoint a different selector?

If the selector had clearly laid out the reasons for the rejection of the royal borough's bid to take over the fire services and had provided a reasoned argument to explain why it considered the bid unviable or unsustainable, there would have been more understanding of the position adopted. At the moment, it seems to be a peremptory dismissal, without deep or thorough consideration, which does not bode well, especially if other selectors were to operate in the same way.

Local people were prepared to pay a bit more to keep the fire service open overnight in Windsor, yet bizarrely, even on that basis, the LGA still rejected the bid. It shows that the decision was not to do with money or resources; there is something else going on, which makes me worry that the SCA may not be fulfilling its original objectives.

Perhaps some software could be found to do the job of changing the selector—although I do not hold out great hopes on that. If the Minister cannot satisfy Windsor by asking the selector to give a clear and reasoned answer as to why it rejected the bid, or if she is not prepared to look at changing the selector, this issue is not going to go away. Windsor and its fire service will be the first of many subjects of complaint received in the House that, despite the aim of the SCA—and, I would argue, of the Government—to allow authorities to transfer powers between them, that aim has not been brought about in reality.

Let me summarise the two main points. First, what is the path to follow in order to change the selector? Secondly, will the Minister apply pressure to ensure that we get a reasoned argument in the public domain explaining why the LGA rejected the application? That is the only way to avoid casting aspersions on the LGA's motives, as it seems it is inevitably attracted by decisions that appear both perverse and irrational. I shall conclude my remarks there and I very much look forward to hearing the Minister's response.

4.23 pm

Mr. David Drew (Stroud) (Lab/Co-op): I shall be brief, but the Local Government Association asked me to say a few words. I was the best apologist that it could get, given the absence of my co-conspirators the hon. Members for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Hurd) and for Falmouth and Camborne (Julia Goldsworthy), who did so much to get the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 on to the statute book. I cannot and would not want to discuss the Windsor fire station in any detail, just as, presumably, the hon. Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie) would not want to discuss the fire stations in my constituency. However, I want to express some sympathy for the LGA, given the circumstances with which it has been wrestling.

It seems rather bizarre that the LGA should be criticised for what it did not let through. Some of us would argue that it let an awful lot through in the first round of bids, and the Government are currently trying to wrestle with all that the LGA agreed to in its capacity as selector. I want to discuss why we ended up choosing the LGA as the selector, given all its possible faults, and to suggest that we stay with it for the time being. During the passage of the Bill that became the Sustainable Communities Act 2007, we discussed which organisation would be the appropriate selector. We considered creating a new selector, but ultimately we opted for the LGA because it was a representative body of local government and we felt it would best reflect what local government wanted, given that local government had been a driver for the Act.

As my hon. Friend the Minister knows, this week we have been wrestling with the Bill that will enhance the 2007 Act—the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 (Amendment) Bill, which we hope will become law and

which includes parish and town councils. I declare an interest, as I always do: I am still a town councillor. The position was always going to be a bit rough and ready, at least for the first year, because of the number of bids received. The Minister will give more details, but many hundreds of bids must have been received, given that so far the LGA has sent some 190 on to be distilled and assessed.

As the hon. Member for Windsor said, we need to open up other parts of the statutory sector and even parts of the non-statutory sector, and to try to persuade them to think in different ways—which chimes with the Government's approach in Total Place—so that, hopefully, we can save money and do things better. However, that will not be easy.

I know that the LGA has been trying to contact the hon. Gentleman. I ask him not to beat up the messenger. We are trying to convey the message, and there are bound to be some disappointed parties.

Adam Afriyie: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his explanation of the appointment of the LGA. My primary complaint relates to the lack of a reasoned and logical response that could subsequently be considered. The argument made by local people was dismissed in a peremptory fashion, and there are strong suspicions that it had more to do with politicking and the LGA's protection of its own interests as appointees than with the democratic wishes of the people of Windsor.

Mr. Drew: I agree, but the good thing is that it was not party political. For all sorts of reasons, the LGA's dominant influence at present is much more in tune with the thinking of the hon. Gentleman's party than with mine. However, as I have said, I have some sympathy for the LGA. I think that it would claim to have been overwhelmed with interest. All of us who sponsored the Bill thought it wonderful that there was so much interest out there, but mistakes were bound to be made—especially during the first year—and, more particularly, there was bound to be that overwhelming amount of interest, as a result of which the LGA has not been debriefing people. I did ask, and the Bill's three sponsors have had meetings with the LGA, which took us through the process and asked us to be sympathetic. It could not pretend that it would get things right during the first year, because of the number of inquiries that it was receiving.

I should like a process of distillation to govern the way in which the bids reach the LGA and then central Government, who are currently having to wrestle with 190 bids, all of which have merit but not all of which will contribute to the process of change. My first point is that this is work in progress and that legislation can never substitute for people getting on with one another and making things happen. Even Government Ministers cannot do it all by themselves and have to rely on a great deal of effort elsewhere. The second point is that I do not want to put off those who, in subsequent years, might want to make a bid. Perhaps more effort needs to go into how a bid is formulated. One of the criticisms has been of the degree to which the bids built a coalition of support. The hon. Gentleman said that a great deal of work went into building the consensus, something that may not have been true in terms of some of the other cases at which I have looked.

Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North) (Lab): Given the interest that there will be in other local authorities around the country who want to build sustainable communities and will be working in partnership with residents, community organisations and the third sector, will my hon. Friend give the House an idea as to what the bids would look like if they were to be successful?

Mr. Drew: That is a hornet's nest. The bids were of every shape, size and dimension one could imagine. Some were quite narrowly focused—I hope my hon. Friend the Minister will help me out of the mess that I have created for myself—and would not have taken a lot of effort to introduce. Some were huge in their implications and would involve major expenditure changes on a local level, and even a national level, because of the implications. Having looked at the 190 bids, I was very partial to some myself. I might have shrugged my shoulders at some and said that people might like them but they would not be delivered in a month of Sundays. That includes those that were potentially in opposition to Government policy. That would cause some difficulties.

This is a learning process and we have not got it right yet. The LGA needs help, as do central Government, but there are some brilliant ideas out there. That was the whole point about the local works coalition bringing forward the idea. It said that it would allow a thousand flowers to bloom; it has, literally, allowed a thousand flowers to bloom. Many authorities that did not get involved in the first round are watching carefully. I urge them not to despair or to say that the Bill is another piece of useless Westminster pontificating that will make no difference to their lives.

The challenge is good and will make the LGA think again. It will make the Government and the sponsors think again, as they will be reading my remarks; they are not very good but they are defending the system that we put in place. The hon. Member for Windsor has done us a favour; he has referred to one of the bids that did not get through. I suspect a lot more will not get through, and central Government, through the Minister, must offer a defence. It will not be easy. That does not mean that what we are doing is wrong; it just has to be better and we must bring people in. I have tried to be an apologist for what we have done. We cannot pretend that we have got it right but the legislation is worthy and could allow for much better decision making at a local level.

4.33 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Barbara Follett): I congratulate the hon. Member for Windsor (Adam Afriyie) on securing the debate and thank my hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Mr. Drew) for his timely and informative intervention.

I know that the hon. Gentleman has campaigned on this issue tirelessly. I pay tribute to him for representing his constituents so well. Our fire and rescue services have a vital role to play in the protection of our communities and we all owe the men and women in them a huge debt of gratitude. They do essential life-saving work, which we all value. My Department also values their work and has invested £1 billion in equipment and technology to ensure that the service is prepared to face 21st-century challenges such as terrorism, to which he referred.

I understand the hon. Gentleman's pride in Windsor's fire station and the service it provides. It exemplifies the Government's belief that local providers are the ones best placed to make decisions about service provision in their areas. That has not always been so. Before 2003, fire and rescue authorities wishing to close a fire station or redeploy pumping appliances were obliged to seek the approval of the Secretary of State beforehand. My Government abolished this requirement when we introduced integrated risk management planning. That gave the Royal Berkshire fire and rescue service the freedom to consider changing the level of fire cover at Windsor fire station. Such changes are subject to full consultation with those affected, of course, and this has taken place in Windsor over the past few years, as the hon. Gentleman said. Although I completely understand why he is disappointed at the decision to reduce the level of service at Windsor fire station, I hope he will also understand why Ministers could not become directly involved.

As my hon. Friend said, the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 was designed to try to reawaken people's interest in democracy and politics at the local level by transferring some power. Under the Act, the Secretary of State sent out an invitation to local authorities to make proposals—local authorities act as the gatekeeper for proposals, because otherwise the Government would be in danger of being swamped. Local authorities were invited to make proposals that they believed would improve the sustainability—I should emphasise that word—of their local area, including the transfer of assets if they think it would achieve the outcome requested. However, each proposal had to be assessed on its own merits by the selector.

In its proposal, Windsor and Maidenhead asked if financial and operational responsibility for the local fire and rescue services could be transferred from the Royal Berkshire fire and rescue service to the royal borough of Windsor and Maidenhead by changing the Fire and Rescue Services Act 2004 to allow the royal borough to be made a fire authority scheme. The 2004 Act requires that, before any proposals to transfer functions are submitted, the local authority in question must consult the persons whose functions it could affect. Although I am not going to comment on the process the local authority went through before submitting its proposal, I should mention that the Royal Berkshire fire and rescue service did not feel that it had been adequately consulted, and that led it to submit an application for judicial review.

There was another obstacle to the proposal. As the chosen selector body under the 2007 Act, the LGA had a legal duty to submit a shortlist of proposals for the Secretary of State to consider, but it decided not to shortlist the one from Windsor and Maidenhead. It gave the reasons for this refusal. Members of the selector panel felt that the proposal would be very complex to implement and were concerned that the small size of the proposed authority would make it not viable. The panel also noted the impact that the proposal could have on the strategic role and service implications of the fire authority across the remaining county area. In addition, members of the selector panel expressed concern that the amount of resources available to the authority might not be sufficient to allow the authority to undertake the full range of responsibilities of a fire and rescue

service. It specifically mentioned the impact on sustainability that the proposal could have in the surrounding areas, but the LGA did offer support to both the council and fire authority in attempting to reach a more satisfactory conclusion.

The selector's decision not to shortlist the proposal was obviously deeply disappointing to the hon. Gentleman and to the local authority concerned. However, the proposal was assessed by the selector on its merits and, I believe, the decision was even deferred by the panel so that it could consider the proposal in more detail.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned the lack of a reasoned response. Minutes of the selector panel's discussions and the reason for its decisions are set out on the Local Government Association website. Indeed, the LGA sent him a letter today, outlining the process and offering once again to work with both the authority and the fire and rescue service to try to reach a satisfactory conclusion. I disagree with him on this point: the decision was not peremptory. The 2007 Act was working in that case.

As my hon. Friend said, the shortlist was very long. There were 199 proposals, which when disaggregated came to 242 separate asks of Government. It is this Minister who is trying to disentangle those asks, with the help of the LGA, which has put an enormous amount of work and effort into trying to process the proposals as fairly as possible.

I assure the hon. Member for Windsor that we intend to develop the 2007 Act. In fact, the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 (Amendment) Bill, the private Member's Bill promoted by the hon. Member for North-East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), attempts to take forward the 2007 Act. It is hoped that the Bill will complete its passage through the House before Dissolution. The Government support the Bill because it will make the process more efficient and more responsive to the needs

of local people. It will also allow us to capture and use the experience we have gained so far—experience such as that of the hon. Member for Windsor—to improve the procedure for the next round.

This is the first time such a large exercise has been undertaken and I know that lessons can be learned by all concerned, including the selector panel. That is why the amendment Bill is so valuable. It will give the hon. Gentleman and Windsor and Maidenhead council the opportunity to influence the future working of the 2007 Act.

Adam Afriyie: I thank the Minister for her careful and reasoned response. I am pleased that we are able to have the debate. If I understand correctly what she is saying, it would be possible for the royal borough of Windsor and Maidenhead to reapply in the next round, because that round might look different from the previous one. Have I heard her correctly?

Barbara Follett: The hon. Gentleman has heard me correctly—as long as the myriad amendments tabled by the hon. Member for Christchurch (Mr. Chope) do not prevent the amendment Bill from going through the House.

The Government want an amended Sustainable Communities Act to be part of the architecture of local government. We want to give councils the chance to embrace all the opportunities the Act presents. I reassure the hon. Member for Windsor that there will be a second round, and that Windsor and Maidenhead will have a second chance to submit.

Question put and agreed to.

4.44 pm

House adjourned.

Westminster Hall

Thursday 11 March 2010

[MR. ERIC ILLSLEY *in the Chair*]

Assistance to Communities

[*Relevant documents: Thirteenth Report from the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government Session 2008-09, HC 649-1 and Government Response, Cm 7790.*]

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(*Angela E. Smith*)

2.30 pm

The Minister of State, Cabinet Office (Angela E. Smith): I was delighted to secure this Adjournment debate on assisting communities and third sector organisations through the recession, and I am pleased to see that a number of hon. Members are in the Chamber to take part. The sector is hugely valued by the Government, and it includes local community groups, a whole range of third sector organisations and social enterprises. The support that such organisations have given in services and advice, together with support from the Government, has been invaluable, especially as we come through a period of international recession.

As the Minister responsible for the third sector, I am proud that in the past 10 years, there has been unprecedented funding for, and investment in, the sector. Since 1997, income from the Government has increased from £5 billion to £12 billion. The sector has also stepped up to the challenge of working with the Government in shaping, designing and helping to deliver public services. If we are to deliver high-quality services it is crucial that they are designed around the needs of the communities and the people they serve.

The third sector plays an essential role in a number of ways, and I will go through them in no particular order. First, the sector is a provider of a whole range of services, from debt advice to counselling. As a result, the sector has become expert in designing and delivering preventive services in the belief that prevention is better than cure. The work follows on from the principle that the service user and citizen should be the starting point for any solution.

We should also see the third sector as an advocate, because it connects people with their communities, and enhances participation and engagement on issues that affect or interest them. The sector makes an invaluable contribution to the British economy that is not often recognised. There are 62,000 social enterprises in the UK, which make an annual contribution of £24 billion to the UK economy and employ 800,000 people. That is a significant contribution and a good example of the way in which the sector is helping the economy to grow.

A recent survey undertaken by the Social Enterprise Coalition showed that social enterprises are performing strongly during the recession, with 56 per cent. experiencing an increase in turnover, and only 20 per cent. experiencing a decrease. That compares favourably with the position for small and medium-sized enterprises, of which 28 per cent. have experienced an increase in turnover, and 43 per cent. a decrease. For all those reasons, the sector

is today regarded seen as intrinsic to British society. There are 870,000 civil society organisations in the UK, and that partnership, which has evolved over the years, is crucial in tackling the challenges that we face as we work through a period of economic downturn.

There is no doubt that the recession has had an impact on the third sector. It is difficult to quantify that impact, because the situation is complex. Because of the diversity of the sector, different organisations are affected in different ways. Some organisations have seen a rise in demand for services, particularly employment services or, as I mentioned, debt advice. Some charity shops on the high street report increased trade, as people trade down from higher-value items. Other organisations have reported far greater difficulties in obtaining donations, with increased competition for those donations, while some bodies report a decrease in demand, with cultural or leisure activities doing less well.

Additionally, the third sector faces financial pressures caused by rising costs as well as a potential fall in donations. I say “potential”, because there is evidence that donations do not necessarily fall during a recession, although they slow down as people become more selective about the causes to which they donate. A Charity Commission survey in August last year showed that most charities were reporting no change in most income streams. In the recession of 1991 to 1993, two thirds of voluntary and charitable organisations reported an increase or no change in income, with only one third reporting a decrease.

A recent survey by the National Council for Voluntary Organisations reported that charity leaders are now more positive about the UK economy than they were when surveyed two years ago, and that 27 per cent. expected their organisation’s financial situation to improve over the coming year. Only 8 per cent. planned to cut the number of paid staff in the next three months, while 7 per cent. planned to reduce the services that they offer.

There is much positive news, but we know that it remains tough in the third sector. There are regional variations in how hard the recession has hit communities, and the current level of additional investment is unlikely to be maintained. That has put pressure on staff in some organisations, who are working longer hours to try to ensure that they provide the best service possible. Concerns about funding obviously affect confidence in job security. The services, advice and help provided by the sector could not be achieved without the dedicated support of staff and volunteers, including trustees.

We should not see the recession as being only about challenges and difficult times with no light at the end of the tunnel. Over the years, third sector organisations have adapted to many policy changes and developments, and they have weathered previous recessions. Some organisations have emerged even stronger, and it seems that when faced with adversity, they can step up, innovate and continue to campaign for social change. When we in the Government have to make difficult decisions, the sector is crucial in lobbying, campaigning and making its voice heard. That can be difficult for the Government, but civil society is not something with which we are concerned only during the good times. We must be even more alert, and enable the sector to do what it does best during the tough times.

[Angela E. Smith]

The challenges for the sector in weathering the storm include ensuring that organisations demonstrate the social benefit of their services, and how that provides value for money. The social return on investment model, developed with the support of the Office of the Third Sector will be helpful in that respect. Demonstrating success is not easy, and using a model that shows the social impact and effectiveness of the work of the third sector in the community, and quantifying that impact, will be crucial. Recessions make us all think differently and force difficult and tough decisions. If we are to get something positive for the sector out of this situation, we will do so by examining organisational models and proving the sector's social and environmental impact.

It is time to get the partnerships right. Pressures on the funding environment for the third sector are creating a need for new ways of working. That could mean joining up with other third sector organisations to bid for contracts as part of a consortium, merging with like-minded organisation, or reinvigorating a partnership with a statutory funder or with the Government. For example, the refreshed Compact launched in December last year offers a platform from which successful partnerships can be built. Although it is early days, Total Place offers a unique opportunity for the sector to engage in local dialogue about effective local services. Only through collaborative, respectful and genuine partnerships can we achieve more with less.

Lembit Öpik (Montgomeryshire) (LD): I am grateful to the Minister who, in my judgment, is outstandingly effective and committed to the sector, as was the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael) when he performed a similar role.

Is the Minister aware of an organisation called RE:generate, which seeks to work to empower local communities in partnership with first sector organisations? If she is not aware of that organisation, and if time permits, would she be willing to meet with RE:generate, which has a clear focus that is much in line with the thrust and narrative that she and her Government seek to push forward?

Angela E. Smith: A number of organisations such as RE:generate do such work, which enables them to engage with the community. It brings people together, gives them a voice and helps that voice to be heard, which can make a difference to the community and whatever population the organisation serves. I would be pleased to hear more about that organisation, and I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that point.

I would like to say a few words about what the Government have done to help the sector. The Office of the Third Sector had a recession action plan, the Real Help for Communities programme, which was launched almost exactly a year ago and was a Government plan to help the sector through the recession. As part of that plan over 1,500 targeted recession-focused grants, loans and bursaries have been provided through the modernisation fund, the targeted support fund and the hardship fund. Another £500,000 has enabled three new schools for social entrepreneurs to be opened in Yorkshire, Hampshire and Devon, and it has allowed existing schools in the north-west and the east midlands to run additional

programmes. The school provides action learning programmes to help social entrepreneurs tackle hardship and make positive changes to their communities. The students I have spoken to about their work are inspirational in seeking to make a difference for their communities—and, in one case, for the world at large. It was most impressive.

The £8 million volunteer brokerage scheme for the unemployed has provided 40,000 opportunities for people to learn new skills and give something back to communities through volunteering. Because the effect of the sector is varied, the action plan included a targeted package of support to sustain organisations through the economic downturn. It has enabled them to support their communities through a range of recession-focused services such as information and guidance on finding employment, support for health and well-being, and increased volunteering and employment opportunities.

I found it really encouraging to visit some of the recipients of the “Real help now” money and see for myself the difference that they have been able to make in their local communities. When I went to Brighton, I met the East Sussex credit union. Many people here today are members of credit unions.

Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op) *indicated assent.*

Angela E. Smith: I see my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael) nodding vigorously.

The credit unions support vulnerable people on low incomes who often find it difficult to access mainstream financial services, and many of whom are targeted by loan sharks. “Coronation Street” fans will know that the programme covered that problem. Loans can be offered at as much as 5,000 per cent. interest. Such people are in a bad cycle of debt and deprivation, but thanks to a bursary from the Modernisation Fund, the credit union is considering merging with another organisation so that it can respond better to the needs of local people; it will be better able to reach many of those being targeted by loan sharks.

I did not have to go far to visit the St. Martin-in-the-Fields Connection centre, where I saw the amazing range of work that it does for homeless people. It provides not only shelter and support, including food and showering, cleaning and changing facilities, but training and support for job seekers. More than 5,000 people benefit from its services every year, which makes it the busiest day centre not only in the capital but in the country. At the other end of the country, the volunteer centre in Blackpool has benefited from a grant from the targeted support fund. It has been working to help meet the increased demand for those who want to volunteer, finding good opportunities to add value to their skills.

That is why we launched the action plan. The money is an investment. However, it is invested not only in those organisations that receive it but in the community. It enables the organisations to continue doing what they do best, which is helping the most vulnerable in society through the economic downturn with Government support.

The work involves not only the Cabinet Office; other Departments are doing invaluable work. For instance, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is investing £5 million up to 2011 in the “Recruit into Coaching”

programme, which will recruit 10,000 new volunteer coaches from 70 of the most deprived areas in England, giving priority to 16 to 25-year-olds who are out of work or education. The aim is to offer a pathway to employment, and to increase confidence and skills. DCMS is also providing £3 million to transform empty high-street shops into cultural and community facilities as part of a programme to tackle the recession in the high street.

The Department for Children, Schools and Families is providing a recession package worth more than £3 million to enhance family services. That includes making extra funds available to Relate in the areas hardest hit by the recession, to the Parentline Plus helpline, and to Parent Know How, which provides support and debt counselling to families. Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs has launched a payments support service for small businesses and individuals who are unable to pay their taxes. So far, over 292,000 time-to-pay arrangements have been agreed, totalling more than £5 billion.

The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has provided a £10 million funding boost to extend the opening hours of citizens advice bureaux this year, and a further £5 million next year so that more people can benefit from its free, independent and impartial advice. The extra funding will allow the bureau network to stay open for approximately 170,000 additional hours, which will benefit about 600,000 extra clients until the end of March 2010 and a further 300,000 next year.

Last year, I spoke at the Citizens Advice annual conference, which was celebrating 70 years of service. It was heartening to hear that volunteers are still the backbone of the service. The value of the work done by volunteers, including its trustees—we sometimes undervalue the role of trustees in such organisations—is estimated to be in excess of £86 million. Those are all good and positive examples of the real efforts that the Government are making to help communities and third-sector organisations tackle the recession.

The Supporting People programme is the biggest source of Government revenue funding for the sector, with more than £13.6 billion invested since the programme began in 2003. The programme is grant-funding housing-related support services, largely delivered by the sector; it is administered by all 152 top-tier local authorities. The economic climate could lead to more vulnerable people facing redundancy and repossession, which will mean an increase in demand for existing services. Through Supporting People, the Government are investing in early intervention and preventive housing services. The recent report by the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government highlighted the fact that, against an investment of £1.6 billion, the programme is delivering a net financial benefit of £3.4 billion each year. Supporting People is helping about 1 million people at any given time. In 2007-08, 41,000 people avoided eviction and maintained accommodation; 21,000 people accessed training and education services; 47,000 people established contact with external services; and 8,000 people gained paid employment.

It is not just about numbers on a page. For every person mentioned, there is a real story. Supporting People has had an impact on people's lives, made a difference and improved things for their families and their communities. In times of financial hardship, we need to continue investing in such services. The removal

of ring-fencing for the Supporting People budget means that local authorities can be more innovative and flexible, and can pool budgets to support even more people, with services tailored to meet individual need. As a result, services are not hide-bound or held in silos, and are thus not inflexible. I know that concerns were raised about ring-fencing Supporting People; removing that ring fence was based on sound principles and was endorsed by the Communities and Local Government Committee.

A lot of work is being done to ensure that the third sector is both resilient and is supported through difficult times, but we must also ensure that its future is secured so that it remains in a strong position to continue its contribution to the design and delivery of better public services. We are not yet out of the danger zone brought about by the impact of the recession; tough times will continue for some time to come. However, I believe that the third sector is in a good position to weather that storm, and can prove its value to the community—and to all levels of government. We will continue to work with the sector for the benefit of the community.

2.48 pm

Alun Michael (Cardiff, South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): It is a particular pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Illsley. You and I shared a fairly chaotic room with another half dozen MPs when we first entered Parliament, although things have become more orderly as the years have passed. Those others included Rhodri Morgan, the former First Minister of the National Assembly for Wales.

It is a pleasure to speak in a debate initiated by my right hon. Friend the Minister. She comes from the voluntary sector, and she worked with me on voluntary sector matters in opposition. She has a good sense of the contribution that the sector makes, and also of its potential. I commend her on the efforts that she has made since taking over her current role to encourage greater participation and engagement by those in business and elsewhere in support of the third sector.

I am pleased that my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Tom Levitt) is sitting next to me, although he will not be with us in the House for much longer, given his decision to stand down after the election—at his young age, that is a total disgrace. It is appropriate to pay tribute to the leadership that he has provided as chair of the all-party group on the community and voluntary sector. His time as chair has been excellent, and the group has looked much more widely at the sector. I have a feeling that those who intend to continue as Members after the general election will hear from him in a variety of ways as he pursues other activities, although I am sure that those activities will not be far from the heart of the voluntary sector.

I want to say two things about the mutual and co-operative model and its potential, to which the Minister has already alluded; as a Labour and Co-operative party MP, it would be surprising if I did not do so. The financial sector has come through a climate in which the mutual banks and building societies have survived, while other models were damaged. Although support for the co-operative sector is very strong among Labour Members, an appreciation of the model has spread throughout the House. It is always welcome to see an idea that might have appeared radical in the past becoming

[*Alun Michael*]

mainstream and embedded. Not surprisingly, I think that the co-operative movement will always stay closest to the Labour movement, which understands it well, but cross-party agreement on the value of the sector is not to be despised. I hope that we will hear positive messages from the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Hurd) when he makes his speech.

In the run-up to the last comprehensive spending review, I carried out a study for the Treasury and Cabinet Office that demonstrated the enormous potential of co-operative models. I hope that that is not gathering too much dust and that it is still checked regularly by the Cabinet Office to determine whether that potential is being fully utilised. In recent years, we have heard suggestions about how things that are important to many people can benefit from the experience of co-operative governance—if I may put it in those terms. Supporter ownership of football clubs has particular salience when we see some of the stories going around. Until now, second-rank clubs might have been taking that route, but it would not be surprising if we saw some of the most high-profile clubs going down that avenue in future.

The Minister referred to the strength of credit unions. As small community-based unions—they are sometimes a little fragile—become bigger and turn into organisations with a greater capacity to offer loans and reasonable financial arrangements to some of the poorer people in society, as well as people in general, such as employees of local authorities and others, they have tremendous potential.

When we were carrying out the study to which I referred, we went with Treasury officials to look at the situation in Plymouth. The advantages of a critical mass of organisations working on a co-operative and community model were striking, because of the way in which they reinforced and supported each other. In that sense, it is important for the Government, and the Minister and her team, to nurture the development of co-operative and community-based models in an area, because people can start to learn from each other and develop greater professionalism. Innovative voluntary sector models can sometimes be a little fragile. It can be a lonely life for those “charismatic nuts”, as they used to be called, who start to develop new models to respond to community needs.

Some of the lessons to be learned by the public sector from the co-operative and governance models of the past are striking. I refer particularly to our visit to Homerton hospital in Hackney, which is right at the heart of one of the most deprived communities in the country. I was particularly struck by the way in which the chief executive, the director of nursing and the clinical director talked about how much closer they felt to the community that they served as a result of a wide range of members of the local community engaging in the foundation trust. We should be innovative so that we are open to the public sector learning lessons from community-based and co-operative models.

Another particularly attractive model is community ownership of wind energy. I have made the point to Ministers with responsibility for energy that if the implementation of wind energy is done to a community from outside, because there are often objections and

people say, “Not in my backyard.” However, the model changes if the community owns the model. In Awel Amman Tawe, we saw members of a group promoting community energy sitting outside their local authority’s planning offices with placards that said not, “Go away wind energy”, but, “Give us our wind turbines”. In fact, they failed with the local authority, but won their case on appeal, such was the strength of local support. There is a different situation when a community feels that it is in charge and able to take things forward, rather than that people from outside it are doing things to them.

Another model that has enormous potential, and that could also receive great cross-party support, relates to the future of British Waterways. I was a waterways Minister, so I am conscious of the financial investment necessary to deal with the backlog of repairs. There has been significant investment over the past 10 years, and the UK now has a less fragile and vulnerable waterways system. Significant developments to the waterways have included an extension of the network and interesting investments from the Heritage Lottery Fund and elsewhere, which have been productive.

People love water and the waterways, but the importance of the canal system goes beyond that. It has social and economic benefits, through the tourism and leisure industry, and environmental benefits as a green link into the centres of our greatest cities as a result of our industrial heritage. Many people are very passionate about the waterways sector and want it to thrive. The chair of the all-party group on waterways, my hon. Friend the Member for Derby, North (Mr. Laxton), has said that he intends to spend more time with his canal boat after he leaves this place, in which he has been a passionate advocate for the waterways.

We have an opportunity, as highlighted by British Waterways in “Setting a new course”, which was published in November 2009, to take the waterways into a third-sector model. I describe that as a sort of National Trust for the waterways that would preserve the benefit of the waterways, just as the benefit of our national parks and areas of outstanding beauty is preserved. The model could continue to do what British Waterways has done well over recent years—exploiting the land associated with the canals for economic development or, in some cases, housing—and it could certainly realise benefits for the finances of British Waterways.

A third-sector model would give people an opportunity to engage with the waterways in the way in which volunteers engage with the National Trust. In a sense, the waterways belong to the British public because they are publically owned, but, with a third-sector organisation like the National Trust, there would be a greater sense that the ownership was personal, so people would be more engaged and able to work more productively as volunteers. It would be possible to develop a form of accountability to the wider public, which would be beneficial to the community and to the waterways in particular. I hope—and I think that this is suggested by exchanges in the Chamber, and questions that Labour and Opposition Members have put to Ministers—that that is an idea whose time has come. I commend it to the Minister as an opportunity that, without partisanship but with positive engagement from Ministers in different Departments, could be carried forward and become productive.

I want to comment on the way in which we provide information to our citizens. I was very pleased to hear what the Minister said about the work of Citizens Advice. I have been involved with it for many years and am honorary president of my local citizens advice bureau in Cardiff. I am also pleased that the service is increasingly working with others, such as the Consumer Credit Counselling Service, to avoid duplicating activities, and to use expertise so as best to target the people who need help.

Most recently there has been work with StartHere, which is an innovative approach to make it easier for people who need information to get it, including those without the technical expertise to search for it on the internet. I encourage Ministers to think further about how StartHere can be used to enhance the public service. I am pleased to say that recent meetings with Ministers in several Departments have encouraged me to think—some five years after some of us sat around in the imaginatively named PSX(E) Cabinet Sub-Committee, which looked at the use of IT within Government, and Ministers started to get excited about the fact that the model makes it easier for people to get information—that several Departments are seeing the benefits of such an approach. Indeed, I have a meeting this afternoon with the Department of Health to talk about that, and I had a meeting with Work and Pensions Minister a few days ago. In particular, my right hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury, who has responsibility for carrying forward broadband Britain policies, has placed a great deal of value on the ease with which people can use StartHere to get information that they need.

An evaluation project early last year that looked at the use of StartHere in association with a number of citizens advice bureaux, as well as a couple of prisons in London, demonstrated enormous value in opening up access in such a way. At a time when those who are digitally literate can gain much information from the internet, we need to be careful that those who lack such expertise can get access. An example from the project was the fact that prisoners who were given the opportunity to go online, or to use a kiosk with StartHere loaded, went to StartHere, because of its simplicity. It is highly complementary to directgov, and co-ordination among Ministers is needed to build on what has happened already. For instance, the Ministry of Defence, through the Royal British Legion, is making use of StartHere in relation to the families of service personnel. I have already referred to Citizens Advice and to the use of the system in prisons. The idea needs to be seized for the benefit of the public whom we serve.

I want to underline the contribution made through volunteering. I have chaired a group on employee volunteering for Volunteering England over the past couple of years. The extent to which employer-assisted volunteering has started to develop is striking. As I was coming back to the issue after a 10-year gap, I was impressed by the way in which personnel departments and people involved with corporate social responsibility in some of our largest companies had seized on the importance of volunteering. There was a time when employer-assisted volunteering meant identifying a community centre and going to paint the same room again, as an exercise for a team from the company. Companies have now gone well past that rather naive approach to volunteering towards a sophisticated

approach in which they understand that giving people the opportunity to volunteer enhances their skills and abilities, and what they bring into the company. That is therefore a win-win situation for the company, the community and the individual.

I pay tribute to the Government for their work on encouraging such activity, including the relevant commission work that has been done in the past couple of years, and to Volunteering England and the Wales Council for Voluntary Action, which give leadership on volunteering, for the fact that volunteering is not standing still. In the 21st century, volunteering is as modern and important as ever. It is also an activity and contribution to society that is being positively and imaginatively developed in the 21st century. The Government have a part to play in providing active support, and it is particularly important to start with young people. Organisations such as the Prince's Trust do a tremendous job of engaging young people, as do many youth organisations such as the Scouts. They do a terrific job by encouraging responsibility and contributions by young people. However, we can never do too much to promote the appreciation of volunteering by Government and society, and to encourage the development of models for the future.

Finally, I encourage the Minister and the Government to take forward—and indeed accelerate—the work of the Compact. That concept was suggested by the commission on the future of the voluntary sector in England, which was chaired by Professor Nicholas Deakin in the late 1990s. It was also a recommendation in “Building the Future Together”, a document for which I had responsibility for the Labour party, and that the Minister had a significant role in writing. The concept is that there is no equality of arms, so to speak, between Government and its institutions, and the voluntary sector, so there is a need for the relationship to be mediated and overseen in some way.

There have been positive developments over the past 10 years since the Compact was brought in, such as the appointment of a commissioner for the Compact. However, more needs to be done to bed that in effectively and to develop a methodology that ensures that consideration of the voluntary sector is balanced properly with the pressures for value for money that the Office of Government Commerce and the Treasury promote for every Department and agency.

Mr. Nick Hurd (Ruislip-Northwood) (Con): I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his speech. He makes an important point about the Compact. He might be aware that the Minister herself recently transferred funds that were committed to charities, without any consultation, and admitted to the House of Commons that she was in breach of the Compact. Does the right hon. Gentleman regret that decision, and what powers would he like the commission for the Compact to have had in that context?

Alun Michael: The hon. Gentleman raises an important point. If decisions are taken in breach of the Compact, it is important that that should be acknowledged, and it is also important that, over time, the issue becomes better understood in Government. Given my ministerial experience, I must say that sometimes a point is reached at which decisions must be taken and when, contemplating the alternatives, one thinks, “I wouldn't have started

[*Alun Michael*]

from here.” I must say that I have some sympathy for Ministers who find themselves in a corner, without even knowing the particular circumstances to which the hon. Gentleman refers. It is important for Ministers to be willing to admit to any failure to adhere to the Compact. Over time, that needs to become more embedded in the system so that Government Departments know what they have to do. One problem I encountered with a Government Department was when officials insisted that they were talking about funding when they were actually talking about a contractual arrangement with the sector. They are not giving largesse, but procuring a service from the sector, and, in those circumstances, they should treat the sector with the same respect that they would give a private company or a corporation.

The hon. Gentleman’s intervention allows me to say that while the Government have taken us in the right direction, the principles of the Compact and the ways in which it is enforced need to be developed over time. As I was saying before his intervention, there will always be a tension between taking on big contracts to conserve money—we have seen that with the Department for Work and Pensions—and taking on small contracts, which smaller voluntary organisations can contract into. That is not very different from the pleas that we hear from small businesses. When I was Minister with responsibility for rural affairs, I heard a lot about contracts being too big for smaller companies to be able to bid into. There is a real challenge for the Government to get things right in terms of value for money, which of course must be a massively important consideration. Moreover, they must recognise that voluntary organisations, and small, local community-based organisations, can provide value for money if the circumstances are right. There are some Government Departments that understand that and some that still do not, which is why the Compact, as a way of mediating across Government Departments, is extremely important.

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West) (Lab/Co-op): My right hon. Friend makes a very important point. Does he also agree that one of the problems of small service providers from the third sector trying to meet a large contract is that the time for tendering is often so short that they do not have time to work with other groups to put in place the consortium that is necessary to meet the requirements of that contract?

Alun Michael: My hon. Friend makes an important point. Again, there is a tension between expediency and the delay that can occur in getting arrangements out so that people can seek to make a contribution. He is right that that needs to be brought into the equation. It is a question not just of value for money and the importance of financial constraints, especially in straitened times, but of getting the balance right. The voluntary sector—and the third sector generally—should be seen as having a specific and beneficial contribution to make, and systems should be designed to get the best out of them. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak is likely to make some comments on precisely those issues in his contribution. Rather than going further into them now, I will leave them for him to develop. I think that we are saying the same thing about the importance of developing

the right systems and ensuring that they are thoroughly embedded in both central and local government for the future.

I very much welcome the debate, as we rarely get the opportunity to speak about the voluntary sector as such. It is significant, however, that the voluntary sector gets referred to in departmental debates going right across the Government these days. I welcome my right hon. Friend the Minister’s introduction to the debate. As has been the case on many previous occasions, I hope that our debate will demonstrate cross-party support for the future development of the third sector and innovative approaches to making the most of its contribution.

3.14 pm

Tom Levitt (High Peak) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Illsley, and to speak yet again alongside my old friend the Minister. We joined the all-party group on the voluntary sector in 1997, and we both became Home Office Parliamentary Private Secretaries at the same time. Whereas she has gone on to stellar things since then, I am fulfilling the role of sweeper. Nevertheless, it is a great pleasure to have this opportunity to contribute to the debate and to speak after my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (*Alun Michael*), who came to my constituency in 1994—even before I first came to this place—to work with me on voluntary sector organisations.

One of the cheap tricks that we have in the House is to stand up in such a debate and reel off a list of worthy organisations in our constituency. I will not sink to those levels, mainly because I did so the last time that we debated this issue, so it is all on the record anyway. The other thing that we do is to pop into Westminster Hall, make an intervention and disappear again. We have already seen an example of that this afternoon. I will not give the hon. Gentleman the pleasure of naming him for the record.

One gets an idea of the importance of this sector from the fact that there are roughly 250 registered charities in every constituency in the country. On average, almost 100 social enterprises operate in every constituency, and I wonder how many there would have been 10 years ago. About three quarters of our constituents take part in voluntary activity at some time or other every year.

The third sector potentially includes everyone and can benefit everyone. Those benefits come from not just the outcomes but the act of being involved in the inputs as well. Taking part in a voluntary activity in a third sector organisation is very much part of what being a member of society is all about, and it is what makes communities work. When we talk about the third sector, we are talking about not just individual volunteers, voluntary organisations, community groups, co-ops—as my right hon. Friend mentioned—social enterprises or any of the not-for-profit sector, but the whole range of things together. Given the values that they espouse and the benefits that they bring, all of that is part of a concerted movement of communities to engage in democracy. It is the way in which people can change things and the way in which communities can influence the services, environment and atmosphere of the very places in which they live. As I said in the debate on the Sustainable Communities Act 2007 (Amendment) Bill,

this is about acknowledging that democracy is something that is 24/7—it does not happen only at election time—and that we should therefore hold it dear, not just in the party political way but in how communities work.

So much has changed over the past 10 years. My right hon. Friend talked about the funding. Some £11 billion has gone from the Government into the sector in one form or another, but that money is not going into a black hole. It is creating opportunities, procuring services and delivering socially beneficial outcomes. The money that the Government give, added to the support given to charities through the taxation system, is still only a part of how those organisations are funded. The very act of giving—the volunteering of one's wealth, as well as one's time—is part of the whole process of engagement about which we are talking.

Qualitative changes have also taken place within the wider sector, however. Not only is there more money than previously, but some third sector organisations operate far more professionally and the forms that they take and the activities in which they engage are more varied. That professionalism is no bad thing, and the creation of some larger, super third sector organisations would have been no bad thing either, because they would not block the emergence of small community organisations, which are being generated all the time. How many community organisations form as a result of local residents' campaigns and then become formal organisations, lobbying politicians and even, after a time, delivering the very services for which the residents campaigned? There is room for both the large and the small in the third sector.

I think that we have seen this new relationship, which has generated so much of the funding, because the third sector's benefits have been recognised through the commissioning of services. When we set up the Compact in, I think, 1999—I was there at the launch—we set out a memorandum of understanding between the public sector generally and the third sector and voluntary sector organisations. Given the growth in commissioning over the years, that understanding has changed and professionalism has come in, and it has therefore been necessary to refresh the Compact. I very much welcome the refreshed Compact. Indeed, the whole third sector has welcomed it. It was produced in December 2009 and has aspects relating to formal partnerships and the commissioning of relationships between public sector and third sector bodies.

Why might a public sector body want to take on a third sector organisation as a partner? In this age, when we look for quality services, a third sector organisation can provide local knowledge and information, and respond to local needs. For example, it can provide time, which public sector organisations often find themselves stretched to provide, to personalise services in social care. Of course, although I would never, and we should never, regard the third sector as the cheap option, it cannot be denied that there is cost-effectiveness—ways of spending money better but not necessarily spending less—in using third sector partners and delivering on a common cause. That has been recognised by local and central Government, as evidenced by the refreshed Compact.

There have been challenges along the way, however, regarding the capacity of the third sector to engage not only in delivering a service, but in the bidding process in response to a tender to provide a service. Full cost

recovery was an early issue, and it has perhaps still not been wholly addressed; nevertheless, we have come a long way. I remember that when my hon. Friend the Member for Slough (Fiona Mactaggart) was the Home Office Minister with responsibility for the third sector many years ago, she said something very memorable: third sector organisations have to learn to say no. They have to be able to recognise when they are being asked to do something impossible, and then say no and not take on the commission or deliver the service. Otherwise, the possibility of full cost recovery is jeopardised, advantage is unfairly taken of the good will of the third sector organisation and the volunteers concerned, and the organisation's mission is endangered. Protecting an organisation against mission creep, while maintaining its financial viability and core activities, is the responsibility of trustees—as my right hon. Friend the Minister mentioned—but all those elements are fundamental to the identity and sanctity of the third sector organisation. Commissioning must therefore never be an excuse for exploiting third sector organisations.

Although we acknowledge that the changes taking place have led to attempts to address each of those issues, we recognise that there have been other changes in service delivery. Local authorities, for example, have increasingly looked to private sector organisations to commission services. The Department for Work and Pensions looks for both private and third sector organisations to deliver support for long-term jobseekers on a payments-by-results basis. One trick that we seem to have been missing is that private sector organisations have as much reason as the local authority or central Government to seek cost-effectiveness, personalisation and the local appropriateness of services. There is absolutely no reason why private sector organisations that deliver services either on behalf of or in parallel with local authorities and central Government should not also look for third sector partners, to provide those nuances.

There will be problems, and my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth touched on some of these aspects. Although there is little formal commissioning of services from the third sector by the private sector, there are huge opportunities for more of that to take place, to the mutual advantage of both partners. Particularly interesting is the way in which some private sector organisations engage with charities such as Pilotlight and even VSO, and provide opportunities for managers in business to get some life experience by working with third sector organisations. They see those organisations as a resource and pay on a commercial basis to get training, experience and enlightenment.

If, however, we are going to make the most out of the relationship between the private sector and the third sector, a number of problems need to be tackled. They include the same attitudinal problems that there were at the beginning of public sector commissioning: the possible mistrust and misunderstanding of what the other partner is about; the private sector perhaps having rather more demanding expectations regarding capacity than the public sector; and scepticism about whether so-called amateurs could ever deliver a professional service, which we know they of course can.

I see other opportunities for third sector organisations, given some of the changes that the Government have brought about in recent years. We have seen a bit of hesitation, but the way in which health services are

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scrutinised has changed over the years. We have set up local involvement networks. LINKs bring local authorities' scrutiny procedures and appropriate third sector bodies into the health service to scrutinise, advise and assist in the improvement of services. That would not have been possible a few years ago, but the local authority scrutiny process has matured over the years and is now capable of providing that service.

The third sector bodies that were involved in the community health councils—some of which were better than others, which is why changes had to be made—are now engaging in the LINKs process. Why, therefore, can we not consider using that process in other public services that are not delivered directly by local government? An obvious example is policing. My right hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Brightside (Mr. Blunkett) wrote a document for the Home Secretary—I was pleased to be involved in the research and writing—advocating the involvement of the third sector locally to scrutinise the policing of communities at a grass-roots level. I am much more interested in a LINK-type process of community engagement through voluntary sector organisations and community groups than I am in the development of a police authority scrutiny procedure. However, I welcome the fact that many chief constables now come before local authority scrutiny committees in a way that perhaps they never did before.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth mentioned volunteering. I do not think that it is possible to talk about volunteering these days without talking about V, a brilliant organisation set up by the Government to foster and promote volunteering among young people. It currently works with about 500 volunteer and community partners throughout the country, opening up 900,000 opportunities for young people to volunteer. V has funded more than 1,300 projects since 2006, and through its support, more than 500 people have set up their own social action projects to meet needs that they have identified in their communities. Every month, young people looking for volunteering opportunities on the V website run 72,000 searches, and online applications to volunteer have increased 200 per cent. in the past year alone.

One thing that V does effectively is to bring in funding from other sources, including £42 million from the private sector. Match funding from more than 120 corporate partners in the past year alone has produced an extra £84 million for youth volunteering. In my constituency, 200 young people have been involved in the V Inspired project. Last week, I was delighted to attend with my right hon. Friend the Minister a celebration of youngsters in Derbyshire—well, it was actually country-wide—who had received V talent certificates for intensive volunteering. One constituent of mine, Rosie, spent 30 hours a week for 45 weeks working under the oversight of Connexions with the police, local authorities, the youth service and others to ensure that young people in her community were not left to drift but were provided with something to do.

I remember the Prime Minister saying that the voluntary sector provided a voice for the voiceless. Many national campaigns have their roots in the voluntary sector and the third sector generally. We should admire the tenacity, effectiveness and professionalism with which such groups

mount their campaigns. People are encouraged, perhaps more so than before, to campaign locally, whether by lobbying their council, signing online petitions or through other measures. It is important that campaigning remains a key activity for the sector.

That, of course, is the point at which we remember that political parties are third sector organisations in terms of how they are set up. We do not receive gift aid, but perhaps that time will come. Nevertheless, campaigning is central to the work of the sector. I urge the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Hurd) to come on board and say that campaigning is not only a legitimate but an essential activity for third sector organisations, and that we should never return to the situation in the early 1990s, when organisations such as Citizens Advice were told that if they did not stop lobbying for the law on various issues to be changed, they risked losing their grants from central Government.

In another example, which I have given before, Save the Children was delivering services in Iraq as part of the rebuilding work after the 2003 war. The charity was critical of the conduct of both the American and British Governments in their military activity there, and as a result, it lost its funding from the American Government. However, it continued to receive funding from the British Government on the grounds that it was doing what it was asked to do and fulfilling the terms of its contract. In general terms, we welcomed rather than criticised the fact that Save the Children had used its position to campaign.

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

Tom Levitt: Briefly, in the hope that the hon. Gentleman will say yes to my question.

Mr. Hurd: I am more than happy to place on record my profound belief in the value of the voluntary sector's advocacy role. I took a private Member's Bill through Parliament almost entirely because it had the support of a national network of organisations driven by exactly the same energy and vigour that the hon. Gentleman mentioned. I am a strong believer in the advocacy role of charities and the sector. We propose no change to the regulation in that context.

Tom Levitt: I am pleased to hear that. The hon. Gentleman will remember that the leader of his party, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron), said at one time, "If you want to know what a Conservative Government are going to do, look at what Conservative local authorities are doing." The hon. Gentleman will also be aware that when Conservatives took over the organisation of London Councils, one of the first things that they did was to decimate the programme of grants to the third sector. I hope that he can reassure me either that his leader was wrong to say that we should look to Conservative councils for leadership or that the Conservative councils were wrong to pull the rug from under many local voluntary organisations. Perhaps he will come back to that later if he does not have an answer now.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) (Con): I am fascinated by the hon. Gentleman's excellent speech, but I ask him to consider this. The voluntary sector and all the tremendous organisations in that sphere are focused primarily on

concern and compassion, and on providing opportunities outside the country's power structure. What I hope to discuss if I catch your eye, Mr. Illsley, is the essential distinction conferred by trust and charitable status. The state and political parties are interested in power, but social care, voluntary contribution and compassion are provided outside the power structure. It is a difficult line to follow, but that is why a lot of problems arise about what is, or is not, political from the point of view of charity law.

Tom Levitt: I am grateful for that fascinating intervention. I will read it carefully in *Hansard* tomorrow. The hon. Gentleman seems to be suggesting that there is a compassionate charitable side and a state power side, and never the twain shall meet—one shall not influence the other. It is about influence. No one is suggesting that the third sector should run the country, but it has the right—and, indeed the obligation—to seek to influence how it is run. That is the heart of the issue.

I welcome what the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood said in another Committee on which we served together a few weeks ago, and which dealt with a statutory instrument on exempt charities. I have praised him once and will praise him again for taking the right line on that matter and for welcoming the Government's initiative under the Charities Act 2006 to move away from the concept of exempt charities, which undermines the status of charities.

Was the hon. Gentleman a little surprised to hear, therefore, that the hon. Member for Surrey Heath (Michael Gove) was trying to put the original clause 42 back in the Children, Schools and Families Bill? The exempt charity ruling was rightly removed from the Bill by the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, because it was unnecessary to the achievement of the good things in the Bill. The only reason for putting it back would be to remove the public benefit test from independent schools. That test was refined in the 2006 Act and, as I recall, it had widespread support. I do not understand why the hon. Member for Surrey Heath wanted to put the exempt charities provision back in the Bill, as it went totally against the advice of the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood.

Mr. Cash: I had direct experience of this matter when a new school was created in my constituency when I first went there in the early 1980s. The assisted places scheme, as it was called in those days, enabled people who otherwise would not have been able to get into that school to do so, to its enormous benefit. It is now one of the best schools in the region. That matter is tied up with the exempt charity status. We must ensure that people can benefit from such opportunities.

Tom Levitt: I am not sure how the exempt charity status reflects on that matter. Labour has taken a different route, which is to make all our schools excellent so that people do not have to make the somewhat artificial choice of entering the narrow confines of the independent sector, rather than being in the big wide world of the state sector.

I will conclude in a moment, but first I want to mention a few topical issues. I welcome what the Minister said about music licensing and PPL in Question Time in the House yesterday. It is important that musicians

receive the payments for the performance of their music to which they are entitled by law. However, everybody, including musicians' representatives, must recognise it would be unfortunate if that had a financial impact on the smallest amateur—I do not use that word disparagingly—groups in the country, particularly at this time. For example, it should not affect people who like to have the radio on in the back of the charity shop. The Government are only playing the role of honest broker in this matter; it does not relate to tax or to any Government measure, but to a court ruling. I hope there can be an agreement between the sector and the music industry that will minimise the impact on those who are least able to pay. I understand that that might be only days away.

I welcome the news that the Department for Culture, Media and Sport is not rejigging the distribution of lottery funding and that it will continue to reflect both need and where the bids come from, rather than seek an artificial evenness. Equality of opportunity does not have to depend on equality of treatment. It is important that the most vulnerable areas are helped whenever possible. Lottery funding, particularly through Reaching Communities, has been incredibly valuable. Later today, I will be celebrating the impact of Reaching Communities on Gamesley in my constituency, which has received £250,000 over three years. We are keeping our fingers crossed that there might be more on the way. That funding has gone into the heart of that community, not to impose or change it, but to enable, empower and enrich it, and to help it celebrate the best of what is available.

I know that the Minister takes an interest in NHS charities, so I hope the assurances of the Department of Health are true that the storm in a teacup a few weeks ago over the future independence of NHS charities was just that—a storm in a teacup. I hope that NHS charities will remain financially independent, while being embedded in, and part of, the NHS. It is almost impossible to be treated in hospital and not come across a volunteer working in the NHS or a facility funded by a charity. That could include anything from the scanner through to the tea shop and florist.

Finally, I do not think there is anything the third sector cannot do. It is varied and versatile, and can adapt to changing circumstances, demands and relationships. I have every confidence that it has a bright future in all its forms, including social enterprises, co-ops and community groups. As chair of the Community Development Foundation, I would like to have said a lot more about communities. I think that there is momentum in the sector. The way in which it looks for relationships has enabled it to grow. Despite the funding relationship that we have discussed, it is probably more independent of Government than it has ever been in its attitudes and in its belief in where it can go. It has a very fine future.

I was hoping to continue speaking until my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth returned to the Chamber, which was quite a challenge to set myself and I will not try to meet it. He mentioned football clubs being taken over by their supporters. I can think of only one major club to which that applies. I had the pleasure of going to see it on a hot night in Barcelona last summer. The Barcelona players have the word "UNICEF" emblazoned across their chests. They celebrate not a fat-cat company that puts money into

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the club, but the third-sector organisation to which they give £1 million a year. I look forward to the day when our football clubs wear similar badges with the same pride. That is the pride we all have in our third sector.

3.48 pm

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the comments that hon. Members have made, and it is a pleasure to sit under your chairmanship, Mr. Illsley.

Like my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael) and the Minister, I am a Labour and Co-operative Member of Parliament. I have had a long association with and commitment to the co-operative and mutual sector. Although that informs my basic philosophical position, I will extend my comments to the wider remit of the community and voluntary sector.

The Minister's opening speech referred to the enormous growth in the third sector's impact on the economy. We could not have had such a debate 15 years ago because it could not have been couched in the same terms. We could not have spoken about the significant impact the third sector was having on the delivery of services, nor the contribution it was making to the country's economy. She gave figures showing an increase from £5 billion to £12 billion. In my Government office region of the west midlands, the contribution is assessed to be £3.3 billion and the sector has between 44,000 and 50,000 employees. Notwithstanding the huge social benefits that the sector brings to the area, there are also considerable economic benefits.

That is the case for a number of reasons, one of which is the public recoil from the privatisation excesses of the '80s and '90s, and the gradual realisation that the propriety form of companies delivering services, or the alternative of public sector organisations providing services, did not sensitively and specifically meet the whole range of needs within the wider community. Although there were models of mutuality and co-operation for people to exploit, they were often not well understood and under-utilised. There was no driving philosophy within the Government or the civil service to give the support necessary to enable those models to reach their full potential. I do not for one moment think that, more than 10 years after the Government came to power, we have reached that full potential, but huge strides have been made.

The Minister has outlined some of the initiatives that have taken place to help development. However, it is also important to note hon. Members' contributions through private Members' Bills. Many of those were introduced by Labour and Co-operative Members, but there were others, including at least one from a Conservative Member. Those people pioneered private Members' legislation that has helped the development of different corporate models that, in turn, have helped the third sector. I would particularly like to mention the community interest company and, of course, the asset lock, both of which have enhanced the legislative framework necessary to assist the development of third-sector organisations.

I did some research into the economic impact of third-sector organisations on my local authority. Although that impact is almost impossible to quantify, it is interesting

to note that, in my local authority of Sandwell, there are 478 third-sector organisations, of which 312 are registered charities. In our representative roles as Members of Parliament, as we carry out our daily constituency tasks, I think we all see the incredible work that is carried out by not just volunteers but professionals within the sector to meet the needs of the local community.

At this time of economic problems and recession—the Minister referred to this—third-sector organisations have a hugely strategic role to play. Two particular difficulties—it is the classic double whammy—for third-sector organisations have resulted from the recession. The rise in unemployment and the associated problems that go with it put an additional strain on voluntary and charitable organisations within an area and, over and above that, many such organisations are dependent on contracts from public sector organisations, which are having to squeeze their expenditure to meet tougher spending regimes in order to reduce public spending and the so-called financial deficit. Third-sector organisations are suffering in both ways, as a possible source of income is diminishing, but they have to meet increased demand on their services.

The Minister outlined the measures that the Government have taken, which clearly show that they recognise the difficulties faced by such organisations. Those measures are, of course, very welcome. This is not a special plea but, as the West Midlands Regional Committee's report highlighted, we have suffered disproportionately in my area of the west midlands, largely because of our historical dependence on the motor industry, which has been badly hit. We have also suffered because we have comparatively low skill levels. Unemployment has been higher in the west midlands than in other regions, and we have had all the associated problems that go with that. The west midlands is at the forefront of facing such pressures.

May I make a few comments about the Compact and the issues outlined by my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth and my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Tom Levitt)? Many of those issues have been covered already. Obviously, there has to be a balance between value for money and the ability of small third-sector organisations to provide a service. The Compact was considered to be a good way of raising awareness of the issues and providing the right sort of framework and culture that would benefit both sides of the equation. However, there is a feeling—and perhaps a fear—within the third sector that, under pressure, there might be a process of resiling from the sort of principles under which the Compact was devised.

Hon. Members have mentioned the difficulties that small third-sector providers face when they try to meet the requirements of large contracts and there is a short time for tendering. However, there is also a fear, which is supported by evidence, that third-sector providers are disadvantaged in the tendering process by an approach that puts cost ahead of value. Some of us who were in local government 20 years ago remember the difficulties that compulsory competitive tendering brought, when the only criterion for awarding a contract was cost. That relates to the old question of how to balance the cost and value of something. The most cost-effective contract often does not provide for the best value.

There is a feeling that such contracts are now being negotiated purely on the basis of cost, and that the third sector is being disadvantaged by a private sector that can sometimes use the contract as a loss leader, and can then either change the terms or simply not deliver on the necessary quality to do the particular service adequately. The Government need to consider that in the development of this particular Compact.

There is also a fear—or a robust complaint—that there is an unequal partnership. The statutory provider can renege on a contract, whereas the voluntary sector would be in trouble if it did so—that issue should be looked at. Regional Action West Midlands has told me that it is developing a regional procurement framework to be implemented by public sector organisations that would provide a standard framework for that particular tendering process throughout the area. That would provide a template that would be easily understood by the third sector and would remove some of the disadvantages of working within a time frame so that it can compete effectively. I ask the Minister to look at that as a way of taking the agenda forward.

In conclusion, the third sector has come an enormously long way in the past 10 to 15 years. It is no longer regarded as an amateurish add-on to the services provided by the public sector, but seen as a more effective, sensitive and specific way of delivering services that the public sector is not always best placed to provide. It is thought of as infinitely better at providing services in many areas than the private sector. However, the third sector still suffers from some disadvantages. We still need to monitor and work with it to ensure that, over the coming years, its full potential is realised for the benefit of not only the economy, but the services that people need in our local communities.

4.1 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr. Illsley. The matter we are discussing is so important that I am sorry that the debate is taking place in Westminster Hall, rather than on the Floor of the House. For me, the matter is fundamental to the kind of society in which we live.

Were I to attempt, probably with some uncertainty, to identify the category into which the so-called third sector fits, I would first have to ask what the three sectors are. That has been implied in some of the speeches I have heard this afternoon, but perhaps not quite identified, although we got close to it in an intervention from the hon. Member for High Peak (Tom Levitt). As I see it, there is the state on one hand, which deals with matters of political power, including the Government, legislation, Parliament, of course, local authorities and all the paraphernalia of administrative law. On the other hand, we have another sector dealing with private ownership, commerce, the marketplace, companies, partnerships, small businesses and many others areas that are as essential to the running of a society as is the state. The division between those two is often prickly, but it is important that we have both, because it is through the Government and the framework of the state, to use that generic expression, that one establishes the rule of law. Therefore, the whole of society is ultimately dependent on that as a means of maintaining stability and good order.

Then, of crucial importance—no less importance than the other two sectors—we have what I prefer to call the voluntary sector. I will not mention the media in this context, although some might argue that they have become the fourth estate, and there is increasing evidence to suggest that the media thinks they are even more important than Parliament. The voluntary sector is vital, and it overlaps with the other two areas in the sense that many charities—I touched on this point in an earlier intervention—are driven by criteria established over many centuries in a very British manner that have now made their way into other countries, more so in the Anglo-Saxon world than elsewhere, whereby charities are driven not only by the state, but by the activity of volunteers. Those charities are not driven entirely by the Church, although it has always played a big role in its interface with charities.

Joan Walley (Stoke-on-Trent, North) (Lab): Would the hon. Gentleman agree with me, with regard to the role and origins of voluntary organisations, that many of them are part and parcel of their local communities, particularly with regard to residents associations, and that people serving on the committees of those associations, of which we have many in Stoke-on-Trent, are the glue that keeps local society working, so it is vital that we give our full support to the voluntary sector for the work it does?

Mr. Cash: I could not be more enthusiastic in following up the hon. Lady's intervention, not least because she, too, represents a Staffordshire constituency, and we often find ourselves co-operating for that reason on matters of voluntary activity. There is a considerable overlap and I am sure that she is right.

The voluntary sector includes not only the charitable element, but the amenity element and the protecting element. Some of that work is ad hoc and some is long-term. As the hon. Member for High Peak said, the growth of the big charities is enormously important. I can remember when Oxfam, in the days when I was at Oxford, was based in a tiny office just up the Banbury road. Look at it now. The same could be said of more recently established charities—perhaps it is unfair to describe them as such—including Tearfund, with which I work closely as chairman of the all-party group on water and sanitation in the third world, and WaterAid, which is relatively new. I could not recite them all, and there would be no point in doing so, as there are so many.

Many of those enormous organisations have sub-units, to use a technical term, in each constituency, and that is why there are, as the hon. Member for High Peak said, about 250 registered charities in the average constituency. Some of them are large charities such as Oxfam, Save the Children, Tearfund and the Royal British Legion, with which I also work closely in my constituency, as I do with many other charities. Others are local charities, and some are much older, such as the trust set up by Izaak Walton, who happened to leave some money in his will to part of my constituency. Therefore, there are small, localised endowments, as well as much larger ones, and there is also an overlap with amenity groups, some of which are long-term groups, such as the Madeley Conservation Group, which has done tremendous work in the coalfields, because Madeley was once a coal community.

[Mr. Cash]

There are also shorter-term, ad hoc amenity groups, such as those that oppose wind farms. I have four such groups in my constituency, some of which are incorporated and some of which are not-for-profit organisations because they want to have a stable constitution. Others are made up of people who simply get together as an amenity group. I would like to refer to one of the accidental outcomes, although perhaps it is a deliberate problem. It often strikes me that when an ad hoc amenity group protests against a specific local government problem—wind farms are only one example—the people involved get together at a big meeting. An MP such as myself will attend and tell them, “This is what you must do if you want to be effective”, which we all have to do. Someone will then get up and ask, “Where will the money come from, and will we need legal representation?” We then have to tell them that they will not be able to protest unless they raise the money. Then they ask, “What about the people on the other side?”, meaning the state, the local authority or the Government policy that has driven those who are determined to set up the wind farm. The amenity group will then find that they must raise the money on an entirely voluntary basis. Meanwhile, the state, in the manner of Goliath, provides the QCs and leaders of the argument, such as environmental experts, at enormous cost and therefore has the advantage over David, because the voluntary amenity body is obliged to find the money, and that, importantly, is driven by the volunteer attitude.

The hon. Member for High Peak made that point. It is about attitude, and I have mentioned care and compassion as well. Those people will go out and raise money so that they can pay for what they want to do. I think that there is a strong case for them to be given legal aid, particularly when there is an enormous imbalance between the very big state and the very small amenity society. However, nothing will stop them. They will step up to the plate, just as they do in the other area that the hon. Gentleman mentioned, and on which I have had an exchange with him. For example, in the context of providing care in the community, an enormous number of people do fantastic work, without any expectation of advancement, patronage or financial reward or benefit of any description—this is the fantastic side of this work, and this is what I believe in passionately—but entirely because they believe in the cause in question, or their local community. They are the unsung heroes of Britain, the warp and weft of our society.

The hon. Gentleman mentioned people who go into hospitals. We have had enough trouble with Stafford hospital, as everyone knows—it is a national scandal, not just a local one—but the truth is that an enormous number of people are still going into the hospital to do the kind of voluntary work that he mentioned. That is extremely important, yet it is often taken for granted. The professionalism of the big organisations is complemented by the enormous sense of commitment and compassion that comes from people in villages and towns and in society at large.

We are part of an enormous international voluntary sector. The hon. Member for High Peak mentioned UNICEF, but one could mention another sphere of activity that is entirely spontaneous and which we have seen in the work of Live Aid some years ago, and in our

responses to disaster funds for hurricanes, tsunamis, Haiti and so on. Now, of course, other organisations come in on the back of massive television appeals, so the idea of the state being able to solve everything has, by definition, proved not to be true. It is often individuals who come and provide the ballast that is necessary to solve enormous problems.

By the same token, it is extremely important that huge organisations, as well as the local ones, should not become overtly political. We do not have time this afternoon to go into every aspect of charity law, other than simply to refer to the balance that has to be struck. I believe that the charity commissioners are somewhat too restrictive, as they tend to make over-enthusiastic assessments in construe certain activities as quasi-political or political, when, in fact, the dividing line is difficult to achieve. I recognise that, but I think that in respect of schools, academies and things of that kind, there is a tendency for the commissioners not to realise that we need the spontaneity of local volunteers who come together to provide the added value that committed members of local society are able to provide for schooling or other things.

I know that this is a very political question for Parliament, but it is important that unreasonable restraint should not be imposed on people being able to provide for independent schools if they wish to do so, or, for that matter, to provide help so that those who are less well off can get a better education than might otherwise be available to them locally. I do not want to disrupt the cross-party enthusiasm in this debate by spending too much time on that, but the question of mission and of the objects of trusts is an important one, and we must do everything that we can to encourage more and more local voluntary activity.

On the broader front, I was struck by the reference of the hon. Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) to the Labour and Co-operative movement. I make no secret of the fact that my family were Quakers for many centuries, and were involved in mutual societies. For example, we helped to finance Samuel Smiles. In fact, we found him—my great-great-grandfather, Newman Cash, is reputed to have discovered him in Leeds before he appointed him secretary to the Leeds and Thirsk Railway, which he set up. The Cadburys are Quaker cousins, and so on. There was an extraordinary combination of enterprise and—let us use the word properly—philanthropic thought and attitude. Another example is John Bright and the Rochdale Society of Equitable Pioneers.

The whole concept of this debate is in my DNA, and it is extremely important to the revival of what has been called the broken society. I am extremely glad that my hon. Friend the Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Hurd) will reply to this debate. I know that Conservatives are all supposed to be pin-striped and boss-eyed, or how people describe us. [Interruption.] No, not in this debate, but hon. Members know what I mean. However, there should be no assumption that, just because someone comes from a particular political party, they do not share common attitudes towards helping people at large.

That is part of it: we may have different political solutions, but it is extremely important to remember who created the mutuals and building societies such as the Abbey National, which we founded in the 1870s, and which is now a bank. In retrospect, I am not at all

happy about what has happened to the notion of mutualisation, which part of the essence of the voluntary and co-operative movement and all that went with it, including mutuals such as the National Provident Institution, which was founded by William Cash in the 1830s. The fact is that we tried to create things to help people—there were no profits for the people concerned. They had other businesses, and the two things worked together. Barclays is another company that began that way, as did Rowntree's—I could go on to list more.

In trying to recreate the circumstances to repair our broken society, we must look not only at what Government, Parliament and legislation can achieve but at how the spirit of voluntarism described by the hon. Member for High Peak can be brought in. This is not a party question at all; it is about how we, despite our political differences, manage to create in society the means of helping to repair our broken society. I shall just mention drugs and drugs addiction, and the fantastic work that is done by those who work voluntarily to help people who are broken by the terrible scourges of today.

Tom Levitt: I am sure that there is accord across the Chamber on the points that the hon. Gentleman just made about mutual organisations, Quaker heritage and so on—that is excellent. However, does he not think, given that three quarters of the population engage in voluntary activity in one form or another, and that there are 250 charities in every constituency and so on, that it is an affront to the organisations and community groups that hold our communities together to call them broken? I accept that there are problems in society—he mentioned drugs, and there are others—but the bonds that hold communities together are far from broken. Suggesting that they are is an affront to those people.

Mr. Cash: I talked about a broken society as a whole. We have monumental problems in society today. I am far from thinking, let alone saying, that those organisations are broken—they are the means whereby society can be mended, to a certain extent, although not entirely, because other measures such as legislation are necessary. The last thing that I would say is that voluntary sector organisations are broken—far from it. They are the means to mend a society that is broken for a variety of reasons, including, although I am not supposed to say such things now, the lack of moral purpose or moral force, which lay at the heart of so much that was good, although there was some bad, in Victorian times.

Alun Michael: As we do not want to break the cross-party consensus, as the hon. Gentleman said, I shall put my point gently. Does he not agree that allowing the break-up and demutualisation of certain organisations was a mistake by a previous Government? He rightly referred to those organisations being set up with both financial and philanthropic objectives, and therefore being part of the binding together of society in many parts of the country.

Mr. Cash: If the right hon. Gentleman is inviting me to criticise that Government, I shall do so with great care, because we did an enormous amount of good in promoting enterprise as well. The problems with the trade union movement—if I may come back with that—had led to the necessity of getting things stabilised. However, that is for another debate.

Let us look at the Cadbury and Kraft situation, for example. Although those are commercial organisations, the charitable activities of the Cadbury trusts and things like Bournville, speak for themselves. So many people want and need that kind of society, in which we achieve a balance between the second sector, the commercial marketplace, and the voluntary sector, which comes third in line—I do not like “third sector” as an expression. That aspect of society is based on voluntary activity, and is not driven by a desire for political power or an insistence on one's own way of doing things—basically, that is what legislation is all about, only within the rule of law—but is based on the ability to deliver good and moral force on the ground and to help individual people as well as society as a whole.

On the question of schools, higher education and places of learning, which was mentioned, I repeat that we the voluntary sector very much needs to be involved, for a variety of reasons, which I do not need to go into today. I say the same with regard to the whole question of hospitals and hospital trusts. We have had a terrible time in Stafford, with the Mid Staffordshire trust. What went wrong has been exhibited in many parliamentary debates, in statements by Ministers and now in five inquiries—we still need a full public inquiry—but, leaving that aside, the real problem arose when foundation trust status was granted.

The questions asked by the regulator were all about money and finance—I say “all” but, of the 47 questions posed in the session that led to the granting of foundation trust status, 37 were about finance and accountancy and the rest, a small minority, were to do with patient care. The whole thing got off to the wrong start. If it was to operate as a trust and therefore within the framework of the voluntary environment that we are debating today, one would expect the discussion to be the other way around, with 37 questions on patient care and how to help people, rather than on accountancy, targets and how to achieve such things.

That is the essence of what I am trying to get across in the debate: the tremendous value of the voluntary sector is related to the volunteer element, which is itself about commitment to other people—to individuals, families, the neighbourhood and the community—and can come up in the fields of planning, hospital care, schools or the environment and amenities. However, giving that commitment every single opportunity to flourish is essential. Therefore, I very much welcome the opportunity to take part in the debate, if only occasionally to state the obvious.

4.26 pm

Mr. Colin Breed (South-East Cornwall) (LD): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr. Illsley.

During a lot of my time in this place, I have been involved in Treasury matters or debates concerning financial crises, banks and everything else, so it is a great pleasure to participate in a debate about something completely different. I have enjoyed hon. Members' contributions because they have made me think a lot more about the voluntary sector and the part played by the literally hundreds of thousands of people who make a great difference to life in our communities.

Although the hon. Member for High Peak (Tom Levitt) entreated us not to give a great list of things happening in our own constituencies, I will widen my

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contribution a little to mention Cornwall. I know we go on a bit about Cornwall, because it is still one of the poorest places, but when we look at the money raised there and the amount of voluntary work that is done, in some of the most difficult circumstances, we see that it is also one of the most generous places.

We do not recognise volunteers as much as we should, because they tend to be people who just get on with the job. They do not make a great fuss; they get on and do their bit. They enjoy doing their bit, but they remain important. For example, although we will think about the bad things that happen to a few children, we should also consider the amount of good stuff that is done for children, in particular those who are looked after in our communities. I am thinking of our sports clubs—football, rugby, cricket and swimming clubs—which look after far more children than even some of our uniformed youth organisations. Many people make a commitment to young people through youth clubs and the uniformed youth organisations.

I am amazed how many committees quietly get on with community events, such as organising music and drama festivals, or May fairs and pageants. Many people work in schools, hospitals and such. We often see the same people going from one voluntary job to another, but sometimes it is difficult to give them recognition.

I do not think that many Members could do their job without the amazing expertise and support of our citizens advice bureaux. Sometimes we find ourselves giving each other cases, but we work on many together. The professionalism of the CAB is tremendous, as is the way in which it has helped not only my constituents, but me.

Some people work quietly away in organisations such as the Samaritans. In my area, there is a rather high bridge across the Tamar. Sadly, rather too many people still jump off it, but I know that the Samaritans have prevented a huge number of people from taking their own lives.

Some people save lives around our coast, including those in lifeboat organisations—not only those raising money, but those out on the boats risking their own lives to save the lives of others, who have sometimes been rather foolish—and lifeguards in the summer. What would our Cornish tourism sector be like without people who were prepared, even when it is not terribly sunny, to patrol our beaches and look after people who are jumping in the sea?

We have hundreds of miles of footpaths in Cornwall, and people dedicate themselves to keeping them open. It is a great thing to be able to walk with a purpose, but these people, without any recognition, do things such as cutting down brambles and making certain that gates are open.

Some people visit others in their own homes. We have a tremendous “live at home” scheme that helps to ensure that people are not so isolated at home and to make certain that they are okay. For example, every Thursday afternoon, people will visit others for a cup of tea. Others will regularly visit people in prison, and then there are people who drive Age Concern buses or staff museums—the list goes on. There has to be some way in which we can recognise these people locally or

regionally—it will not always be done through the granting of gongs—because they truly make our communities what they are.

Perhaps other hon. Members have experienced, like me, the growing problem that volunteers are beginning to find lots of pressures put on them, including due to considerations of their families and work. For example, if people have to work longer hours and travel further to work, they can devote less time to volunteering than their parents or other family members could. Uniformed organisations and youth clubs, in particular, are coming under real pressure because of people’s ability to commit to the time necessary to be involved.

I regret the bureaucracy that has crept into the system. I understand the need for Criminal Records Bureau checks and so on, but they have undoubtedly made a lot of people apprehensive when they have no need to be—I do not mean about the cost—and not only in respect of working with children. Older people in their 70s and 80s who want to visit other people of the same age can become somewhat apprehensive when they asked what they think about having a CRB check, so they might decide that they do not want to participate. It is terribly sad that we have to think about carrying out a CRB check on an 80-year-old lady who wants to visit somebody else for a cup of tea on a Thursday afternoon.

There is now a fear of litigation, particularly in respect of taking groups of children across Dartmoor on the Ten Tors challenge or for training. That is a cause of great sadness. When I did the Ten Tors back in 1962, there were just a few hundred children involved, but now some 2,000 or 3,000 have the opportunity to participate in the challenge of walking across Dartmoor over a certain period. However, ever fewer people are now prepared to take what they perceive as the risk of looking after children, because they fear litigation and everything else that might be visited upon them. We must recognise the three distinct pressures on volunteering that I have set out and get some balance back into the system.

When I talk about volunteers, I am referring to people who do things off their own bat for no money whatsoever because they want to do it. They are part of a particular sector and they face particular pressures. However, let me mention how the Government can support the charitable sector, to which they provide financial, legislative and administrative support, and perhaps co-operation and co-ordination. That sector is also having difficulties, the most obvious of which, at times of recession, is underfunding. Charities are concerned that the things that they are doing that are going well and are well received might be cut, or that they might receive a smaller grant. They are also concerned that the funding that they raise themselves, such as for air ambulances, will be reduced if people’s disposal income falls and the sums that they are able to give to their favourite charity are reduced.

In the current circumstances, we have to recognise that everybody will have to cut their cloth accordingly. Some small yet vital charitable organisations that do valuable work will be hit quite hard. The larger charities, some of which have been mentioned, will probably already have their plan worked out, as they will have done their financial planning and got in place their accountants, professional fundraisers and advertising.

While those larger charities might suffer a reduction in their overall funding and finances, I fear that we will see a lot more problems at the smaller end, with people desperately trying to keep their organisations going. I hope that the Government recognise that financial support, in one way or another—particularly through local government—is a vital factor in many organisations' ability to operate.

Mr. Cash: I shall be grateful if the hon. Gentleman takes account of a point that I ought to have mentioned. The creation of quangos, with politically appointed members, can lead to discrimination due to the manner in which those so-called voluntary organisations dispense their patronage. Does he agree that it is important that there is a requirement to ensure that they are even-handed?

Mr. Breed: I entirely agree. Many excellent, small charities are beavering away with relatively small sums, but if that money is suddenly withdrawn, for whatever reason, they will find things difficult. I hope that such funding will be part of the totality of any future Government policies.

On the legislative side, may I mention an area that is ripe for thought and consideration? Gift Aid is a fantastic way of getting tax back. However, the system has become too bureaucratic in respect of the different rates, even though the ethos, the principle and everything else is correct. Whatever Government are in power after the next election, I hope that they will look carefully at that—not destroy it, but enhance and improve it so that it becomes less bureaucratic and problematic. A little bit of reform rather than radical surgery is needed to help the process and make it less cumbersome.

Contracts for third sector companies and charities have been mentioned. I wholeheartedly concur with the right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael) about the ability of relatively small organisations to bid for work in rural areas. Their local knowledge will often enable them to do such work, if they are given a little bit of help and support and if the size of the contract is commensurate with their ability to fulfil it.

I often feel that whenever we spend money—whether our own or Government money—the closer the decision is taken to where it is spent, the better the value for money. The further away the decision is taken, the less value is obtained. With much more local decision making, and an ability to support a larger number of smaller local groups to undertake some work, we would get better value for money. We would maintain the fabric of the third sector by giving it the ability to compete properly and undertake such work.

Professionals and amateurs have been mentioned, and there is a story that we must never forget: the Titanic was built and designed by professionals, and the Ark was made by an amateur called Noah. Sometimes we forget that professionalism does not always reside many miles away with a large company.

I also want to mention education and encouragement. Recently, I was greatly encouraged by receiving e-mails from some young people who wanted to join with other young people to do something locally in a charitable context. Whether that is part of the curriculum now, or whether it has suddenly sprung up, there seems to be

a real opportunity to encourage young people to get more involved in the voluntary sector. Whatever happens after the next election, I hope that we can continue to educate young people to become more involved in their communities through opportunities to volunteer, because the side benefits that they will get from that are incalculable.

I was chairman of the Prince's Trust volunteers in my area for about five years when it was first set up. Groups of 16 to 24-year-olds from all sorts of different backgrounds joined to together for team building, and that had a massive effect on people who would not normally mix together. They were certainly not the sort of people who would go down the pub together and have a drink, because they came from different backgrounds, but they got the opportunity to understand each other. People from poorer areas mixed with those from more affluent areas, who perhaps had well-paid jobs, and the individuals learned a lot from each other. The unfortunate thing about the volunteers, however, was that it became difficult for younger people to be released for reasonable periods of time so that they could engage in the scheme. That gives us a valuable lesson, and I think that the process should be reformed.

I said that I have been involved in Treasury matters, and the issue of remutualisation has already been touched on. Although the previous Government enabled the mutual societies to become plcs and ultimately banks, they did not necessarily drive that. Subsequently, the financial sector began to see that lots of small building societies were beginning to come together and merge. Although we had had 400, 500 or 600—or even 700 or 800—building societies, it rapidly became clear that 90 per cent. of the business of building societies was being carried out by five of them. That was a significantly different situation, and the great shame, as much as anything else, was that competition was destroyed. There must be a return to a broader operation of the financial sector. The plcs and huge multinational banks that we now have are not necessarily the gold standard, and there must be room for modern mutuals to come back and be encouraged. Perhaps there needs to be greater emphasis on some of the credit unions. I would prefer them to be slightly bigger and to be called community banks, as that would be a far more sensible name. They would be another way of providing a variety of competition in the financial sector.

There must be some thought as to how modern mutuals can be encouraged under a new legislative framework, and become more involved in the smaller end so that we again have a good spectrum. There has been a flight towards size, and although it might have been thought that fewer but larger banks would be easier to regulate, the obvious examples from recent years give the lie to that. We would have been better off by having a much wider range of financial organisations, rather than relying on a small number of large banks.

There are all sorts of potential opportunities for modern mutuals. Football clubs were mentioned, and there is an opportunity for professional clubs that do not want to go down the plc route to begin to develop as a modern mutual so that supporters both near and far can be involved in their club and provide some measure of financial stability. By reducing the mutual sector in all sorts of spheres and making plcs a sort of gold

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standard, we have lost an awful lot. We need to try and find ways of re-energising the mutual sector.

Finally, as I said at the beginning of my speech, we need to find ways to recognise the amazing work that is done in a voluntary capacity by so many people. Not everybody can get an honour in the new year, but surely we could begin to have a more organised way of recognising genuine service over long periods of time for particular communities. That is what people often like—a little bit of recognition. They have never been paid and have given huge amounts of their time and effort, and sometimes of their own money. We must find a way of rewarding that with some recognition.

4.46 pm

Mr. Nick Hurd (Ruislip-Northwood) (Con): I am still reeling from the shock, as I think I have just listened to a predictably excellent speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) that contained no mention of the European Court of Human Rights. I suspect that he will correct that. It was an excellent and passionate speech that reinforced the point made by all speakers in different ways, which is that in this place we do not talk enough about the value of independent civil society to our sense of national wellbeing. The hon. Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey) was entirely right—Members of Parliament are uniquely placed to articulate that point, because we know from our day-to-day work that what we call the third sector is often the glue that holds our communities together. If I think about what would happen if volunteers did not turn up to the Ruislip scouts group, the churches, the Northwood police station or the Michael Sobell hospice, I get a sense of what we would lose, and it something vital. I am also conscious that I represent a relatively lucky community where that glue is strong. As most of us know, there are too many parts of the country where that glue is weak and needs strengthening.

We must think collectively about how to tackle the stubborn social problems that carry such a big financial and, more importantly, human cost. Whether we like the broken society narrative or not, we are all aware that the problems out there are stubborn and expensive. Most of us recognise from our day-to-day work that if we are looking for solutions, the first place to start is often the voluntary sector and what are frequently small organisations that are that much closer to the people whom we are trying to help, and which enjoy a different relationship of trust and therefore a greater capacity to make an impact.

I am sure that we all have our favourite organisations. I am continually inspired by a social enterprise on the edge of my constituency called Blue Sky, which is the only company in the country where someone has to have a criminal record to work there. It does extraordinary work in helping prisoners to work, under contract to Hillingdon council, so that they can prove to a future employer that they can be trusted. It is a critical stepping stone on the journey off the reoffending cycle. That solution works and could be replicated elsewhere if other local authorities contracted on the same model. At the moment, an important political consensus is being developed that we need to try to create more space to allow those kinds of organisations to do their magic.

Political consensus is important, too, in the role that the Government have to play in helping to support the sector and unlock its potential—again, an expression used by the hon. Member for West Bromwich, West—to help more people and to improve more lives. I suggest that that is why we are here. In their role of supporting the sector, we believe that the Government should focus on three questions.

The first is about what we are doing to make it easier to run a charity, a social enterprise or a voluntary organisation. The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) was entirely right. We believe that, over time, we have allowed an increasingly dense thicket of regulation, bureaucracy and hidden costs to grow for those organisations. The risk is that that will stifle much of the innovation and creativity that we want; it will turn off exactly the sort of people we want to turn on. It is complicated, because a lot of that stuff is there for understandably good reasons, but we have lost sight of the cumulative effect on the sector. We are determined to thin that thicket. The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall was right, too, to highlight Gift Aid as a place to start. It is undeniably an excessively bureaucratic process. The burden of that administration falls on charities, with a disproportionate part falling on smaller charities, which are struggling.

The second question for the Government is what we are doing to get more resources, both time and money, into the sector. The time bit is crucial. The right hon. Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael) and the hon. Member for High Peak (Tom Levitt) were eloquent on that question. I totally agree with the right hon. Gentleman's analysis when he spoke of the potential for more employee-led volunteering, and the need to engage more businesses by structuring their role and inspiring their people to give more time.

What excites me in talking to that community is that more and more businesses see that it is not about public relations or ticking a box on corporate social responsibility. They are doing it because they can see that it is absolutely in their commercial interests to do so; it is about developing their most important assets, which are human. Barclays, KPMG and the people leading on this see that clearly. The challenge is to inspire other business leaders. I shall return to the issue of money later.

The third question, on which I shall focus, is what are we and the Government doing to make it easier for the organisations in that sector to do business with the state? I have been shadow spokesman for just over a year, and everything that I have heard suggests that too often it is a bureaucratic nightmare. To give a specific example, the excellent report by the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government, which we were encouraged to read for the debate and which the Minister mentioned, is deals with the Supporting People programme. The report brings to light a substantial problem—how difficult it is to get the relationship right consistently across the country. The programme is aimed at vulnerable people, and, as the report makes clear, the third sector has a central role in delivery. However, the report shows how difficult it is to get it right and make the relationship work.

What comes through—this is the main point that I wish to make—is how complex we have made that environment. The report gives a picture of different practices in different local authorities and Departments,

of programmes that one minute are ring-fenced and the next not ring-fenced, of new initiatives that have to be pieced in and made coherent, of new apparatus for decision making, of new local area agreements, local strategic partnerships and regional layers, and of changes being made to the assessment regime. We may convince ourselves that things are moving things in the right direction, devolving power and everything else that we sign up to on a cross-party basis, but I wonder whether we have thought enough about what it means to the environment in which people have to work.

Mr. Cash: May I make a small suggestion? There was a time when the friendly societies and mutuals had a similar problem, which resulted from their 19th-century origins. The Friendly Societies Acts and the Companies Acts then dealt with the various circumstances that arose. If we were to have a voluntary societies Act or a third sector Act, that could, without increasing bureaucratisation, simply provide a template against which most others could be judged. That could be a way to help make things simpler and more transparent.

Mr. Hurd: That suggestion is an interesting idea, and the main point made by my hon. Friend is something that I am trying to reinforce. We ought to be in the business of making things simpler, but we are making them really hard.

Mr. Breed: I entirely agree with the hon. Gentleman. One simple way of doing that would be to ensure that there is a sense of proportionality. The problem is that we sometimes have exactly the same rules for Oxfam as for a tiny organisation in a small town. We need a sense of proportionality about the way in which charities are administered and controlled.

Mr. Hurd: I agree. The starting point is a determination that the role of the Government should be to make things simpler.

The report shows how complex the environment is, and how difficult it is for that relationship to work. It is a relationship between two people trying to do something simple and sensible—one person wishing to buy a service and the other wishing to sell or deliver a service. Both of them should be united in their purpose, as it is all about trying to deliver a better outcome to those we are trying to help. The environment in which this simple human transaction is taking place is unbelievably complex.

The problem is that the environment is about to change for the worse. We all know about the state of public finances in our constituencies, and that the funding market for local authorities has been difficult for the past four or five years, but it is about to get even harder, as the authorities know. My local authority of Hillingdon has been very effective in squeezing out efficiencies for the past three or four years—it was recently ranked as the most efficient council in London—but it is now in an environment in which it will have to do the same again. It has reached the point of saying that it cannot necessarily go on as before. It has squeezed the lemon. It almost has to start with a blank sheet of paper and think about what it has to deliver and to open its mind to doing things differently. If that is happening elsewhere, it will present a tremendous opportunity for the third sector, but also a risk and a challenge.

Tom Levitt: I hope that the hon. Gentleman will return to the question of how to make life easier for these organisations. There is nothing easier than setting up a “Just Giving” webpage, as the Gift Aid is then easily sorted out. I have not heard the hon. Gentleman suggest that charity law needs to be changed, or that the health and safety regime should be relaxed. Neither the hon. Gentleman nor the hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) have suggested changing the CRB rules on the grounds of the requirement for some checks. Will the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Hurd) be a little more specific about what changes he would make, bearing in mind that he also complains that things are different in different areas, which suggests that centralisation of the regulations is not necessarily the problem?

Mr. Hurd: I have mentioned Gift Aid, but there are specific considerations relating to making the process easier.

The most important point is that there needs to be a serious step back. We need to consider what has happened over the last 20 years as a result of increasing regulation and bureaucracy. We need to look at it in the round, because it is complex, and much of that stuff is there for a reason. There has been some progress in reducing the time associated with making CRB applications, but there is a lot of frustration about the need for multiple applications. There is a desire for things such as a passporting scheme to be considered. However, I want to talk about making things easier, the relationship between the state and the organisations, which want to step up and help to deliver services, and the frustrations that those organisations face.

The report is interesting because of the themes that it brings up. It illustrates some things that seem to be going wrong, and it is frank about some of the difficulties that the Government face—government is hard. There is clearly a lot of effort on giving clearer guidance to local authority commissioners about things such as EU procurement laws and all the excuses that can be used.

The Department is clear that there is still a serious problem at grassroots level. The guidance is still not clear enough and there is a big problem with helping commissioners to differentiate between value and cost. If that argument is won, there is a need to help with the measurement of value. The Minister knows that there is a lot of debate about measuring value, but the simple point is that finding money, whether public or private, will be more demanding when we want to measure value and impacts. The Government can play a role by working with the sector to find mechanisms to help commissioners to identify and quantify impact and value, and that will help in an environment in which the natural human tendency will always be driven by cost. If we believe that there is a distinction between value and cost, the people who are trying to make the process work will need some help from us.

Another theme that comes through in the report is the difficulty of spreading best practice. Some local authorities and commissioners are doing that well. The Compact works well in Merton, which I am sure the Minister and others have visited. There are local authorities that are very clear, nimble, flexible and agile in their dealing with EU procurement law, such as Hampshire and Westminster, which have been cited. We always talk

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about spreading best practice—it is one of the clichés of the political narrative—but why is it so hard in practice? The report talks about using regional improvement and efficiency partnerships, but I am sceptical about that idea, because another regional layer would be introduced and that would add to the confusion. We already have the Local Government Association, the Improvement and Development Agency and lots of people trying to help but, collectively, they are not making an impact, so that needs some thought.

On the commissioning process and the difficulty of accessing public money, we need to revisit all the things that flow from that, such as reporting, monitoring and accountability. The example that sticks in my mind is of a gentleman who represented a community group in Dorset standing up at a conference, waving a document at me and saying, “I applied for a contract of just a few thousand pounds from my local authority, and I’m having to fill in a 28-page contract. This is bonkers.” More dramatically, a social entrepreneur told me that he had received £500,000 from a private sector grant-making organisation on the basis of four agreed desired outcomes. One piece of paper framed that entire relationship. He then got £1 million, which is a lot of money, from a Government Department, but he told me that he wished that he had not, because of what happened next. That Department hired an agency as an intermediary to manage the relationship, and the agency came in and checked his diary, e-mails and phone logs to see what he was doing.

The message that I get, and I am sure the Minister has picked up on this as well, is that our message to the sector is wrong. On the one hand, we say that we love its creativity and powers of innovation but, on the other hand, what we put it through with the contracting and commissioning process sends the message, “We don’t trust you.” The focus in the House has to be on what we can do to reduce bureaucracy and the flurry of activity in the name of accountability, and how we can introduce more trust into the process of commissioning and procurement.

My last point in that context is about more effective checks and balances in the system. The Compact is clearly very useful, but it is undermined by the fact that it can be ignored with impunity. It is time to get serious about giving the commission a clearer role and recognised authority. Greater transparency, about which we feel strongly, is another important tool in the box. There should be transparency about public money and the terms and values of contracts and grants. That is why our commitment to publish details of all public expenditure over £25,000 will be an important catalyst for driving better processes. Transparency, as we know in the House to our cost, can be a powerful force for change.

Mr. Cash: Does my hon. Friend agree that ensuring that he gets the accountability—to use that expression—right in this context does not mean doing so to the extent that the object of the exercise is lost because people spend all their time bean counting and not carrying out the job in question and the supervision that goes with it?

Mr. Hurd: My hon. Friend touches on a fundamental point: accountability to whom. At the moment, as we know, local authorities feel a tremendous sense of

accountability to Whitehall. With the devolution of power, the basis of accountability will shift to the communities that they serve. Transparency is an important tool in that process.

I would like to make a final point about money, which we have not really touched on. Above all else, the sector needs money, because demand for its services will always outstrip supply. As various hon. Members have mentioned, the recession has proved a particularly demanding environment for the sector when accessing money. I see the situation relatively simply, in that there are three main sources of money for the sector.

First, there is public sector money from the opportunity to deliver services. That amount has grown and will continue to grow, because the sector’s share of the cake will grow, even if the cake shrinks. Secondly, there is philanthropy, which has struggled to make progress, and we have said that we need a concerted effort to deliver a step change in cultural attitudes to giving. The third pillar is embryonic and small, but it has fascinating potential. It is called social investment, and it is money from sources that are prepared to consider a blend of traditional financial return and social impact. That source is worth about £1 billion, but it could be worth a great deal more. We see an opportunity to connect the social entrepreneur with the strategic capital. At the moment, they are disconnected and speak different languages. For the market to grow, we need a strong intermediary that can make the connection and create the financial products that make sense for mainstream capital.

Mr. Cash: I am extremely interested in that suggestion. In a sense, it was what I was referring to. In the 19th century, people created the railways and other things out of nothing. They also created the companies that led to the building societies, the insurance companies and so on. That was driven by the very thing to which my hon. Friend is referring—social investment.

Mr. Hurd: Our instinct tells us that people are looking for the opportunity to invest significant capital for good, but that process needs help. That is why we have strongly supported the idea of the social investment bank for some time. There has been widespread consensus on that for three years, but we still do not have the bank. When will we get it? On my travels around the sector, I have heard two concerns: first, that the Government do not have a clear enough vision of the potential of the social investment bank or of what it will do; and, secondly, that the Government, in a last-minute dash to be seen to be doing something, might create something half-baked that does not capture the full potential of such an institution.

There is concern that the Government’s commitment of up to £75 million of capital is inadequate compared with the capitalisation that the sector feels is right. I would like the Minister to put on record confirmation of the Government’s intent. Will the Budget, as promised, make it clearer what model they are considering, and is the £75 million a stepping stone on a journey towards higher capitalisation? We and the sector think that the social investment bank would be an improvement, but there is frustration over how long it is taking to put into place an organisation that could play an important role in connecting social entrepreneurs with the strategic capital that they need.

5.10 pm

Angela E. Smith: With leave, Mr. Illsley, I should like to respond to some of the issues raised in the debate. I will happily come back to some of the points made by the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood (Mr. Hurd), but I will have to disappoint him because I cannot give him any Budget secrets today. He will have to wait a few days longer for the Budget.

I thank hon. Members for their contributions. The debate has been wide ranging and diverse, which reflects the nature of the sector. We need to look at the third sector as a whole and the report itself. I am sad that no members of the Select Committee were present to debate the report, because that would have been a very useful contribution.

What we have firmly placed on record today is how we as a Government, a Parliament and a society value the third sector—small voluntary community organisations, volunteers and large social enterprises and charities—for the contributions that it makes.

Let me turn to the comments of my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth (Alun Michael). When I stopped working in the third sector, I went to work for my right hon. Friend. I could say that he taught me everything that I know, but I will not. The points that he made about mutuals and co-ops were timely. He will be aware that my right hon. Friend, the Minister for the Cabinet Office and for the Olympics, and Paymaster General has been meeting a number of people and is driving this agenda forward.

Partly as a response to the banking crisis and some of the issues that have led us into an international recession, the public no longer has an appetite for “business as usual”. When engaging with business—whether as consumers, investors or employees—they are attracted to and supportive of a business model that is not the same as it always has been. I was encouraged by the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) when he talked about the very genuine commitment there is to mutualism and the co-operative movement. In the early days, people who were involved in the co-op movement were regarded as slightly whacky, but now the ideas are becoming far more mainstream in political thinking. It may have taken us since 1844 and the Rochdale Pioneers—over 160 years ago—to get where we are today, but new thinking is always welcome. The ideas of the pioneers are as appropriate today as they were then.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth mentioned StartHere, which shows the value of the third sector in bringing together the kind of issues and support that is needed to help some of our vulnerable groups. I would be happy to discuss that matter further with him.

The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall (Mr. Breed) talked about the value of volunteering. He asked questions about the Criminal Records Bureau and the vetting and barring system. I am not sure whether his example, in which someone goes to have a cup of tea with someone once a week, qualifies. The system is there to protect young people and the most vulnerable people. Society demands that the Government have a process in place to protect people. We need to strike the right balance between giving the protection that Government are able to offer and not creating a bureaucracy that deters people from volunteering. Some individuals may be put

off from volunteering by the vetting system, but the majority of people are not deterred. CRB checks have prevented more than 80,000 unsuitable people from taking on jobs or volunteering, which shows how important they are. It may reassure the hon. Gentleman if I tell him that checks for volunteers are free. The Singleton report, which the Government have accepted, strikes the balance between not being over-bureaucratic and not unnecessarily deterring people from volunteering.

My hon. Friend the Member for High Peak (Tom Levitt), like my right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth, called on his own knowledge and practical experience of the sector. He raised some policing issues. Let me tell him that the Home Office and the Association of Chief Police Officers have now launched a compact between them. Knowing his commitment to the Compact, I think that he will find that of particular interest. I have to say that I met Rosie, his V volunteer, at the V volunteer awards. I feel passionate about the V volunteer awards and talent awards. I saw young people who have been engaged in the volunteering process for a whole year. Many of them were working in the field of youth justice. Over the year, they gained confidence and an ability to engage. The process made them more ready for employment or higher education. Young people cannot acquire such skills easily; they have to make the effort themselves.

Various Members raised the issue of campaigning. I touched on the subject myself in my opening remarks, but I will need to read *Hansard* to ensure that I have correctly understood the comments made by the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash). I welcome the comment made by the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood, who said that he believes in advocacy—it was a step on the right road—but advocacy and campaigning are not the same thing. We would all expect third sector organisations to be advocates for their cause, but how far they are able to campaign is an important issue. I hope that he does not get into too much trouble with the rest of the Conservative Front-Bench team after the comments that he has made today.

The hon. Member for Stone, if I understood him correctly, differentiated between service providers in organisations and those who are able to campaign. He spoke of local organisations in his constituency. Next week, I will chair a meeting in the Bulphan area of my constituency that will be attended by local residents whose homes have been flooded and by local pressure groups. Both groups will come together in the way in which he described the groups in his constituency.

It is right for organisations and charities to campaign—I am not talking about campaigning for or against a political party—because they are ideally placed to do so, even, as I said in my opening remarks, when it is uncomfortable for the Government. I use the example of the RSPCA purely because I met an RSPCA inspector this week during my work. RSPCA inspectors do a fantastic job in the areas of animal welfare, homing animals and responding to animals in distress. They are at the forefront of the organisation. They are hugely admired by society as a whole, but because of the work that they do, they become acutely aware of the problems that need to be addressed, and they are not alone in that. The Animal Welfare Act 2006 received the support of many Members across the House because the issues were brought to their attention by organisations such as

[Angela E. Smith]

the RSPCA. There was no party political campaigning, because all parties supported the legislation, and the organisations were justified in their actions.

Mr. Cash: Will the Minister give way?

Angela E. Smith: Let me finish my point, and then I will happily give way. I am seeking to illustrate the fact that those who provide services become aware of certain things that need to be changed, and it could be argued that they have a duty to draw those issues to the attention of legislators and to campaign for change.

Mr. Cash: The phrase “political purposes”, which is the test against which so much of this is defined, is itself extremely difficult to define and will remain so. However, I think that I am right in saying that the RSPCA has occasionally got itself into difficulties in relation to the manner in which it dispenses some of its funds. I am not criticising it, but saying that there have been difficulties. The National Trust, too, has had difficulties in relation to the use of its land. The fact is that political campaigning—without making an absolutely clear distinction with purely political campaigning—quite often overlaps with social campaigning. It is difficult to draw a line between the two. It is not for us to solve that problem in this debate, but I ask the Minister to go away and seek more detail and analysis. I think that she will find that the definition of “political purposes” is becoming more and more difficult to understand.

Angela E. Smith: It is difficult; the hon. Gentleman is right. How do we define social rather than political campaigning? Any campaign can be defined as political that seeks to make social change. However, I was trying to illustrate the fact that those who deliver services see what changes are required to deliver those services better, and it is right and proper that they should draw them to the attention of councillors or MPs who can effect change.

Alun Michael: Surely, it is not that difficult. If an organisation has clear charitable objects, any campaigning must be clearly within and consistent with those objects. To constrain that would be wrong. A prime example is the Alzheimer’s Society or an organisation dealing with a particular disability. Such organisations provide services to people who cannot have a voice of their own. Surely, we must be protective of organisations that seek to represent the interests of those who are clearly within their charitable objects.

Angela E. Smith: That is absolutely right. It is cause for concern when organisations are prevented from campaigning on behalf of the people—or animals—whom they were set up to represent.

My right hon. Friend the Member for Cardiff, South and Penarth mentioned the Compact and the refreshed Compact, which ties into the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West (Mr. Bailey). The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood mentioned my breach of the Compact. One important thing about the Compact is that it established a framework for the relationship between the Government and the sector. It is important that we embed that through the

Government. That does not mean that there will never be another breach of the Compact; it means that the Government must understand the value of the Compact not just to the organisation concerned, but to the Government.

My right hon. Friend and I worked on the issue before I was an MP, when he was a shadow Minister for the third sector. The whole point of the Compact was that it gave a different relationship between the Government and the sector, from which both benefited. The Government see the value of three-year contracts being the norm, for example. It would not be something that the Government were doing for the sector; it would be a partnership relationship and a different way of working.

I am keen for the refreshed Compact to be implemented and monitored, not in a censorious way that says “Your Department’s very bad; it’s broken the Compact on X number of occasions,” but in a way that says, “This is a really good example of Compact working; this works well,” and asks why it works well, why the Department thinks it works well and how other Departments can learn from it and use the Compact in a way that works well for them. I have shared the frustrations of the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood about spreading best practice on more than one occasion. It does not seem that difficult. If we can get it right sometimes, why can we not get it right most of the time? That is what I am trying to do with the Compact. It should be the normal, common-sense way of working, and all sides should benefit.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West mentioned financial pressures on local authorities that are making meeting the Compact more difficult locally. I met Regional Action West Midlands when I was in Birmingham last week. It is doing excellent work on procurement and working with local authorities. The case must be made to local authorities as well that they can benefit from the Compact. In a tighter spending round, when their finances are more constrained, a framework within which they could work with the sector would bring huge benefits to them as well as to the sector. Having seen RAWM’s work on procurement and a new framework, I think that it is well placed to make that case to local authorities in the area.

The hon. Member for South-East Cornwall discussed funding. He is concerned about small local community groups that might find themselves in greater difficulty. I direct him to the Government grass-roots grant scheme, which is aimed particularly at smaller groups. Grants start at £250 and run up to £5,000. His point about decisions being made by funders closer to those receiving funding applies to the scheme, because community development foundations make the awards. As he will know, for many organisations, particularly those that rely on volunteers, that kind of money can make a huge difference. I appreciate that he might not have been aware of the scheme. Some organisations in his constituency might find it useful.

The hon. Gentleman did not take the wise advice of my hon. Friend the Member for High Peak; he referred to work done in his constituency. I think that what he said resonated with every Member here. We all have similar organisations in our constituency. He asked about gift aid. We made changes to gift aid when we came into government. As his shadow Treasury team will be aware, we are looking into gift aid and undertaking

research, particularly into the higher rate. Gift aid is worth more than £900 million a year to charities. It is huge. We are proud of the support that we are giving to charities through gift aid.

The hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood and my hon. Friend the Member for West Bromwich, West mentioned commissioning. We are providing training and support for commissioners and working with the Improvement and Development Agency. The issue relates to the social return on investment model, which we discussed earlier. To respond to the comments of the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood, we need to value the social impact of third sector organisations that undertake contracts on behalf of local authorities or health bodies. There are ways to do that, although the idea is still in its infancy. Some local authorities are working it into their contracts.

The key is often to have commissioners who understand the role of the third sector and the wider benefits that it brings in terms of the social return on a contract. That is not just about the narrow confines of what the organisation is being asked to deliver; it is about asking what extra can be gained for the area from the organisation undertaking the contract. That will become more and more important as time goes by, funding becomes harder and people want more for the same money. If a social return can be proved, that is even better. Capacity builders are providing advice and guidance on the issue, and a Cabinet Committee is specifically considering how we can remove barriers to third sector organisations.

I think that I have addressed most hon. Members' points, although I have not yet addressed all the points raised by the hon. Member for Ruislip-Northwood. What can we do to make things easier for charities? The Charities Act 2006 removed many of the obstacles, but we are still implementing some proposals. It makes a difference to be able to reduce bureaucracy. There is still

more that we can do. At the moment, I am considering reporting arrangements for organisations receiving funding, whether from grants or contracts. There seems to be so much different information for such organisations. There must be some way that we can narrow down and standardise the necessary reporting to take into account proportionality, which hon. Members have mentioned.

On resources, our support for volunteering has been unprecedented, and it is important to recognise the impact that it has had on society. I mentioned grass-roots grants, which supply finance to small organisations as well as larger ones, and our package of support, which has increased significantly since 1997, particularly recession support.

On doing business with the state—the social wholesale investment bank was particularly mentioned—the Government are absolutely committed to the issue. The responses to our consultation were clear about what kind of social wholesale investment bank was sought. However, we must get the structure and financing right, and we must not make the bank the only route for social investment. The Government will set up the social wholesale investment bank in the best way that we can to leverage social finance into social businesses, but we will also consider how else we can obtain other, private capital. Our initial £75 million commitment is the greatest commitment that any Government has ever made to put social capital into social businesses. We are committed to increasing social investment, because we know that social businesses and enterprises can make a difference by working with the public and private sectors to deliver services and benefits to the community.

Question put and agreed to.

5.29 pm

Sitting adjourned.

Written Ministerial Statements

Thursday 11 March 2010

TREASURY

Double Taxation Agreement (Bahrain)

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): A Double Taxation Agreement with Bahrain was signed on 10 March. The text of the agreement has been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and made available on HM Revenue and Customs' website. The text will be scheduled to a draft Order in Council and laid before the House of Commons in due course.

CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

Common Assessment Framework

The Minister for Children, Young People and Families (Dawn Primarolo): I am announcing today progress in the implementation of the National electronic Common Assessment Framework system (National eCAF)

Many children and young people in England need support from a range of services because they have additional needs. The Common Assessment Framework (CAF), which came about as part of the Every Child Matters reforms, plays a crucial part in delivering this for them. The CAF is designed to help practitioners to assess the additional needs of children and young people when they emerge, and to work together to meet them. CAF is used only with the consent of children and young people, or their parents and carers as appropriate. Since its introduction in 2006 thousands of practitioners have been trained in the CAF and are now using it successfully in their day-to-day work.

CAF information is currently recorded using a paper format or on local systems. A new system to electronically enable the CAF, called National eCAF, will be made available from 22 March 2010 to a small group of early adopter organisations who have applied to take part in this scheme. They comprise four local authorities—Birmingham, Cambridgeshire, Northamptonshire and Walsall, and two voluntary organisations—Barnardo's and Kids. Information will be held on National eCAF, as with the CAF, only with the explicit consent of the child or young person, or their parents or carers as appropriate.

The security of National eCAF is of paramount importance. Only authorised, trained practitioners with enhanced Criminal Records Bureau checks will be able to use National eCAF; they will also need a token and a password to access the system.

We have worked closely with professionals and partner organisations on the development of National eCAF to date, and we will continue to do so as we develop the system further, and in the light of the experience of early adopter organisations.

For more information, please visit www.dcsf.gov.uk/ecm/ecaf.

Secondary School Applications and Offers 2010 (Statistics)

The Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families (Ed Balls): My Department is today publishing the statistical release "Secondary School Applications and Offers 2010" which can be viewed on the DCSF Research and Statistics Gateway. This statistical release was produced by officials working under the direction of Government statisticians in accordance with the code of practice for official statistics and was released at 9.30 today.

The schools admissions code and related legislation ensure that all school places are awarded in an open, fair and transparent way. We have outlawed unfair and covert admission practices which disadvantage low-income families. The code has transformed the admissions system by placing parents and families at the heart of the process, helping them to choose the best school for their child. We have extended the role of the independent schools adjudicator, ensuring he is there to champion fair access for all, allowing him to look into any admission arrangements that parents feel are unfair or overly complicated as well as requiring him to monitor compliance and report to me annually.

The Information as to Provision of Education (England) Regulations 2008 require local authorities (LAs) to submit data to the Department on how many families received an offer of a place at one of their preferred secondary schools. This year on Monday 1 March, almost 530,000 families were advised as to which secondary school their child was being offered a place at.

Today we are publishing validated data, based on returns from 151 LAs, showing that across the country 83.2 per cent. of families received an offer at their first preference school—the same percentage as last year. A further 8.6 per cent. of families were offered a place at their second preference school and 94.9 per cent. were offered a place at one of their three preferred schools. In total, 96.6 per cent. of families were offered a place at one of their preferred schools. I am placing a copy of these data in the Libraries of both Houses.

There is considerable variation nationally. Outside of London, more than 86 per cent. of parents were offered a place in their first preference school. For Greater London, this figure is 66 per cent. However across London, almost 94 per cent. of pupils have been offered a place at one of their chosen schools.

Parents have the right of appeal against any application that has been turned down; and over the summer, local authorities and schools will be re-allocating places where others have moved address or chosen a different route of education for their child.

Parents now have a fairer choice because of our action to enforce the code, and also more real choice because there has been a transformation in the quality of our state schools. More schools are judged by Ofsted as outstanding. In 1997, 45.1 per cent. of pupils achieved five or more A*-C at GCSE compared to 69.7 per cent. in 2009. No Government have done more to reduce failure. In 1997 half of all secondary schools were below the basic benchmark of 30 per cent. of pupils achieving 5A*-C at GCSE including English and maths, it is now one in 13.

We will continue to look at ways to improve the admissions system to ensure that it has families and children firmly at its heart. I will today place a copy of a report by the chief schools adjudicator on misleading applications for school places in the Libraries of both Houses along with my response.

While the chief schools adjudicator has found that only a tiny minority of applications are misleading, this is clearly an important issue. Every place that is awarded through deception is denying another child their rightful place. I accept the findings of the report and will work with the adjudicator on addressing the issue.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan Troops

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Bob Ainsworth):

Over the past 12 months, and principally as a result of the uplift in US forces announced by President Obama in December 2009, International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troop numbers in Helmand province have risen from around 7,700 to over 20,000. In the light of this increase in the resources available to them, ISAF commanders are considering options for rebalancing forces in the province in order to ensure that international troops can have the greatest effect in countering the threat posed by the insurgency and protecting the civilian population. As a first step, General McChrystal, Commander ISAF, and General Carter, Commander Regional Command (South), have agreed that responsibility for the security of Musa Qaleh district, in the Upper Helmand Valley, will be transferred from UK to US forces over the coming weeks.

Ministers have been consulted throughout ISAF's decision-making process and we fully support the transfer of Musa Qaleh as the logical next stage in adjusting the distribution of security responsibility in Helmand, as the US establishes its presence in the north of the province. The transfer will allow UK troops to be redeployed from Musa Qaleh to central Helmand, the most heavily populated area of the province, where the majority of our troops are already based. The thickening of our force density in central Helmand will allow us to continue the progress over the last 12 months in increasing our emphasis on partnering and training the Afghan national security forces and will reaffirm our central role in delivering General McChrystal's population-focused counter-insurgency approach, both of which are key elements of ISAF's strategy to defeat the insurgency and build a stable and secure Afghanistan.

Further changes are likely in due course, as the ISAF force laydown continues to evolve to increase the presence of ISAF and Afghan forces across the main population centres in the province. We will make further announcements at the appropriate point as decisions are made.

UK forces first deployed to Musa Qaleh in summer 2006. The history of our involvement since then reflects the complexity of the campaign, but our objectives throughout have remained clear: to protect the population against the insurgency and to reinforce the legitimate Afghan Government. Over the period in which we have been responsible for security there, 23 British service

personnel have lost their lives in the district. However, through their professionalism and courage, and that of their colleagues, insurgent activity in the district centre has been contained, the authority of the legitimate Afghan Government has been reinforced, and there has been steady progress on governance and development, especially in the last 12 months, as the daily lives of its citizens have been improved. While responsibility for security will now transfer to US forces, the UK will remain committed to building on the progress of development through the ongoing activities of the UK-led Helmand provincial reconstruction team in Musa Qaleh.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture and Fisheries Council (22 February)

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

The Minister with responsibility 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 22 February. Richard Lochhead MSP also attended. It was also the first Council for Commissioners Ciolos and Dalli.

On animal welfare labelling there was a first exchange of views on the Commission's communication for labelling food to reflect the animal welfare status of their production. Discussions showed some common ground among member states, not least on a call for any welfare labelling system to be simple, clear, voluntary and allow for higher levels than the EU minimum. There were also calls for a thorough cost-benefit analysis of any proposals so as not to place undue burden on producers, but conversely it was also acknowledged that welfare labelling could provide producers with new market opportunities. There was little discussion of the concept of EU animal welfare reference centres.

Next, the Presidency tabled a paper on the future of market management measures (MMMs) under the common agricultural policy (CAP). Most member states believed the current degree of market orientation to be sufficient, while others (including the UK) believed the degree to be insufficient. The majority of member states also thought the existing suite of MMMs were efficient but not sufficient for the future given the increasing prevalence of price and income volatility. The UK was among those that welcomed the expected abolition of export refunds—and Commissioner Ciolos confirmed that their abolition was a core element of the EU's DDA position—and also doubted the utility of MMMs across the piece. A number of member states also called for additional MMMs, while a bloc—the UK included—remained sceptical of adding to the existing instruments.

Commissioner Ciolos stressed that there would be no return to the pre-2003 days of market management. The Presidency noted the views around the table and set out its intention to submit draft Council conclusions to the Special Committee on Agriculture—SCA.

Italy requested Council to approve extension of its state aid scheme to support land purchases, calling for European solidarity. The application required Council approval because it was outside regular state aid rules.

A number of member states indicated they would vote against, therefore the Presidency halted the discussion, noting that the Council was not unanimous.

There were a number of items under any other business. Portugal—supported by the UK and some other member states—urged the Commission once more to take action to increase supplies of raw sugar for the EU cane refining industry. The Commission demurred, but promised to continue to monitor the situation.

The Netherlands expressed its concern about increased trade in illegal ivory and noted that the number of seizures had doubled last year. As this was not directly Agriculture Council business, the Commissioner recognised the widespread concern on this issue, which he would pass on to his colleagues.

Greece outlined its concern about the impact of the financial crisis on its agricultural sector, in particular calling for additional market management measures to prevent crises developing.

Commissioner Ciolos responded to a written French request to intervene in support of the cereals market, stressing that there was no justification to activate additional market management measures—intervention was already open—and that the prospects for the market for 2010 were optimistic.

Poland made a plea for the date of the entry into force of the ban on the use of conventional cages for laying hens to be delayed for five years to 2017. Commissioner Dalli responded that a delay would be a major step backwards, would undermine EU law, and would confuse producers, and urged member states to take full advantage of money available through rural development funding to help their respective industries adapt.

On BSE testing, Belgium suggested that it should be able to move from controlled risk to negligible risk status, and increase the age for BSE testing to 60 months from 48. Commissioner Dalli suggested that this would be considered as part of a suite of amendments being considered to BSE controls as part of the revised TSE Roadmap which will be published in May.

Finally, Council took note of the update given by the Netherlands on the Q fever situation, the rigorous measures they are taking, and the international conference on Q fever that the Netherlands will host.

HEALTH

Violence Against Women and Children (Taskforce)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Health (Ann Keen): Today, on behalf of the Government, I formally welcome the report from the independent Taskforce on the Health Aspects of Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC).

The taskforce, led by Sir George Alberti, was established in May 2009 to identify the role of the national health service in responding to women and children who are victims of violence. It created four sub-groups to examine domestic violence; sexual violence against women; child

sexual abuse; and harmful traditional practices (female genital mutilation, forced marriage, honour-based violence) and trafficking.

It brings together expertise from the health service, third sector and academia, and its report sets out recommendations on what more the NHS needs to do to improve its response to victims of violence. Women and children service users and NHS staff were also consulted to inform the report.

I welcome the messages in the report and would like to thank Sir George and the members of the taskforce steering group and four sub-groups for all the work that went into this report and those of the sub-groups. The health service has a crucial role to play in identifying and treating victims and it is important that we are able to support victims effectively and sensitively and to prevent them from becoming victims of any further violence.

Alongside the independent report, the Department has today published an interim Government response to the recommendations setting out our proposed next steps. A more detailed implementation plan will be drawn up by the autumn.

I am placing a copy of the report in the Library and copies are available to hon. Members from the Vote Office.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Police Report Card

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Counter-Terrorism (Mr. David Hanson): I am pleased to report that Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary (HMIC) is launching today the police report card, which is a significant milestone for both the police and the public. The police report card gives the public a clear independent view on the quality of policing in their local area. An interactive website called mypolice will be launched soon.

The delivery of this assessment is an important milestone in the new role of HMIC. It follows the excellent work that the police and their partners have achieved in reducing crime by 36 per cent. since 1997, raising public confidence and ensuring that the risk of being a victim is at its lowest point ever.

I am placing a summary of the police report card in the House Library.

Police Collaboration (Legislation and Statutory Guidance)

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Counter-Terrorism (Mr. David Hanson): I am today announcing that on 12 March we will commence the provisions in section 5 of the Policing and Crime Act governing collaboration arrangements in the police service and will also be publishing statutory guidance to support those provisions.

Commitments were made in Parliament during the debate of the Policing and Crime Bill that these revised provisions would be fully supported and clarified by the issuing of guidance. That commitment was reinforced in our recent White Paper, "Protecting the Public: Supporting the Police to Succeed", and I am pleased to confirm our delivery on that promise now.

The revisions to the provisions in the Police Act 1996 governing collaboration arrangements for police forces and police authorities have been welcomed by the service. They provide greater clarity to the complex questions of how the service should make formal arrangements to work more closely together in order to deliver better, more efficient services for the public, while ensuring appropriate governance mechanisms are maintained and the responsibilities and duties of individual participants are upheld. These new provisions also include the new ability for collaboration agreements between police forces to transfer direction and control between chief officers, as appropriate for individual arrangements, as specified by the agreement.

The new statutory guidance supporting this legislation has been developed through extensive consultation throughout the service and has been endorsed by the Association of Chief Police Officers, the Association of Police Authorities, Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary, the National Policing Improvement Agency and the Police Advisory Board of England and Wales, all of whom have made a significant contribution to its content. This statutory guidance is further supported by an electronic toolkit providing both statutory and more practical advice to police practitioners embarking on new collaboration plans.

Both the statutory guidance and its supporting toolkit will be copied to all police force chief officers, police authority chairs and chief executives and other key stakeholder organisations and individuals. The statutory guidance will also be made available from the Home Office website.

JUSTICE

UK Supreme Court (Final Set-Up Costs)

The Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor (Mr. Jack Straw): The Supreme Court of the United Kingdom came into being on 1 October 2009 and was delivered on time and within budget by the Ministry of Justice. I promised to keep the House informed of the final costs of the Supreme Court Implementation Programme, and I am therefore pleased to announce that the implementation costs of £57.6 million are £1.3 million below the estimated set-up figure of £58.9 million that was announced in Parliament on 3 July 2008.

This figure is made up of £33.7 million for capital construction using a lease and leaseback arrangement over 30 years, £19.4 million of other set-up costs (including library costs, visitor facilities programme team costs, furniture, IT services) and £1.5 million for additional repairs to Middlesex Guildhall. In addition the figure also includes the £3.0 million cost of the external security works, in line with the Whitehall Streetscape Programme, which was not included in the previously announced estimated figure of £58.9m.

The establishment of the Supreme Court represents a major milestone in the Government's constitutional reform agenda. It has given greater clarity to our constitutional arrangements, achieving a clear and physical separation of the judiciary from the legislature and the executive and improving the visibility of and accessibility to the highest court in the UK.

Sentencing Guidelines Council (Annual Report)

The Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor (Mr. Jack Straw): I have laid today before Parliament the final joint Annual Report of the Sentencing Guidelines Council and the Sentencing Advisory Panel. The report gives details of the excellent work they have achieved during the past 10 years, which the Sentencing Council, created by the Coroners and Justice Act 2009, will build upon in future. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all members, past and present, of both bodies for their hard work in realising the significant achievements of the last decade.

Coroner System Reform (Consultation)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Bridget Prentice): The Government are today publishing a consultation paper to seek views on aspects of policy that will inform the drafting of secondary legislation to be made under part 1 (Coroners Etc) of the Coroners and Justice Act 2009.

Our consultation paper seeks views on the following nine policy areas:

- The specific types of deaths which should be reported to coroners for investigation.

- The criteria, and financial arrangements, for transferring cases from one coroner to another.

- Post-mortem examinations.

- The application of coroner powers of entry, search and seizure.

- Coroners' disclosure of relevant documents to bereaved families and others with a core interest.

- The conduct of inquests.

- The new appeals and complaints systems.

- The training of coroners, their officers and other support staff.

- Short death certificates.

The consultation will run until 1 July 2010. Following the subsequent development of the secondary legislation, we plan to share it, in draft, in a further consultation in 2011. The intention remains to implement the bulk of the Act's coroner provisions in April 2012.

Today, I have deposited copies of the consultation paper in the Libraries of both Houses. Copies are also available in the Vote Office and Printed Paper Office. Copies are available on the internet at: www.justice.gov.uk.

Prison Transfers Prior to HMCIP Inspections

The Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor (Mr. Jack Straw): In my statement of 20 October 2009, *Official Report*, column 53WS, I announced a review of the transfer of prisoners prior to inspection. This will be published on 11 March 2010. The review was conducted by the director of analytical services at the Ministry of Justice and HMCIP and was commissioned after an investigation by the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) discovered that 11 prisoners were subject to temporary transfers around the time of inspection. Six were moved from Pentonville to Wandsworth immediately prior to the Pentonville inspection (11 to 15 May), and five from Wandsworth to Pentonville

immediately prior to the Wandsworth inspection (1 to 5 June). The investigation found that the 11 transfers had been arranged as deliberate attempts to manipulate the outcomes of the inspections.

Subsequently allegations were made regarding transfers from Brixton prison around the time of inspection. A separate investigation concluded that these were also deliberate attempts to manipulate the outcome of the prison inspection. A separate investigation commissioned by the Director of Offender Management for London found that three prisoners had been transferred out of Brixton prison on the day the prison's inspection began in April 2008. Two prisoners were held in HMP High Down and one in HMP Wandsworth. All three returned to Brixton after the inspection was completed. As a result, four members of staff were charged under the Prison Service's Code of Conduct and Discipline. Two later had their charges dismissed, one was found guilty of serious unprofessional conduct and received a written warning and the fourth was found guilty of unprofessional conduct and received an oral warning.

The wider investigation focused on identifying patterns of movement which were similar to those at HMPs Pentonville, Wandsworth and Brixton. The defining characteristics of these transfers were transfers to and from a prison where all transfers out of the prison took place on the same day; and all transfers back to the prison took place on the same day; and the time spent in the second prison was very short compared to other transfers at the time of inspection. In addition some prisoners had been transferred who should not have been transferred for medical reasons.

By analysing these characteristics around the time of all inspections it was found that the practice identified at Wandsworth, Pentonville and Brixton was not widespread but there were some features that warranted further investigation.

One other prison had transferred a prisoner at the time of inspection who should not have been moved for medical reasons and six prisons transferred prisoners who should not have been moved for security reasons.

These details were passed to the NOMS for further investigation. These cases were investigated by NOMS found that none of these were a deliberate attempt to manipulate HMCIP inspections.

In addition a selection of other cases where transfers took place at the time of inspection but did not have the same characteristics as the transfers which took place between Wandsworth and Pentonville were also sent to NOMS for investigation. This was to ensure that there were not other methods being used to carry out this practice.

Following this work, the report concludes that there is no evidence that the practice identified in the transfers between Wandsworth and Pentonville and also at Brixton took place at any other prison. However, improvements can be made to the system to prevent such incidents occurring in the future.

Prisons will be required to submit details of all transfers in the four weeks prior to inspection to HMCIP upon arrival then any movement of prisoners with security or medical reasons for not being transferred would be identified.

Secondly, the analysis conducted here will be repeated annually to check for any further suspicious patterns.

A copy of the report has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and is available on: www.justice.gov.uk/publications/prison-transfers.htm

PRIME MINISTER

Intelligence and Security Committee Annual Report 2008-2009

The Prime Minister (Mr. Gordon Brown): I have laid today before the House the Intelligence and Security Committee's Annual Report 2008-2009 (Cm7807). This follows consultation with the Committee over matters that could not be published without prejudicing the work of the intelligence and security agencies.

I have also laid before the House today the Government's response to this report (Cm7808). Copies of the report and the response have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

I am grateful to the Intelligence and Security Committee for its valuable work.

Petitions

Thursday 11 March 2010

PRESENTED PETITIONS

Petitions presented to the House on Wednesday 10 March 2010 but not read on the Floor

Council Tax Collection

The Petition of Mr. Martin Burke of Elizabeth Regina Love,

Declares that if a Manchester City Council tax payer is late in paying an instalment they will often unexpectedly receive a court summons; that to many this is a shock and they think they will have to appear in court and that it is a threat of prison; that this reaction is quite regular; that the management of the council tax unit know about this reaction and expect it and have not taken steps to mitigate it, and play on it. Declares that this is tax collection by the use of scare tactics, and requests a stop be put to this abuse.

The petitioner requests that the House of Commons bear in mind in its law making the above, and that were the question put the House consent to the request(s) in this Mr. Burke's 7th petition first posted to the House on 29 December 2009.

And the Petitioner remains, etc.

[P000755]

Health at Bus Stations

The Petition of Mr. Martin Burke of Elizabeth Regina Love,

Declares that day in day out for years men and women from the bus companies have worked in Piccadilly bus station in Manchester exposed to the exhaust fumes of numerous heavy diesel engines with no breathing protection, and that passengers, passersby and local shops are also exposed to these fumes. Requests that no bus be allowed to wait with engines running in Piccadilly bus station and in all other bus stations in the country, and that busses be only allowed to stop there for passengers to alight and board.

The petitioner requests that the House of Commons bear in mind in its law making the above, and that were the question put the House consent to the request(s) in this Mr. Burke's 13th petition first posted to the House on 29 December 2009.

And the Petitioner remains, etc.

[P000758]

Jobseekers Agreements Threats

The Petition of Mr. Martin Burke of Elizabeth Regina Love,

Declares that if a person claiming unemployment benefit does not agree 3 types of jobs that you will apply for as part of a jobseekers agreement acceptable to the interviewer and against their wishes, then Jobseekers Allowance will be suspended even if there is little enough money for food; and declares that this a blackmail. Declares that the Department of Work and Pensions and Jobcentre Plus is an organisation that, if a person is

5 minutes late due to the traffic for a meeting and refused entry, is able and willing to and does cut a person's benefit by half so that there is £32.30 a week to live on for the next two weeks, with no information with regard to the circumstances or the consequences. And further declares that a successful appeal 3 months later and 6 months after the event is the return of wrongfully taken money. Declares also that this organisation will also similarly stop two weeks benefit on the basis of a doubt. The petitioner requests a stop be put to these practices and they be outlawed.

The petitioner requests that the House of Commons bear in mind in its law making the above, and that were the question put the House consent to the request(s) in this Mr. Burke's 8th petition first posted to the House on 29 December 2009.

And the Petitioner remains, etc.

[P000756]

MP's Expenses

The Petition of Mr. Martin Burke of Elizabeth Regina Love,

Declares that that to effectively represent their constituents Members of Parliament require independence of mind and a good night's sleep. Further declares that it is unlikely that for example the people of Glasgow would want their representatives to travel to Parliament sleeping on the seats and floors of third class compartments as did James Maxton, who then lived miles away in Putney. And further declares that constituents wish their Members of Parliament to be in good condition to represent them.

Declares that while responsibility for judgements with regard to expenses and other matters may be delegated, those to whom it is delegated remain accountable to Members of Parliament, and Members of Parliament remain responsible and accountable for those judgements. The petitioner requests that the House turn its mind to the challenges facing the country, such as the rise in unemployment and restlessness when there is so much work that needs to be done.

The petitioner requests that the House of Commons bear in mind in its law making the above, and that were the question put the House consent to the request(s) in this Mr. Burke's 11th petition first posted to the House on 29 December 2009.

And the Petitioner remains, etc.

[P000764]

New Copyright Library

The Petition of Mr. Martin Burke of Elizabeth Regina Love,

Declares that there are 6 Legal Deposit or "Copyright" Libraries in the British Isles, in Edinburgh, Dublin, Cardiff, Oxford, Cambridge and London. Declares that the universities in the North of England could do with a copyright library closer than these. Declares that Mr. Burke's preference about location is Manchester next to Piccadilly Railway Station, however Mr. Burke was born in Manchester and other possible locations need to be considered. The petitioner requests that a 7th copyright library be established.

The petitioner requests that the House of Commons bear in mind in its law making the above, and that were the question put the House consent to the request(s) in this Mr. Burke's 12th petition first posted to the House on 29 December 2009.

And the Petitioner remains, etc.

[P000759]

Prison Transport as a Punishment

The Petition of Mr. Martin Burke of Elizabeth Regina Love,

Declares that on 25 October 2007 in committee on the Criminal Justice and Immigration Bill the member for Harborough (Mr. Garnier) stated that young offenders convicted of offences or on remand in custody in courts in the east of England are having to be taken in a sweat box hundreds of miles overnight and brought back to court the following day. On some occasions, they do not arrive at their overnight accommodation until well after 9 o'clock. Declares that this is not a punishment awarded by the Courts. The petitioner asks if this is still happening and if it is that a stop be put to it.

The petitioner requests that the House of Commons bear in mind in its law making the above, and that were the question put the House consent to the request(s) in this Mr Burke's 9th petition first posted to the House on 29 December 2009.

And the Petitioner remains, etc.

[P000765]

Safety of the Armed Forces (2)

The Petition of Mr. Martin Burke of Elizabeth Regina Love,

Declares that the member for Airdrie and Shotts (Rt. Hon Dr John Reid MP) has replied to the Petitioner about Mr. Burke's Petition "Safety of the Armed Forces" to the effect that were it not for being a former Government Minister, which included being recently Home Secretary and Secretary of State for Defence, he would have signed the Petition which was presented on 14 December 2009, in which Mr. Burke drew attention to the statement of Sir Richard Mottram that that he had influence, or knew those who had influence to avert a threat to the Armed Forces; that they were willing and able to not only not intervene but initiate a threat; and that Dr. Reid supports the Petition, and that a link to that Petition is at: www.eheartr.com.

The Petitioner requests that the House of Commons note Dr. Reid's reply: and once again requests that in order to begin the process of restoring trust in the 3 United Kingdom Intelligence Agencies that Members of the House of Commons, who are elected and serve to lead this country, form an oversight committee to conduct regular hearings with the heads of these 3 Intelligence Agencies in public.

The petitioner requests that the House of Commons bear in mind in its law making the above, and that were the question put the House consent to the request(s) in this Mr. Burke's 5th petition first posted to the House on 29 December 2009.

And the Petitioner remains, etc.

[P000754]

Smoking

The Petition of Mr. Martin Burke of Elizabeth Regina Love,

Declares that one fine cold still winter morning in Manchester Mr. Burke was stood on the pavement and a passerby walked past smoking a cigarette; noted that against the clear crystal blue sky the smoke from the cigarette formed a ball around the person as if their head were in a fishbowl of smoke which moved with them; further notes that this smoke was also through the bloodstream on the inside of their head and that this is equivalent to exposing very sensitive parts of the brain to a car exhaust. The petitioner requests that the cigarette factories be closed down.

The petitioner requests that the House of Commons bear in mind in its law making the above, and that were the question put the House consent to the request(s) in this Mr. Burke's 14th petition first posted to the House on 29 December 2009.

And the Petitioner remains, etc.

[P000757]

The BBC

The Petition of Mr. Martin Burke of Elizabeth Regina Love,

Declares that on 19 May 2009 the day before his first petition was presented Mr. Burke was waiting in the Central Lobby waiting to meet his Member of Parliament when he observed several senior members of the House of Commons being selected and organised by a BBC producer to communicate by television and radio to the public about the change of Speaker. Further declares that the following day just before Mr. Burke's petition was presented members of the House of Commons voted on the funding of the BBC. The petitioner requests that control of access to the public by the BBC of members of the House of Commons be removed and that the House sets up its own independently employed and trained broadcasting unit.

The petitioner requests that the House of Commons bear in mind in its law making the above, and that were the question put the House consent to the request(s) in this Mr. Burke's 10th petition first posted to the House on 29 December 2009.

And the Petitioner remains, etc.

[P000763]

The House of Lords and A Fully Elected Second Chamber

The Petition of Mr. Martin Burke of Elizabeth Regina Love,

Declares that it is a peculiar paradox that members of an unelected House of Lords have ensured the survival of a fully elected House of Commons. The petitioner requests that the House of Commons create from itself a new fully elected 2nd chamber and that membership of the House of Lords be opened to persons from the Commonwealth of Nations.

The petitioner requests that the House of Commons bear in mind in its law making the above, and that were the question put the House consent to the request(s) in this Mr. Burke's 4th petition first emailed to the House on 12 February 2010.

And the Petitioner remains, etc.

[P000760]

The North Korean People

The Petition of Mr. Martin Burke of Elizabeth Regina Love,

Declares that during the 2006 North Korea nuclear crisis in a United Nations Security Council meeting the United States' ambassador to the United Nations Ambassador Bolton pointed out that North Koreans have below average height compared to their neighbours in South Korea, and further declares that that the petitioner quickly pursued the point of food relief, as well as and hopefully instead of sanctions, together with other points in his communications in October and November 2006. Notes and regrets that the 6 party talks have not lead yet to a successful outcome.

Declares that the welfare of the North Korean people is still a concern and as a mark of that concern requests that the House receive regular reports on the welfare of the North Korean people.

The petitioner requests that the House of Commons bear in mind in its law making the above, and that were

the question put the House consent to the request(s) in this Mr. Burke's 16th petition first posted to the House on 29 December 2009.

And the Petitioner remains, etc.

[P000761]

The Right to Petition the House

The Petition of Mr. Martin Burke of Elizabeth Regina Love,

Declares that he would like to thank the Speakers Lord Martin and Mr. Bercow and members of the House for maintaining the right to petition the House with his first and subsequent petitions. The petitioner requests a vote of thanks to both Speakers.

The petitioner requests that the House of Commons bear in mind in its law making the above, and that were the question put the House consent to the request(s) in this Mr. Burke's 15th petition first posted to the House on 29 December 2009.

And the Petitioner remains, etc.

[P000762]

Written Answers to Questions

Thursday 11 March 2010

LEADER OF THE HOUSE

Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund

Simon Hughes: To ask the Leader of the House what recent discussions she has had with the trustees of the Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund on its exercise of shareholder voting rights during annual general meetings of those companies in which it invests. [321533]

Barbara Keeley: The Leader has not had any recent discussions with the Trustees on this subject. The investment of the assets of the Parliamentary Contributory Pension Fund is a matter for the Fund's Trustees. The scheme regulations require the Trustees to have in place a Statement of Investment Principles and to consult with the Leader about it.

The current Statement of Investment Principles states that the Trustees have instructed their investment managers

"to exercise the rights attached to the Fund's investments in order to ensure, so far as is consistent with the Trustees' duty to act in the best financial interests of the beneficiaries, that the companies in which the Fund is invested adopt high standards"

in relation to a

"responsible approach to social, ethical and environmental issues".

NORTHERN IRELAND

Criminal Proceedings

Dr. Alasdair McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how long on average it took the Northern Ireland Public Prosecution Service to bring a criminal case to court following the submission of papers by the Police Service of Northern Ireland in the last three years. [321465]

Paul Goggins: This is an operational matter for the Acting Director of Public Prosecutions. I have asked him to reply directly to the hon. Gentleman and will arrange for a copy of the letter to be placed in the Library of the House.

Departmental Carbon Emissions

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what estimate he has made of the volume of carbon dioxide emissions from his Department's buildings in each year since 2005. [320567]

Paul Goggins: The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) contributes data annually to the NI Public Sector Energy Campaign (PSEC) regarding energy consumption.

The most up to date figures on carbon dioxide emissions are contained within the 2007-08 PSEC report and are shown in the following table:

	<i>CO₂ total</i>	<i>Tonnes</i>
2007-08		1,546
2006-07		1,873
2005-06		1,616
2004-05		1,751

The Department has a Green ICT strategy in place, derived from the Cabinet Office "Greening Government ICT" strategy, to assist in reducing energy consumption and emissions.

The Department participates in Government Carbon Offsetting Fund (GCOF) to offset emissions relating to air travel by Ministers and staff on official business.

Departmental Internet

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many designs for its (a) internal website and (b) intranet his Department has commissioned since 2005; and what the cost was of each such design. [321982]

Paul Goggins: The Northern Ireland Office (NIO) maintains an internal intranet. Since 2005 the homepage has been redesigned at a cost of £7,040 and the content management system upgraded at a cost of £1,760. Two further updates were carried out by departmental ICT staff at no additional cost.

Prisoners: Ex-servicemen

Sammy Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what percentage of the Northern Ireland prison population formerly served in the UK armed forces. [321214]

Paul Goggins: While all prisoners are asked their occupation on committal, there is no requirement for prisoners to disclose this information. Of those currently in prison, 0.36 per cent. (five persons) have stated their occupation as being in the armed forces or protective services.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Children: Maintenance

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many individuals paid off arrears to the Child Support Agency by credit card in each of the last three years. [318744]

Helen Goodman: The Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission is responsible for the child maintenance system. I have asked the Child Maintenance Commissioner to write to the hon. Member with the information requested and I have seen the response.

Letter from Stephen Geraghty:

In reply to your recent Parliamentary Question about the Child Support Agency, the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Child Maintenance Commissioner as the Child Support Agency is now the responsibility of the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, how many individuals paid off their arrears to the Child Support Agency by credit card in each of the last three years. [318744]

Data on child maintenance arrears payments made only by credit card is not available as it is not possible to separate regular and arrears payments and it is not possible to break down payments made by credit or debit card.

I am sorry on this occasion I can not be more helpful.

Housing Benefit: Greater London

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average housing benefit paid to (a) local authority tenants, (b) housing association tenants and (c) private sector tenants was in each London borough in the latest period for which figures are available; and what the average rent level was in each of the three sectors in that period. [321076]

Helen Goodman [*holding answer 11 March 2010*]: The most recent available information is in the table.

Average weekly housing benefit paid to local authority tenants, registered social landlord tenants and private sector tenants in London boroughs: November 2009

£				
<i>Local authority</i>	<i>Local authority tenants</i>	<i>Registered social landlord tenants</i>	<i>Private tenants</i>	<i>All tenancy types</i>
Camden	93.08	115.23	211.99	118.67
City of London	86.40	102.98	174.18	97.24
Hackney	91.68	108.11	194.93	120.33
Hammersmith and Fulham	90.72	124.58	196.77	124.77
Haringey	121.10	119.23	157.60	132.78
Islington	91.14	111.00	194.00	109.26
Kensington and Chelsea	123.75	117.47	274.64	154.47
Lambeth	107.44	99.94	148.65	112.94
Lewisham	86.22	90.81	162.65	109.08
Newham	132.36	121.84	167.97	142.92
Southwark	82.95	104.36	147.75	95.94
Tower Hamlets	121.78	100.57	193.32	119.57
Wandsworth	103.62	109.48	215.40	135.71
Westminster	97.73	127.03	310.74	182.54
Barking and Dagenham	86.52	102.39	158.61	107.69
Barnet	85.61	138.18	184.16	145.27
Bexley	266.29	89.38	148.43	110.33
Brent	108.77	145.21	199.75	159.12
Bromley	—	97.96	143.12	110.48
Croydon	88.38	103.44	154.47	121.48
Ealing	121.71	120.37	178.32	141.57
Enfield	122.99	110.83	179.10	147.84
Greenwich	76.44	96.58	146.17	94.15
Harrow	81.11	143.85	180.14	147.75
Havering	84.54	90.94	149.34	104.98
Hillingdon	115.65	100.24	164.66	129.48
Hounslow	92.77	102.00	173.07	119.28
Kingston upon Thames	113.46	103.38	175.40	134.13
Merton	80.99	101.67	156.66	115.23
Redbridge	159.50	106.05	163.35	152.43
Richmond upon Thames	241.47	91.19	175.53	119.15

Average weekly housing benefit paid to local authority tenants, registered social landlord tenants and private sector tenants in London boroughs: November 2009

£				
<i>Local authority</i>	<i>Local authority tenants</i>	<i>Registered social landlord tenants</i>	<i>Private tenants</i>	<i>All tenancy types</i>
Sutton	76.83	95.32	151.45	107.21
Waltham Forest	105.49	99.94	149.23	119.36

Notes:

1. Data are as at second Thursday of the month.
2. Average amounts of housing benefit are shown as pounds per week and rounded to the nearest penny.
3. Housing association tenants are shown as registered social landlord tenants.
4. Tenure type does not include recipients with unknown tenure type.
5. "—" denotes nil cases.
6. The data refer to benefit units, which may be a single person or a couple.
7. SHBE is a monthly electronic scan of claimant level data direct from local authority computer systems. It replaces quarterly aggregate clerical returns. The data are available monthly from November 2008 and October 2009 is the most recent available.

Source:

Single Housing Benefit Extract (SHBE).

TREASURY

Climate Change Levy

Charles Hendry: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what the monetary value of receipts from the Climate Change Levy has been in each of the last five years. [321254]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: Final outturns of climate change levy receipts are published at Budget in table C.6 in chapter C "The public Finances" for each fiscal year.

Public Bodies

Mr. Harper: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he plans to respond to the recommendation in the Public Accounts Committee report on the Equality and Human Rights Commission published on 4 March 2010 that his Department should draw up best practice guidelines for the creation of public sector bodies. [321600]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: The Government's response will be set out alongside responses to the other Committee of Public Accounts' conclusions and recommendations from its Fifteenth Report in a Treasury Minute in due course.

Tax Allowances: Energy

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether he has plans to amend the categories of equipment eligible for support under the Enhanced Capital Allowance Energy Scheme to include low energy loss distribution transformers. [321626]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: The Enhanced Capital Allowances scheme for energy saving technologies is dynamic and kept under regular review. Updates and changes to the EGA schemes are normally announced at Budget.

Taxation: Holiday Accommodation

Mr. Weir: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many submissions were received to the technical consultation on the draft legislation and guidance on the ending of Furnished Holiday Lettings relief which closed on 26 February 2010; and how many of those submissions expressed views in favour of the Government's proposals. [321332]

Mr. Timms: None of the responses to the technical consultation on the proposed legislation to repeal the Furnished Holiday Lettings (FHL) rules identified any technical difficulties with the draft legislation which was published at the 2009 pre-Budget report. Therefore there are no plans to publish a full report on the findings from this informal consultation.

The Treasury receives representations on a range of policy issues. As was the case with the previous Administration, it is not the Government's practice to provide details of such representations.

The Government acknowledge that this change has not been welcomed by the tourism industry. However, for legal reasons, a change is necessary.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Departmental Consultants

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether consultants have been contracted to carry out public participation activity on behalf of his Department in the last three years; and, if so, how much was spent in each case. [319763]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Government Olympic Executive in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport runs an East London digital network. This is an on-line forum for invited members of the public to give their opinions and ideas and is one of the key ways in which Government are meeting their promise to engage with local people about what they want from the Olympics and ensure that Government policy reflects their views.

The cost of the project, including the contracting of consultants stands at £111,759.20 exclusive of VAT.

Digital Switchover Help Scheme: Gordon

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many enquiries from households in Gordon constituency have been received by the Digital UK Help Scheme; and how many of those households were eligible to receive the digital conversion service free of charge. [321650]

Mr. Bradshaw: The Switchover Help Scheme receives eligibility data from the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and is only able to report statistically at an ITV region level. The provision of help scheme eligibility data at both country and local level is a matter for the DWP. The help scheme estimates around 170,000 people in the STV North TV Region will be eligible to receive help. It is estimated that 37 per cent. of the 170,000 eligible people in the STV North TV

Region are entitled to receive the help for free. The numbers of help scheme eligible people and people entitled to receive the help for free in this region are likely to change between now and when the last STV North transmitter switches in October 2010.

Irish Language Broadcast Fund: Expenditure

Sammy Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much funding his Department has provided to the Irish Language Broadcast Fund in each of the last five years. [321213]

Mr. Bradshaw: My Department acted as the conduit through which the UK Government paid £3 million for the Irish Language Broadcasting Fund in 2009-10. Funding was provided through the UK Film Council.

Stroud

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will set out, with statistical information related as directly as possible to Stroud constituency, the effects on that constituency of his Department's policies and actions since 2000. [321475]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport's aim is to improve the quality of life for everyone through cultural and sporting activities, to support the pursuit of excellence and to champion the tourism, creative and leisure industries.

The impact of bodies and policies of the Department on the Stroud constituency since 2000 include:

£156,862 given from Arts Council England to organisations based in Stroud in 2008-09 through the Grants for the Arts programme.

£121,000 of English Heritage grant offers to the Stroud constituency in 2008-09.

Digital Switchover is due to take place in Stroud in April 2010. By the time switchover is complete at the end of 2012, 98.5 per cent. of households nationwide will be able to receive digital TV—the same number that can currently receive analogue.

Over £18,046,315 of national lottery grants made to applications from the Stroud constituency since 2000.

The Stroud constituency has also benefitted from other policies and spending whose impact cannot be broken down by constituency. This includes:

£4 billion of Exchequer funding spent on culture.

More than £5.5 billion invested in sport by the Government and the national lottery since 1997.

Almost 750,000 free swims taken in London in the first eight months of the Free Swimming programme.

A 68 per cent. increase in national museum visits from 1998-99 to 2008-09—10 per cent. of which were by adults from lower socio-economic groups.

£416.6 million in grants allocated by English Heritage since 1997.

48 per cent. of buildings on the original 1999 Buildings at Risk Register having their future secured.

90 per cent. of all pupils taking part in at least two hours of high quality PE or sport per week in 2008 from an estimated 25 per cent. in 2003-04—exceeding our target.

Trade Unions

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how many staff his Department and its agencies are seconded to trade unions; what facilities are made available to them; how many days other staff of his Department and its agencies spent on trade union activity in the latest year for which figures are available; and what recent estimate he has made of the annual cost to the public purse of such activity.

[320610]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Department for Culture, Media and Sport and the Royal Parks Agency do not have any employees seconded to trade unions.

Both DCMS and the Royal Parks provide facility time for local trade union officials.

The annual cost of trade union facility time for DCMS is up to £25,952.

The annual cost of trade union activity for the Royal Parks is up to £29,333.

There are no figures available for the number of days other staff spend on trade union activity. To obtain such information would incur a disproportionate cost.

Ulster Scots: Expenditure

Sammy Wilson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much funding his Department has provided for the promotion and development of Ulster Scots language and culture in each of the last five years.

[321208]

Mr. Bradshaw: None—but under the terms of the BBC's charter and agreement, the BBC Trust must have regard to the importance of ensuring appropriate provision in minority languages. Funding to enable the BBC to provide minority languages is included in the BBC's funding settlement, which is set by my Department, although my Department does not specify the amounts that the BBC must spend in this area.

TRANSPORT

Aviation: Security

Mr. Leech: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what assessment he has made of the (a) effectiveness and (b) effect on time taken for passengers to pass through security of the use of different types of scanners used to detect liquids.

[321187]

Paul Clark: The Department for Transport has been working with the European Civil Aviation Conference and other international partners to test the effectiveness of liquid screening technologies and final results will be available by the end of the year.

The Department has also undertaken several studies on the time taken for passengers to pass through liquid detection systems, the results of which have been used to define options for the deployment of liquid detection machines and also to guide manufacturers on how the performance of the machines might be improved.

Departmental Advertising

Anne Main: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how much his Department has spent on advertisements on television and commercial radio on campaigns run by the Department since 2005.

[317100]

Chris Mole: The majority of television and radio advertising media expenditure by the Department for Transport is in support of the THINK! Road safety and the Act on CO₂ campaigns. Among the Department's executive agencies, the most prominent use of advertising has been by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, in support of Electronic Vehicle Licensing, Sale of Marks and Vehicle Excise Enforcement (Continuous Registration).

The information sought is not held in the format requested by all parts of the Department and can be provided only at disproportionate cost. Information available is included in the following table:

	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	£000 2008-09
<i>Television advertising</i>				
DFT(C)	6,889	5,171	8,002	8,171
DSA	0	0	0	0
DVLA	n/a	n/a	n/a	4,800
GCDA	0	0	0	0
HA	0	0	0	0
MCA	25	4	15	13
VCA	0	0	0	0
VOSA	0	0	0	0
<i>Radio advertising</i>				
DFT(C)	2,011	2,578	2,511	3,089
DSA	0	0	0	41
DVLA	n/a	n/a	n/a	1,400
GCDA	0	0	0	0
HA	n/a	n/a	40	66
MCA	0	0	0	0
VCA	0	0	0	0
VOSA	0	0	0	0

Departmental Energy

Andrew Stunell: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what the estimated (a) amount and (b) cost was of energy used in his Department and its agencies in each year since 1997; what proportion of the energy used was generated from renewable sources in each of those years; and if he will make a statement.

[317236]

Chris Mole: The Department for Transport was formed in 2002 and therefore no records exist for the Department prior to that date.

The following tables show the electricity, gas and other fuels used by the Department for Transport and its Agencies since 2004-05.

Total electricity

<i>Business unit</i>	<i>2004-05</i>	<i>2005-06</i>	<i>2006-07</i>	<i>2007-08</i>	<i>2008-09</i>
Central Department	8,073,203	9,187,270	8,039,848	7,522,387	7,472,014
Executive Agencies	34,810,758	36,567,277	39,721,844	37,988,465	42,271,338
DfT total	42,883,961	45,754,547	47,761,692	45,510,852	49,743,352

The following table gives the percentage of electricity consumed by the Department that came from renewable resources for each of the last five years.

Electricity from renewable resources

<i>Business unit</i>	<i>2004-05</i>	<i>2005-06</i>	<i>2006-07</i>	<i>2007-08</i>	<i>Percentage 2008-09</i>
DfT	68	74	66	62.5	53

The reducing percentage of electricity from renewable resources depicted above is as a result of a change in the main supply contract from Buying Solutions which now

has a reduced renewable allowance in order to ensure renewable energy is available in the private sector.

Total gas

<i>Business unit</i>	<i>2004-05</i>	<i>2005-06</i>	<i>2006-07</i>	<i>2007-08</i>	<i>2008-09</i>
Central Department	1,183,339	1,743,451	893,005	970,130	1,144,174
Executive Agencies	29,967,416	46,974,572	42,517,851	48,308,845	52,890,398
DfT total	31,150,755	48,718,023	43,410,856	49,278,975	54,034,572

Total other fuels

<i>Business unit</i>	<i>2004-05</i>	<i>2005-06</i>	<i>2006-07</i>	<i>2007-08</i>	<i>2008-09</i>
Central Department	421,858	450,079	448,200	390,760	211,385
Executive Agencies	1,639,613	219,000	2,746,182	2,819,862	2,496,956
DfT total	2,061,471	669,079	3,194,382	3,210,622	2,708,341

Part of the progressive increases shown in the above tables is accounted for by improvements in the standard of data collection.

The following table provides the total annual cost of the energy used in the above tables.

Total fuels

<i>Business unit</i>	<i>2004-05</i>	<i>2005-06</i>	<i>2006-07</i>	<i>2007-08</i>	<i>2008-09</i>
Central Department	1,261,721.52	1,931,567.00	1,124,339.31	870,380.58	1,031,824.05
Executive Agencies	2,371,574.30	4,559,976.64	4,237,074.20	5,195,331.01	7,238,984.25
DfT total	3,633,295.82	6,491,543.64	5,361,413.51	6,065,711.59	8,270,808.30

In addition to the above listed energy use the Highways Agency is responsible for the provision of roadside technology and lighting which incurred £23.9 million in energy costs in 2008-09. It is not possible to provide consumption data for this facet of departmental activity.

Chris Mole: The Department's records indicate that no staff from BAA have been seconded to the Department for Transport in the last five years.

Departmental Theft

Mr. Watson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how many thefts from his Department have been recorded in the last two years.

[318998]

Justine Greening: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how many staff from BAA (a) are seconded to his Department and (b) were so seconded in each of the last five years; what the roles were of such personnel; and if he will make a statement.

[320137]

Chris Mole: The figure provided here is for all items recorded as stolen in the past two years and is for the entire Department for Transport including its agencies and shared service centre. The figure provided does not

include thefts where records are not available centrally, or such thefts that were not reported. While some of this information may exist in records held locally within the central Department and the agencies, it could be obtained only at disproportionate costs.

Central records show that since 10 February 2008 76 items have been reported stolen. Of these 54 were reported stolen from within departmental premises.

The Department has in place access control measures in accordance with cabinet office guidance, issues staff awareness guidance on its Intranet and provides lockable pedestals and personal lockers. Reminders on security awareness are also disseminated to employees via security liaison officers within the Department teams.

Official Cars: Senior Civil Servants

Mr. Maude: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what the annual cost to the public purse is of the provision by the Government Car and Despatch Agency of official cars with drivers to senior civil servants. [318635]

Paul Clark: The annual cost of providing official cars to senior civil servants by the Government Car and Despatch Agency is £371,379.00.

Roads: Litter

Mr. Soames: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport if he will take steps to bring A-roads under the responsibility of the Highways Agency for the purposes of removal of roadside litter. [320963]

Chris Mole: The Highways Agency retains responsibility for litter collection on the motorways and also on some all purpose trunk roads. A list of these roads has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The Highways Agency will continue to collaborate with local authorities to ensure the effective removal of roadside litter.

Roads: Repairs and Maintenance

Mrs. Villiers: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how much of the £6 billion allocated has been spent on completion of schemes funded under the first tranche of the National Roads Programme. [316869]

Chris Mole: The following table gives the amount spent on completing work on the first tranche of schemes out of the up to £6 billion allocated to the National Roads Programme in the January 2009 Roads Announcement.

<i>Amount allocated from £6 billion national roads programme</i>	<i>£ million</i>
M6 Carlisle to Guardsmill	31.4
M1 J6a-10 Widening	82.5
A14 Haughley New Street to Stowmarket	14.0
M62 J6 Improvements	14.7
M25 J1b-3 widening	15.1
A5117/A550Deeside Park Junction improvement	23.3
A1 Bramham to Wetherby	31.8
Total	212.7

Thameslink Railway Line

Patrick Hall: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what proportion of the increase in capacity provided by the Thameslink Programme will be attributable to the (a) Key Output 0, (b) Key Output 1 and (c) Key Output 2 phase. [321211]

Chris Mole: Key Output 0 has already delivered an increase of 2,500 seats in each peak period. The Key Output 1 service, from December 2011 will increase the capacity into central London initially by approximately a further 1,000 seats in each peak period.

As the new Key Output 2 trains are progressively brought on to the rail network, capacity will increase in to the central London section of the Thameslink route by up to approximately 30,000 additional seats in each peak period.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund: Nottinghamshire

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the use of Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund money by Nottinghamshire county council in villages directly affected by quarrying. [321601]

Huw Irranca-Davies: It is for local authorities to decide how to spend money provided via ALSF as a non ring fenced area based grant. These monies are spent according to local priorities.

Nottinghamshire county council uses all money allocated to it on aggregates projects and reports through the DEFRA ALSF database, which can be viewed at:

<http://alsf.defra.gov.uk/>

The database currently records 73 projects funded by Nottinghamshire county council with a total value of nearly £2 million, of which £495,000 is from ALSF grants.

DEFRA is currently undertaking an assessment of the effectiveness of the ALSF, including funds provided to local authorities, in advance of the next spending review.

Compost: Mushrooms

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what discussions his Department has had with Bassetlaw council on the prosecution of mushroom composters in breach of regulations on odour emissions. [321602]

Jim Fitzpatrick: Our officials continue to receive regular updates from Bassetlaw council about the regulation of the mushroom composting plant in their district, most recently from council officers on 3 March. DEFRA officials spoke to the newly-employed consultant to the council on 9 March. The decision on whether or not to prosecute is a matter for the council, having regard to, among other matters, the statutory Regulators' Compliance Code.

Noah's Ark Farm Zoo

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps his Department has taken to ensure the compliance of Noah's Ark Farm Zoo, North Somerset, with section 7.13 of the Standards of Modern Zoo Practice as a condition of its zoo licence. [321598]

Jim Fitzpatrick: The Zoo Licensing Act 1981 places responsibility for the inspection and licensing of zoos with local authorities, in this case North Somerset council. The Act provides local authorities with all the powers they require to ensure that zoos operate to high standards consistent with the Secretary of State's Standards of Modern Zoo Practice.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Departmental Disciplinary Proceedings

Barry Gardiner: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many (a) disciplinary and (b) capability procedures have been (i) initiated and (ii) completed in his Department and its predecessor in each of the last five years; how much time on average was taken to complete each type of procedure in each such year; how many and what proportion of his Department's staff were subject to each type of procedure in each such year; and how many and what proportion of each type of procedure resulted in the dismissal of the member of staff. [320638]

Mr. McFadden: We are unable to provide the information requested on procedures initiated or average length of time that procedures take as responsibility for commencing capability and minor disciplinary procedures rests with line management across the Department. No records are collated centrally regarding how many procedures are initiated in the Department.

Staff may be dismissed for poor performance, poor attendance, gross misconduct or repeated misconduct. Information for the Department, including any predecessor Departments and data for UK Trade and Investment, in relation to dismissals on these grounds is set out in the following table. Totals of five or less are suppressed on the grounds of confidentiality.

	<i>Number of staff dismissed (all reasons)</i>
2009-10 ¹	2 ²
2008	8
2007	14
2006	12
2005	15

¹ To date.

² Unable to supply this information under section 40 (personal data) of the Data Protection Act.

Departmental Paper

Martin Horwood: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what (a) suppliers and (b) brands of (i) paper and (ii) paper products his Department uses; and what his Department's policy is on the procurement of those materials. [320036]

Mr. McFadden: The Department uses the Pan Government Office Supplies Framework set up by the MOD. Under the framework Office Depot are the paper suppliers. Our reprographics department also use The Paper Company (formally Dixon and Roe) for their supplies.

Our hand towels, toilet rolls and kitchen paper are purchased through our cleaning company—GBM who in turn purchase from either Bunzi Cleaning and Hygiene Supplies or Futures Supplies and Support Services Ltd.

For the paper we use some unbranded products and some branded products as follows:

Reprographics Department uses Evolve Office Paper and Nine Lives Paper.

Office Depot provides Evolve, Unbranded; Filemaster; Paradis; Kendall; Kestrel; Communiques; Conqueror; Copyspeed; Classic and Rellex.

Our cleaning consumables are Kimberly Clark.

Insolvency: Essex

Bob Spink: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many businesses employing fewer than 50 people went into administration in (a) Essex and (b) Castle Point constituency in (i) each of the last 12 months and (ii) each of the last five years. [321446]

Ian Lucas: Official statistics for corporate insolvencies, including administrations, are not currently available at a sub-national level within England and Wales.

Additionally, the number of employees of a company in administration is not recorded on the Companies House source data.

Met Office

John Thurso: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills with reference to page 27 of the document Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government, what underlying data for weather forecasts will be released for free download and reuse by April 2010. [321358]

Mr. Kevan Jones: I have been asked to reply.

The underlying data that has been made available is detailed in the following table. This data can be downloaded for free from the Met Office website at the following link:

<http://www.metoffice.gov.uk/public/pws/invent/weathermap/>

As outlined in 'Putting the Frontline First: Smarter Government', the Met Office has also released a free iPhone application to access weather data and a widget that enables other websites to deploy Met Office supplied weather information.

<i>Category</i>	<i>Data details</i>
Weather warnings	Type, validity period, risk and severity for all current valid warnings issued by the Met Office
Weather	For all UK weather stations for which an observation or a forecast is available: Site name Latitude Longitude

Category	Data details
	Wind direction
	Wind speed
	Wind gust
	Weather type (as numerical code, decode provided on website)
	Visibility
	Temperature
	Pressure—observed values only
	Pressure tendency (e.g. “Rising”)—observed values only
Mountain and leisure areas	For Mountain areas: For the current day (day zero): weather hazards including severity, fell top conditions, weather forecast including precipitation probabilities For the next day (day one): weather forecast For days two and three: weather outlook For Leisure areas: a textual overview of the current day’s weather
Pressure	Forecast Pressure for the entire UK area at various time frames
Ultra Violet	Forecast UV values for the current day through to day four for every forecast location in the UK

Post Offices: Bank Services

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) how many sub-postmasters have had back-payments collected from them by Post Office Ltd. in relation to ATMs installed in their branches; and from how many Post Office Ltd. continues seek to collect such back-payments; [321089]

(2) what recent discussions he has had with Post Office Ltd. on the collection of back-payments from sub-postmasters for ATMs in their branches; and if he will make a statement. [321090]

Mr. McFadden: Following agreement with the National Federation of Sub-postmasters, Post Office Ltd. notified sub-postmasters in September 2009 that they would not be asked to pay any backdated fees from the time their ATM was installed up to the end of August 2009.

Royal Mail

Peter Luff: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills when he expects to announce the appointment of a new chief executive for Royal Mail Group; and if he will make a statement. [320978]

Mr. McFadden: The chief executive post is not a Government appointment. The Royal Mail Board has begun the search for Adam Crozier’s replacement but there is no set timetable for the recruitment process. An announcement will be made when the process is concluded.

WOMEN AND EQUALITY

Departmental Disciplinary Proceedings

Barry Gardiner: To ask the Minister for Women and Equality how many (a) disciplinary and (b) capability procedures have been (i) initiated and (ii) completed in the Government Equalities Office in each of the last five years; how much time on average was taken to complete each type of procedure in each such year; how many and what proportion of staff of the Government Equalities Office were subject to each type of procedure in each such year; and how many and what proportion of each type of procedure resulted in the dismissal of the member of staff. [320640]

Michael Jabez Foster: Since its creation in 2007, the Government Equalities Office has had one disciplinary case, in 2009. The case involved one member of staff and did not result in dismissal. It was initiated and completed within the 2009 calendar year.

CABINET OFFICE

Departmental ICT

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what information technology projects initiated by (a) her Department and (b) its agency were cancelled prior to completion in the last 12 months; and what the cost of each such project was to the public purse. [320437]

Angela E. Smith: My Department has not cancelled any information technology projects in the last 12 months.

Employment

Jim Cousins: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many people have moved from being (a) unemployed and (b) economically inactive to employed in each quarter in each (i) region and (ii) country of the UK since 2007; and what proportion of the labour force this represented in each (A) quarter and (B) such area. [321064]

Angela E. Smith: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated March 2010:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking how many people have moved from being (a) unemployed and (b) economically inactive to employed in each quarter in each (i) region and (ii) country of the UK since 2007; and what proportion of the labour force this represented in each (A) quarter and (B) such area. (321064)

Estimates for the working age population of the UK are provided in the attached table. They are derived from datasets extracted from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) which enable the estimation of the labour market status of people surveyed in two successive quarters. These datasets are made publicly available as the “LFS Longitudinal Datasets”. Estimates for the regions and countries within the UK, and for all people aged 16 and over, are not available due to sample size restrictions and the limitations of the estimation methodology.

As with any estimates extracted from sample surveys, the figures provided are subject to a margin of uncertainty. More precise estimates of the quality of the estimates provided in this answer are not available.

Estimated quarterly flows¹ from unemployment and from economic inactivity into employment, working age people², United Kingdom, not seasonally adjusted

		Flows (Thousand)		Flows as a percentage of total economically active	
		Unemployment to employment	Economic inactivity to employment	Unemployment to employment	Economic inactivity to employment
2007	Q1	376	406	1.3	1.4
	Q2	448	478	1.5	1.6
	Q3	454	655	1.5	2.2
	Q4	567	528	1.9	1.8
2008	Q1	395	453	1.3	1.5
	Q2	421	444	1.4	1.5
	Q3	409	600	1.4	2.0
	Q4	549	503	1.8	1.7
2009	Q1	370	359	1.2	1.2
	Q2	450	330	1.5	1.1
	Q3	555	518	1.8	1.7
	Q4	582	405	1.9	1.4

¹ From the previous calendar quarter to the quarter shown.

² Men aged 16 to 64 and women aged 16 to 59.

Source:

ONS Labour Force Survey Longitudinal Datasets

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Birmingham City Council: Finance

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what recent discussions he has had with Birmingham city council on its financial situation. [321363]

Barbara Follett: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State has had no recent discussions with Birmingham city council regarding its financial situation.

Community Development: Finance

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer of 2 February 2010, *Official Report*, column 247W, on community development: finance, if he will place in the Library a copy of the (a) data and (b) plans used to determine the allocation of funding from the Connecting Communities Fund to each local authority. [319106]

Barbara Follett: The neighbourhoods which benefited from Connecting Communities funding were identified after a range of hard and soft data around cohesion, deprivation and crime, perceived unfairness in the allocation of resources had been carefully examined. Feedback was also given by people working locally. The plans for each area were decided after discussions between local authorities and their Government office about the support required. The data and the plans are specific to each local authority and may include sensitive information. The hon. Member may wish to contact Peterborough city council about the selection of areas and the activities taking place in his constituency.

Departmental Location

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much his Department spent on the relocation of staff from posts in (a) Essex and (b) Castle Point constituency in each of the last five years. [321434]

Barbara Follett: Communities and Local Government has not relocated any posts from either Essex or the Castle Point constituency.

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many full-time equivalent staff of each grade are employed by his Department to assist special advisers. [321131]

Barbara Follett: Two full-time and one 0.4 full-time equivalent civil servants support the special advisers in the offices of the Secretary of State and the Minister for Housing. All three civil servants provide support of a non-political nature, in accordance with the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers. They also provide support to Ministers' private offices.

Departmental Pay

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much was paid in reimbursable expenses to special advisers in his Department in each of the last five years. [320476]

Barbara Follett: For information up to 2007-08, I refer the hon. Member to the answer he was given on 21 July 2008, *Official Report*, column 765W.

Since 2007-08, the information is as follows:

	£
2008-09	4,407.35
2009-10	1,327.90

Procedures for reimbursing staff expenses are set out in the Department's staff handbook, and are in line with the provisions set out in the Civil Service Management Code.

Empty Dwelling Management Orders: Squatting

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what guidance has been produced by his Department on whether an Empty Dwelling Management Order may be issued in respect of a property which is occupied by squatters. [319296]

Mr. Ian Austin: The Department issued a Guidance Note on Empty Dwelling Management Orders in July 2006 which can be downloaded from the Communities website:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/guidancenote>

An interim Empty Dwelling Management Order can be issued only by the Residential Property Tribunal Service if the dwelling has been wholly unoccupied (i.e. no part is occupied whether lawfully or unlawfully) for at least six months.

The issue of squatters is managed through separate provisions—other powers exist to evict squatters. The landlord must obtain an eviction order from a county court. The EDMO provisions can then be followed if required.

Fire Services: Finance

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how much was spent on the fire and rescue service per 100,000 population in each local authority area in the last 12 months. [321597]

Barbara Follett: The latest available outturn net current expenditure on the fire and rescue services per 100,000 of the population in each local authority in England is for 2008-09 and is tabled as follows:

	<i>£000 per 100,000 population</i>
Greater London Authority	5,388
Greater Manchester Fire and CD Authority	3,887
Merseyside Fire and CD Authority	5,013
South Yorkshire Fire and CD Authority	4,168
Tyne and Wear Fire and CD Authority	4,648
West Midlands Fire and CD Authority	4,393
West Yorkshire Fire and CD Authority	3,184
Avon Combined Fire Authority	3,862
Bedfordshire Combined Fire Authority	3,651
Berkshire Combined Fire Authority	3,758
Buckinghamshire Combined Fire Authority	3,505
Cambridgeshire Combined Fire Authority	2,714
Cheshire Combined Fire Authority	3,927
Cleveland Combined Fire Authority	5,006
Derbyshire Combined Fire Authority	3,129
Devon and Somerset Combined Fire Authority	4,048
Dorset Combined Fire Authority	3,375
Durham Combined Fire Authority	4,417
East Sussex Combined Fire Authority	4,714
Essex Combined Fire Authority	4,032
Hampshire Combined Fire Authority	3,449
Hereford and Worcester Combined Fire Authority	3,691
Humberside Combined Fire Authority	5,085
Kent Combined Fire Authority	4,071
Lancashire Combined Fire Authority	3,966
Leicestershire Combined Fire Authority	3,245
North Yorkshire Combined Fire Authority	3,598
Nottinghamshire Combined Fire Authority	3,853
Shropshire Combined Fire Authority	4,145
Staffordshire Combined Fire Authority	2,813
Wiltshire Combined Fire Authority	3,618
<i>County councils</i>	
Cornwall	3,842
Cumbria	3,865

	<i>£000 per 100,000 population</i>
Gloucestershire	3,184
Hertfordshire	3,600
Lincolnshire	3,835
Norfolk	3,499
Northamptonshire	3,428
Northumberland	5,033
Oxfordshire	3,547
Somerset ¹	39
Suffolk	3,279
Surrey	3,778
Warwickshire	3,955
West Sussex	4,047
Isles of Scilly	15,547
<i>Unitary authority</i>	
Isle of Wight UA	4,227

¹ Fire and rescue responsibility was transferred from Somerset county council to Devon and Somerset Combined Fire Authority on 1 April 2007. However, Somerset county council still has some residual costs.

Source:

Communities and Local Government provisional Revenue Outturn (RO) returns.

Population figures used in the calculation are the Office for National Statistics' (ONS) Mid-Year Population estimates for 2008.

The current expenditure defined here is on a Financial Reporting Standard (FRS) 17 basis and is the cost of running local authority services within the financial year. This includes the costs of staffing, heating, lighting and cleaning, together with expenditure on goods and services consumed within the year. This expenditure is offset by income from sales, fees and charges and other (non-grant) income, to give net current expenditure.

Greater Manchester

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will set out, with statistical information related as directly as possible to Manchester, Gorton constituency, the effects on that constituency of the policies of his Department and its predecessors since 1997. [322141]

Barbara Follett: My Department does not routinely collect information at constituency level but, as the constituency of Manchester, Gorton falls within the local authority of Manchester we have, where relevant, included information from them in this answer.

The Neighbourhood Statistics Service provides a wide range of statistical information at parliamentary constituency level, taken from the 2001 Census and other sources.

This service is available on the National Statistics website at:

<http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/>

Communities and Local Government statistical publications can be found at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/researchandstatistics/statistics/>

This includes time series data across the Department's remit at various geographic levels.

Details of research projects commissioned by Communities and Local Government and its predecessors are available from our Research Database (RD) at:

<http://www.rmd.communities.gov.uk/>

This includes evaluations of key policies.

Over the last year, Communities and Local Government has:

Played a critical role responding to the recession ensuring people, business and communities receive the practical help they need, including: helping people avoid repossession; Real Help Now; supporting the construction industry, critical regeneration projects, jobs through Future Jobs Fund; and businesses with the business rates deferral scheme.

Set in place a platform for greater local devolution for more effective decision making through local area agreements (LAAs)—including slashing central performance standards from over 1,200 to fewer than 200.

Continued building on this through Total Place pilots, leading innovation across public services—cutting out waste, overlap and duplication, meaning more and better quality services at less cost to the taxpayer.

Established the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) set out in the Planning Act 2008—which will make the major Infrastructure Planning decisions for the country, delivering a faster, fairer and more transparent planning regime.

Announced the £1.5 billion Housing Pledge to deliver an additional 20,000 units of affordable housing, creating 45,000 jobs in the construction industry over this year and next, including 1,300 new apprenticeship schemes.

Last year there were 330 additional affordable homes provided by Manchester local authority. See link for further information:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/1406085.xls>

During the period since 1997, the Department's achievements include:

Working with local housing authorities to reduce the number of people accepted as owed a main homelessness duty by 71 per cent. since the peak in 2003—the lowest level since the late seventies—through greater emphasis on the prevention of homelessness.

In 2008-09, there were 539 households accepted as being homeless and in priority need in Manchester local authority compared to 2,688 households accepted as being homeless and in priority need in 2002-03. See link for further information:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/141476.xls>

Launching the Local Government White Paper “Strong and Prosperous Communities” which set out a new stage of public sector reform, significantly strengthening leadership and devolving power to local government as well as providing a major expansion of opportunities for local people to influence local decision-making and improve their lives.

Helping reduce accidental fire-related deaths—the lowest level since 1959.

In 2008-09, there were 12 accidental fire related deaths in Greater Manchester, compared to 28 accidental fire related deaths in 2001-02. At the local level, fire deaths may fluctuate within a general declining national trend. See link for further information (Table 4b):

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/xls/1403049.xls>

Reducing by 1.2 million the number of non decent social homes

As at 1 April 2009, there were 7,201 non-decent dwellings in Manchester local authority, compared to 40,586 non decent dwellings at 1 April 2001. See links for further information:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/1393612.xls>

(2008-09 data)

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/141950.xls>

(2001-02 data)

Investing through the Neighbourhood Renewal Fund £1.87 billion for England’s 88 most deprived local authorities—leading to real positive change.

Hackney

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will set out, with statistical evidence relating as closely as possible to Hackney North and Stoke Newington constituency, the effects on that constituency of his Department’s policies since 1997. [318372]

Barbara Follett: The Department does not routinely collect information at constituency level as far back as to 1997. The constituency of Hackney North and Stoke Newington constituency falls within the London borough of Hackney and therefore where relevant information is available, this has been included in the answer.

The Neighbourhood Statistics Service provides a wide range of statistical information at parliamentary constituency level, taken from the 2001 Census and other sources. This service is available on the National Statistics website at:

<http://neighbourhood.statistics.gov.uk/>

Communities and Local Government statistical publications can be found at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/corporate/researchandstatistics/statistics/>

This includes time series data across the Department’s remit at various geographic levels.

Details of research projects commissioned by Communities and Local Government and its predecessors are available from our Research Database (RD) at:

<http://www.rmd.communities.gov.uk/>

This includes evaluations of key policies.

Over the last year, Communities and Local Government has:

Played a critical role responding to the recession ensuring people, business and communities receive the practical help they

need, including: helping people avoid repossession; Real Help Now; supporting the construction industry, critical regeneration projects, jobs through Future Jobs Fund; and businesses with the business rates deferral scheme.

Set in place a platform for greater local devolution for more effective decision-making through Local Area Agreements (LAAs)—including slashing central performance standards from over 1,200 to fewer than 200.

Continued building on this through Total Place pilots, leading innovation across public services—cutting out waste, overlap and duplication, meaning more and better quality services at less cost to the taxpayer.

Established the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) set out in the Planning Act 2008—which will make the major infrastructure planning decisions for the country, delivering a faster, fairer and more transparent planning regime.

Announced the £1.5 billion Housing Pledge to deliver an additional 20,000 units of affordable housing, creating 45,000 jobs in the construction industry over this year and next, including 1,300 new apprenticeship schemes.

Last year there were 990 additional affordable homes provided by the London borough of Hackney, compared to 709 additional affordable homes provided in 1996-97. See link for further information:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/1406085.xls>

During the period since 1997, the Department’s achievements include:

Working with local housing authorities to reduce the number of people accepted as owed a main homelessness duty by 71 per cent. since the peak in 2003—the lowest level since the late seventies—through greater emphasis on the prevention of homelessness.

In 2008-09, there were 615 households accepted as being homeless and in priority need in the London borough of Hackney compared to 1,136 households accepted as being homeless and in priority need in 2002-03. See link for further information:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/141476.xls>

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Helping reduce accidental fire-related deaths—the lowest level since 1959.

In 2008-09, there were 30 accidental fire related deaths in Greater London, compared to 56 accidental fire related deaths in 2001-02. See link for further information (Table 4b):

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/xls/1403049.xls>

Reducing by 1.2 million the number of non-decent social homes.

As at 1 April 2009, there were 7,326 non-decent dwellings in the London borough of Hackney, compared to 26,649 non-decent dwellings as at 1 April 2001. See links for further information:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/1393612.xls>

(2008009 data)

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/142466.xls>

(2001-02 data)

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Non-domestic Rates: Ports

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many port businesses have paid the assessments for business rates for 2009-10; how many such businesses have paid a first contribution into his Department's scheme to allow the payment of such retrospective charges over eight years; and what estimate he has made of the number of businesses eligible for assistance under this scheme. [321417]

Barbara Follett: The Department does not hold information on the extent to which individual businesses have met their business rates liabilities for 2009-10.

Local authorities reported that, as at 8 October 2009, ratepayers occupying 221 properties within ports had fully discharged their backdated liability and ratepayers occupying a further 200 business properties within ports had been granted a schedule of payments.

In a Business Rates Information letter dated 10 February 2009 the Government said that, based on historical trends, they estimate that up to 1,500 properties could benefit from a schedule of payments in 2009-10.

The Government have listened to the concerns of businesses with significant and unexpected backdated bills, including some of those within ports. It has legislated to enable such bills to be repaid over an unprecedented eight years rather than in one instalment thus helping affected businesses to manage the impact on their cash flows during the downturn by reducing the amount they are required to pay now by 87.5 per cent.

Stroud

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will set out, with statistical information related as directly as possible to Stroud constituency, the effects on that constituency of the policies and actions of his Department and its predecessor since 2000. [321478]

Barbara Follett: My Department does not routinely collect information at constituency level but, as the constituency of Stroud falls within the local authority of Stroud we have, where relevant, included information from them in this answer.

The Neighbourhood Statistics Service provides a wide range of statistical information at parliamentary constituency level, taken from the 2001 Census and other sources. This service is available on the National Statistics website at:

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Communities and Local Government statistical publications can be found at:

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Established the Infrastructure Planning Commission (IPC) set out in the Planning Act 2008—which will make the major Infrastructure Planning decisions for the country, delivering a faster, fairer and more transparent planning regime.

Announced the £1.5 billion Housing Pledge to deliver an additional 20,000 units of affordable housing, creating 45,000 jobs in the construction industry over this year and next, including 1,300 new apprenticeship schemes.

Last year there were 70 additional affordable homes provided by Stroud local authority compared to 50 additional affordable homes provided in 2000-01. See link for further information:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/1406085.xls>

During the period since 1997, the Department's achievements include:

Working with local housing authorities to reduce the number of people accepted as owed a main homelessness duty by 71 per cent. since the peak in 2003—the lowest level since the late seventies—through greater emphasis on the prevention of homelessness.

In 2008-09, there were 22 households accepted as being homeless and in priority need in Stroud local authority compared to 89 households accepted as being homeless and in priority need in 2002-03. See link for further information:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/141476.xls>

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Helping reduce accidental fire-related deaths—the lowest level since 1959.

In 2007-08, there were five accidental fire related deaths in Gloucestershire, compared to two accidental fire related deaths in 2001-02. At the local level, fire deaths may fluctuate within a general declining national trend. See link for further information (Table 4b):

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/statistics/xls/1403049.xls>

Reducing by 1.2 million the number of non decent social homes

As at 1 April 2009, there were 625 non-decent dwellings in Stroud local authority, compared to 1,895 non decent dwellings at 1 April 2001. See links for further information:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/1393612.xls>

(2008-09 data)

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/documents/housing/xls/142016.xls>

(2001-02 data)

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FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Democratic Republic of Congo: Armed Conflict

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make an assessment of the merits of making the provision of assistance to the Congolese army conditional on progress towards the release from its ranks of those under the age of 18 years and the removal of individuals suspected of having committed human rights abuses. [321661]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The UN Peacekeeping mission, MONUC, has a conditionality clause in its mandate that support will be withdrawn from Congolese army units (FARDC) which commit human rights abuses.

We fully support this approach and will continue to maintain pressure on the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) to take appropriate action against perpetrators of human rights abuses and uphold the rule of law. My noble Friend the Minister for Africa visited DRC last month and raised the issue with President Kabila, urging progress on security sector reform and implementation of his “zero tolerance” policy on human rights abuses. The Minister also met with FARDC officers and UN Peacekeeping troop commanders in South Kivu, in eastern Congo, and was encouraged by their considered approach to the newly mandated operation, Amani Leo, where they have created a method for vetting FARDC commanders before collaborating with them, shifted emphasis to predominantly civilian protection and developed a robust message on zero tolerance and the need to maintain professional standards. We will continue to monitor the mission through our staff on the ground and UN, non-governmental organisations and independent reporting.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of the merits of providing assistance for accountability mechanisms in Democratic Republic of Congo in respect of reported human rights abuses, with particular reference to the participation of children in armed conflict. [321662]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Accountability is essential for the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) armed forces to be able to provide civilian protection. My noble Friend the Minister for Africa raised the issue of impunity for human rights abusers with Prime Minister Muzito and President Kabila when in the country last month. We have lent support to developing the justice sector in DRC. We are providing about £80 million over five years to increase accountability of the security sector through strengthened oversight mechanisms, technical assistance and training.

Through the EU advisory and assistance mission for security reform in the DRC we are funding a biometric census project which provides accurate personnel figures for the military of the DRC regiments and allows child soldiers to be successfully identified and removed.

Mr. Oaten: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will make an assessment of the merits of extending the provisions of UN Security Council Resolution 1698 (2006) to include all political and military leaders responsible for the recruitment and use of children in armed conflict in Democratic Republic of Congo. [321663]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: UN Security Council Resolution 1698 states that political and military leaders recruiting or using children in armed conflict in violation of applicable international law; and individuals committing serious violations of international law involving the targeting of children in situations of armed conflict, including killing and maiming, sexual violence, abduction and forced displacement be subject to sanctions. We fully support this measure as stated in the declaration.

Democratic Republic of Congo: Political Prisoners

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Government of the Democratic Republic of Congo on the arrest in January 2010 of Lutu Mabangu. [321392]

Mr. Ivan Lewis [*holding answer 9 March 2010*]: My noble Friend Baroness Kinnock raised freedom of expression and the need for media freedom and freedom of association in the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) with the President, Prime Minister and other Ministers when she visited in late February. Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials will raise the specific case of Lutu Mabangu at the meeting of the EU human rights working group in Kinshasa next month. We are currently not making any specific representations to the Government of DRC about this case.

Departmental Location

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much his Department spent on the relocation of staff from posts in (a) Essex and (b) Castle Point constituency in each of the last five years. [321429]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: No such expenditure has been incurred.

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many full-time equivalent staff of each grade are employed by his Department to assist special advisers. [321136]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Since June 2009 there have been two full-time Civil Servants: one Band A member of staff (AO equivalent) and one Band B member (EO equivalent) employed to assist Special Advisers. These Civil Servants have provided administrative support of a non-political nature in accordance with the provisions of the Code of Conduct for Special Advisers.

Palestinians: International Assistance

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will take steps to seek to ensure safe passage of the Free Gaza flotilla through international waters. [321677]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Vessels in international waters enjoy the right of freedom of navigation. However, the Government strongly advise against any travel to Gaza at this time. Humanitarian aid workers and other essential specialist staff needing to travel to Gaza should co-ordinate their entry to Gaza with the major international

humanitarian organisations already on the ground. The Government also regularly lobby the Israeli Government to increase the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza.

If, despite this advice, 'Free Gaza' decide to travel to Gaza, they do so at their own risk. They should review their security arrangements and seek professional security advice on whether they are adequate. They should register with our consular office in Gaza. The level of consular assistance the FCO can provide is extremely limited.

Terrorism: Northern Ireland

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what progress his Department has made in its policy of supporting the provision of compensation by the Libyan government for victims of terrorism in Northern Ireland. [321769]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Libya/Northern Ireland Reconciliation Unit continues to support the campaign by victims and families of victims of Irish Republican Army terrorism to obtain a settlement from the Libyan Government. This dedicated unit continues to provide facilitation, logistical support and advice to the campaign.

Trade Unions

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many days staff of his Department and its agencies spent on trade union activity in the latest year for which figures are available; and what recent estimate he has made of the annual cost to the public purse of such activity. [320613]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: This information is not held centrally and to provide it would incur disproportionate cost.

Western Sahara: Politics and Government

Daniel Kawczynski: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he has had discussions with his counterparts in North Africa on the effects of the Western Sahara dispute on the effectiveness of the Maghreb Arab Union. [321617]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Foreign and Commonwealth Office officials have not discussed the effect of the Western Sahara dispute on the Maghreb Arab Union with all governments in North Africa. This issue has, however, been discussed with the Moroccan authorities. The UK recognises the negative impact of the long-running dispute over the territory of Western Sahara on a range of regional co-operation initiatives, including the Arab Maghreb Union.

The UK regards the status of the disputed non self-governing territory of Western Sahara as undetermined, pending UN efforts to find a solution that provides for the self-determination of the people of Western Sahara. To this end, we continue to support the UN Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy, Christopher Ross, in their efforts to resolve the dispute.

HOME DEPARTMENT **Alcoholic Drinks**

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what projects his Department is operating to encourage the responsible consumption of alcohol; and how much is being spent on each. [321156]

Mr. Alan Campbell: The Partnership Support Programme, run by the Alcohol Strategy Unit identified 50 CDRP areas where they expected to see action to tackle binge drinking and related antisocial behaviour. These areas are being encouraged to engage with their communities about the damaging effects of irresponsible drinking and the action they are taking to address problem areas. A total of £1.5 million has been distributed between the 50 CDRPs for this purpose.

12 selected CDRPs on the partnership support programme have received specialist strategic consultancy to develop sustainable communications plans to engage local communities and tackle people's perceptions of the issues. The consultancy included research dissemination and feedback, the facilitation of communications workshops and the development of communications strategies. This is supported by ongoing liaison with regional Know Your Limits stakeholders; providing them with promotional materials to run their campaigns about irresponsible drinking and keeping them informed of Home Office activity and news.

We provide support to CDRPs and other stakeholders who have questions and requests about the Know Your Limits campaign. This includes information about materials available to them, using logos and amplifying campaigns locally, advice on the type of communication programme that they could run in their area, as well as general communication guidance and best practice.

The Know Your Limits advertising campaign targets 18 to 24-year-olds to prompt them to reconsider their behaviour around binge drinking. Throughout the summer adverts appeared on websites, radio, TV and in magazines. The cost of media for the financial year 2009-10, excluding production and fees was £1,661,612.

Additionally, we have funded a number of adult and young people's alcohol arrest referral projects. These seek to offer a brief intervention to individuals who have been arrested for an offence, and are under the influence of alcohol. A total of £1.6 million has been spent on these arrest referral projects during the financial year 2009-10.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were (a) prosecuted, (b) convicted and (c) received the maximum available fine for the offence of not obeying an instruction to stop drinking in a designated public place in each of the last three years. [321158]

Mr. Alan Campbell: The number of defendants proceeding against at magistrates courts and convicted and fined at all courts in England and Wales, and issued with a penalty notice for disorder for not obeying an instruction to stop drinking in a designated public place in each year from 2006 to 2008 (latest available) can be viewed in the following table. No defendants have received the maximum fine of £500 between 2006 and 2008.

Court proceedings data for 2009 are planned to be published in the autumn 2010.

Number of defendants proceeded against at magistrates courts, found guilty, issued with a penalty notice of disorder and issued with a court fine at all courts for not obeying an instruction to stop drinking in a designated public place, England and Wales 2006-08^{1, 2, 3}

Offence description	Number	Of those paid		
		2006	2007	2008
Failure to obey an instruction to stop alcohol consumption in designated public place (Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001, sec. 12)	Proceeded against	101	113	4153
	Found guilty	73	98	4123
	Penalty notice of disorder	1,061	1,544	1,761
	Maximum fines issued	—	—	—
	Number of defendants fined	59	76	92

¹ The court proceedings figures given in the table relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

² Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

³ The offence of alcohol consumption in designated public place (section 12 of the Criminal Justice and Police Act 2001) came into force on 1 September 2001.

⁴ Excludes prosecutions and convictions data for Cardiff magistrates court for April, July, and August 2008.

Source:

Justice Statistics Analytical Services—Ministry of Justice.

Alcoholic Drinks: Crime

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what provisions on the purchase, production, sale or misuse of alcohol introduced in legislation since 1 May 2007 have not yet been brought into force. [321161]

Mr. Alan Campbell [holding answer 8 March 2010]: Legislative provisions that fall under the responsibility of the Home Office and have not yet been brought into force are as follows:

Policing and Crime Act 2009

The secondary legislation in relation to the mandatory licensing conditions for alcohol retailers. The Licensing Act 2003 (Mandatory Licensing Conditions) Order is currently before Parliament for approval.

Violent Crime Reduction Act 2006

Sections 6,7 and 8 in relation to Drinking Banning Orders on conviction will come into force on 1 April 2010.

Alcoholic Drinks: Fixed Penalties

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many penalty notices for disorder have been issued for the offence of consuming alcohol in a designated public place in each of the last three years; and how much was paid in fines for such notices in each of the last three years; [321034]

(2) how many penalty notices for disorder have been issued for the offence of being drunk in a highway in each of the last three years; and how much was paid in fines for such notices in each of the three years; [321035]

(3) how many penalty notices for disorder were issued for the offence of purchasing alcohol on behalf of a person under 18 in each of the last three years; and

how much was paid in fines for such notices in each of those years; [321036]

(4) how many penalty notices for disorder were issued for the offence of buying or attempting to buy alcohol by a person under 18 in each of the last three years; and how much was paid in fines for such notices in each of those years; [321037]

(5) how many penalty notices for disorder have been issued for the offence of selling alcohol to a person who is drunk in each of the last three years; and how much was paid in fines in each of those years.; [321073]

(6) how many penalty notices for disorder were issued for the offence of being drunk and disorderly in each of the last three years; and how much was paid in fines in each of those years; [321159]

(7) how many penalty notices for disorder were issued for the offence of selling alcohol to a person under 18 years old in each of the last three years; and how much was paid in fines in each of those years. [321160]

Mr. Alan Campbell: The number of penalty notice for disorder issued for selected offences 2006 to 2008 (latest) are given in the tables. Alcohol related offences have been italicised.

Offences requested as follows:

DB07—consuming alcohol in a designated public place

DB05—being drunk in a highway

DA19 and DA20— purchasing alcohol on behalf of a person under 18

DB14—buying or attempting to buy alcohol

DA16—selling alcohol to a person who is drunk

DA06—drunk and disorderly

DA18—selling alcohol to a person under 18 years old

Penalty notices for disorder data for 2009 are planned to be published in autumn 2010.

Number of Penalty Notices for Disorder issued to all persons aged 16 and over, by Offence and Outcome, England and Wales 2006¹

Offence description	Number issued	Total paid in full	%	Of those paid				
				Paid in full within 21 days	%	Paid in full outside 21 days	%	
<i>£80 Tickets issued</i>								
DA01	Wasting police time	3,933	1,911	49	1,355	34	556	14

Number of Penalty Notices for Disorder issued to all persons aged 16 and over, by Offence and Outcome, England and Wales 2006¹

Offence description	Number issued	Total paid in full	%	Of those paid				
				Paid in full within 21 days	%	Paid in full outside 21 days	%	
DA02 Misuse of public telecommunications system	909	523	58	388	43	135	15	
DA03 Giving false alarm to fire and rescue authority	106	43	41	35	33	8	8	
DA04 Causing Harassment, alarm or distress ²	82,235	43,120	52	30,757	37	12,363	15	
DA05 Throwing fireworks	682	380	56	267	39	113	17	
DA06 Drunk and disorderly	43,556	24,673	57	18,123	42	6,550	15	
DA11 Criminal Damage (under £500) ²	20,620	11,351	55	8,342	40	3,009	15	
DA12 Theft (retail under £200) ²	38,772	16,169	42	12,370	32	3,799	10	
DA13 Breach of fireworks curfew	53	34	64	27	51	7	13	
DA14 Possession of category 4 firework	28	12	43	9	32	3	11	
DA15 Possession by a person under 18 of adult firework	76	51	67	34	45	17	22	
DA16 Sale of alcohol to drunken person	47	35	74	29	62	6	13	
DA17 Supply of alcohol to person under 18	60	53	88	41	68	12	20	
DA18 Sale of alcohol to person under 18	3,195	2,756	86	2,354	74	402	13	
DA19 Purchase alcohol for person under 18	407	268	66	213	52	55	14	
DA20 Purchase alcohol for person under 18 for consumption on premises	60	39	65	35	58	4	7	
DA21 Delivery of alcohol to person under 18 or allowing such delivery	297	176	59	132	44	44	15	
<i>£50 Tickets issued</i>								
DB03 Trespass on a railway	1,042	551	53	320	31	231	22	
DB04 Throwing stones at a train/ railway	15	6	40	5	33	1	7	
DB05 Drunk in a highway	2,712	1,433	53	1,064	39	369	14	
DB07 Consumption of alcohol in public place	1,061	252	24	165	16	87	8	
DB08 Depositing and leaving litter	1,169	593	51	427	37	166	14	
DB12 Consumption of alcohol by under 18 on relevant premises	75	55	73	46	61	9	12	
DB13 Allowing consumption of alcohol by under 18 on relevant premises	14	10	71	10	71	—	—	
DB14 Buying or Attempting to buy alcohol by person under 18	73	52	71	43	59	9	12	
<i>All offences</i>	<i>201,197</i>	<i>104,546</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>76,591</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>27,955</i>	<i>14</i>	

Other outcomes

Offence description	Number issued	Total paid in full	Fine registered	%	Court hearing requested		PND cancelled		Potential prosecution		Outcome unknown	
					£	%	£	%	£	%	£	%
<i>£80 Tickets issued</i>												
DA01 Wasting police time	3,933	1,911	1,787	45	44	1	108	3	81	2	2	0
DA02 Misuse of public telecommunications system	909	523	319	35	14	2	26	3	24	3	3	0
DA03 Giving false alarm to fire and rescue authority	106	43	52	49	—	—	6	6	5	5	—	—

	Offence description	Number issued	Total paid in full	Fine registered	%	Court hearing requested	Other outcomes						
							%	PND cancelled	%	Potential prosecution	%	Outcome unknown	%
DB14	Buying or Attempting to buy alcohol by person under 18	73	52	20	27	—	—	1	1	—	—	—	—
	<i>All offences</i>	<i>201,197</i>	<i>104,546</i>	<i>87,796</i>	<i>44</i>	<i>1,480</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>4,268</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2,710</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>397</i>	<i>0</i>

Number of Penalty Notices for Disorder issued to all persons aged 16 and over, by Offence and Outcome, England and Wales 2007¹

Offence description	Number issued	Total paid in full	%	Of those paid				
				Paid in full within 21 days	%	Paid in full outside 21 days	%	
<i>£80 Tickets issued</i>								
DA01	Wasting police time	3,966	1,862	47	1,384	35	478	12
DA02	Misuse of public telecommunications system	1,193	670	56	526	44	144	12
DA03	Giving false alarm to fire and rescue authority	96	55	57	38	40	17	18
DA04	Causing Harassment, alarm or distress ²	77,827	40,357	52	30,761	40	9,596	12
DA05	Throwing fireworks	649	374	58	290	45	84	13
DA06	Drunk and disorderly	46,996	26,367	56	19,727	42	6,640	14
DA11	Criminal Damage (under £500) ²	19,946	11,072	56	8,401	42	2,671	13
DA12	Theft (retail under £200) ²	45,146	19,111	42	15,390	34	3,721	8
DA13	Breach of fireworks curfew	39	25	64	20	51	5	13
DA14	Possession of category 4 firework	22	10	45	7	32	3	14
DA15	Possession by a person under 18 of adult firework	106	67	63	57	54	10	9
DA16	Sale of alcohol to drunken person	81	64	79	50	62	14	17
DA17	Supply of alcohol to person under 18	54	41	76	31	57	10	19
DA18	Sale of alcohol to person under 18	3,583	3,074	86	2,623	73	451	13
DA19	Purchase alcohol for person under 18	555	320	58	244	44	76	14
DA20	Purchase alcohol for person under 18 for consumption on premises	64	31	48	23	36	8	13
DA21	Delivery of alcohol to person under 18 or allowing such delivery	431	268	62	219	51	49	11
<i>£50 Tickets issued</i>								
DB03	Trespass on a railway	1,527	780	51	441	29	339	22
DB04	Throwing stones at a train/railway	25	13	52	11	44	2	8
DB05	Drunk in a highway	2,066	1,146	55	942	46	204	10
DB07	Consumption of alcohol in public place	1,544	328	21	259	17	69	4
DB08	Depositing and leaving litter	1,374	705	51	541	39	164	12
DB12	Consumption of alcohol by under 18 on relevant premises	85	67	79	55	65	12	14
DB13	Allowing consumption of alcohol by under 18 on relevant premises	11	9	82	8	73	1	9
DB14	Buying or Attempting to buy alcohol by person under 18	158	109	69	85	54	24	15
	<i>All offences</i>	<i>207,544</i>	<i>106,925</i>	<i>52</i>	<i>82,133</i>	<i>40</i>	<i>24,792</i>	<i>12</i>

		<i>Other outcomes</i>											
	<i>Offence description</i>	<i>Number issued</i>	<i>Total paid in full</i>	<i>Fine registered</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Court hearing requested</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>PND cancelled</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Potential prosecution</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>Outcome unknown</i>	<i>%</i>
	<i>£80 Tickets issued</i>												
DA01	Wasting police time	3,966	1,862	1,807	46	34	1	122	3	140	4	1	0
DA02	Misuse of public telecommunications system	1,193	670	431	36	17	1	43	4	32	3	—	—
DA03	Giving false alarm to fire and rescue authority	96	55	37	39	—	—	3	3	1	1	—	—
DA04	Causing Harassment, alarm or distress ²	77,827	40,357	33,021	42	626	1	2,210	3	1,577	2	36	0
DA05	Throwing fireworks	649	374	223	34	9	1	30	5	13	2	—	—
DA06	Drunk and disorderly	46,996	26,367	18,161	39	244	1	1,038	2	1,177	3	9	0
DA11	Criminal Damage (under £500) ²	19,946	11,072	7,979	40	112	1	384	2	393	2	6	0
DA12	Theft (retail under £200) ²	45,146	19,111	24,344	54	172	0	988	2	507	1	24	0
DA13	Breach of fireworks curfew	39	25	13	33	—	—	1	3	—	—	—	—
DA14	Possession of category 4 firework	22	10	10	45	—	—	2	9	—	—	—	—
DA15	Possession by a person under 18 of adult firework	106	67	31	29	1	1	5	5	2	2	—	—
DA16	Sale of alcohol to drunken person	81	64	9	11	3	4	2	2	3	4	—	—
DA17	Supply of alcohol to person under 18	54	41	11	20	1	2	1	2	—	—	—	—
DA18	Sale of alcohol to person under 18	3,583	3,074	405	11	13	0	69	2	22	1	—	—
DA19	Purchase alcohol for person under 18	555	320	211	38	4	1	14	3	5	1	1	0
DA20	Purchase alcohol for person under 18 for consumption on premises	64	31	22	34	—	—	10	16	1	2	—	—
DA21	Delivery of alcohol to person under 18 or allowing such delivery	431	268	138	32	1	0	19	4	5	1	—	—
	<i>£50 Tickets issued</i>												
DB03	Trespass on a railway	1,527	780	675	44	—	—	45	3	26	2	1	0
DB04	Throwing stones at a train/railway	25	13	10	40	—	—	2	8	—	—	—	—
DB05	Drunk in a highway	2,066	1,146	788	38	8	0	94	5	30	1	—	—
DB07	Consumption of alcohol in public place	1,544	328	1,090	71	6	0	87	6	32	2	1	0
DB08	Depositing and leaving litter	1,374	705	589	43	2	0	64	5	13	1	1	0

	Offence description	Number issued	Total paid in full	Fine registered	%	Court hearing requested	Other outcomes						
							%	PND cancelled	%	Potential prosecution	%	Outcome unknown	%
DB12	Consumption of alcohol by under 18 on relevant premises	85	67	16	19	—	—	2	2	—	—	—	—
DB13	Allowing consumption of alcohol by under 18 on relevant premises	11	9	1	9	—	—	1	9	—	—	—	—
DB14	Buying or Attempting to buy alcohol by person under 18	158	109	35	22	—	—	13	8	1	1	—	—
<i>All offences</i>		<i>207,544</i>	<i>106,925</i>	<i>90,057</i>	<i>43</i>	<i>1,253</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>5,249</i>	<i>3</i>	<i>3,980</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>80</i>	<i>0</i>

Number of Penalty Notices for Disorder issued to all persons aged 16 and over, by Offence and Outcome, England and Wales 2008¹

	Offence description	Number issued	Total paid in full	%	Of those paid				
					Paid in full within 21 days	%	Paid in full outside 21 days	%	
<i>£80 Tickets issued</i>									
DA01	Wasting police time	3,443	1,659	48	1,302	38	357	10	
DA02	Misuse of public telecommunications system	888	532	60	422	48	110	12	
DA03	Giving false alarm to fire and rescue authority	77	50	65	35	45	15	19	
DA04	Causing Harassment, alarm or distress ²	57,773	29,646	51	23,172	40	6,474	11	
DA05	Throwing fireworks	531	296	56	240	45	56	11	
DA06	Drunk and disorderly	44,411	24,775	56	18,371	41	6,404	14	
DA11	Criminal Damage (under £500) ²	13,427	7,624	57	5,880	44	1,744	13	
DA12	Theft (retail under £200) ²	45,616	20,903	46	17,280	38	3,623	8	
DA13	Breach of fireworks curfew	23	21	91	17	74	4	17	
DA14	Possession of category 4 firework	23	12	52	10	43	2	9	
DA15	Possession by a person under 18 of adult firework	67	42	63	38	57	4	6	
DA16	Sale of alcohol to drunken person	66	51	77	47	71	4	6	
DA17	Supply of alcohol to person under 18	83	70	84	60	72	10	12	
DA18	Sale of alcohol to person under 18	2,824	2,473	88	2,121	75	352	12	
DA19	Purchase alcohol for person under 18	524	291	56	232	44	59	11	
DA20	Purchase alcohol for person under 18 for consumption on premises	50	34	68	24	48	10	20	
DA21	Delivery of alcohol to person under 18 or allowing such delivery	286	162	57	134	47	28	10	
<i>£50 Tickets issued</i>									
DB03	Trespass on a railway	1,468	797	54	313	21	484	33	
DB04	Throwing stones at a train/ railway	27	16	59	7	26	9	33	
DB05	<i>Drunk in a highway</i>	1,438	773	54	657	46	116	8	
DB07	<i>Consumption of alcohol in public place</i>	1,761	296	17	254	14	42	2	
DB08	Depositing and leaving litter	1,202	660	55	543	45	117	10	
DB12	<i>Consumption of alcohol by under 18 on relevant premises</i>	36	23	64	19	53	4	11	
DB13	<i>Allowing consumption of alcohol by under 18 on relevant premises</i>	6	4	67	4	67	—	—	

Number of Penalty Notices for Disorder issued to all persons aged 16 and over, by Offence and Outcome, England and Wales 2008¹

Offence description	Number issued	Total paid in full	%	Of those paid			
				Paid in full within 21 days	%	Paid in full outside 21 days	%
DB14 Buying or Attempting to buy alcohol by person under 18	114	79	69	62	54	17	15
England and Wales	176,164	91,289	52	71,244	40	20,045	11

Offence description	Number issued	Total paid in full	Fine registered	%	Court hearing requested		PND cancelled		Potential prosecution		Outcome unknown	
					%	%	%	%	%	%		
<i>£80 Tickets issued</i>												
DA01 Wasting police time	3,443	1,659	1,519	44	35	1	115	3	113	3	2	0
DA02 Misuse of public telecommunications system	888	532	285	32	11	1	40	5	20	2	—	—
DA03 Giving false alarm to fire and rescue authority	77	50	25	32	1	1	—	—	1	1	—	—
DA04 Causing Harassment, alarm or distress ²	57,773	29,646	24,623	43	419	1	1,688	3	1,387	2	10	0
DA05 Throwing fireworks	531	296	204	38	3	1	17	3	11	2	—	—
DA06 Drunk and disorderly	44,411	24,775	17,368	39	299	1	873	2	1,072	2	24	0
DA11 Criminal Damage (under £500) ²	13,427	7,624	5,251	39	72	1	210	2	266	2	4	0
DA12 Theft (retail under £200) ²	45,616	20,903	23,090	51	189	0	881	2	540	1	13	0
DA13 Breach of fireworks curfew	23	21	1	4	1	4	—	—	—	—	—	—
DA14 Possession of category 4 firework	23	12	11	48	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
DA15 Possession by a person under 18 of adult firework	67	42	22	33	—	—	2	3	1	1	—	—
DA16 Sale of alcohol to drunken person	66	51	9	14	3	5	1	2	2	3	—	—
DA17 Supply of alcohol to person under 18	83	70	12	14	—	—	—	—	1	1	—	—
DA18 Sale of alcohol to person under 18	2,824	2,473	309	11	9	0	15	1	17	1	1	0
DA19 Purchase alcohol for person under 18	524	291	210	40	4	1	10	2	9	2	—	—
DA20 Purchase alcohol for person under 18 for consumption on premises	50	34	15	30	—	—	1	2	—	—	—	—
DA21 Delivery of alcohol to person under 18 or allowing such delivery	286	162	116	41	—	—	8	3	—	—	—	—
<i>£50 Tickets issued</i>												
DB03 Trespass on a railway	1,468	797	585	40	1	0	69	5	16	1	—	—
DB04 Throwing stones at a train/railway	27	16	10	37	—	—	1	4	—	—	—	—
DB05 Drunk in a highway	1,438	773	586	41	4	0	55	4	20	1	—	—

	Offence description	Number issued	Total paid in full	Fine registered	%	Court hearing requested		PND cancelled		Potential prosecution		Outcome unknown	
							%		%		%		%
DB07	Consumption of alcohol in public place	1,761	296	1,365	78	2	0	72	4	26	1	—	—
DB08	Depositing and leaving litter	1,202	660	496	41	8	1	25	2	12	1	1	0
DB12	Consumption of alcohol by under 18 on relevant premises	36	23	11	31	—	—	2	6	—	—	—	—
DB13	Allowing consumption of alcohol by under 18 on relevant premises	6	4	2	33	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—
DB14	Buying or Attempting to buy alcohol by person under 18	114	79	30	26	1	1	4	4	—	—	—	—
	England and Wales	176,164	91,289	76,155	43	1,062	1	4,089	2	3,514	2	55	0

“—” = Nil.

¹ Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

² Offence is a Notifiable offence included within OBTJ figures.

Source:

Justice Statistics Analytical Services—Ministry of Justice.

[Ref: IOS 120-10], [Ref: IOS 124-10], [Ref: IOS 125-10], [Ref: IOS 126-10], [Ref: IOS 127-10], [Ref: IOS 128-10] and [Ref: IOS 129-10]

Animal Experiments: Primates

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department takes steps to ensure that monkeys imported for scientific research from (a) China and (b) Vietnam have been bred in that country and not re-exported from a third country. [321326]

Meg Hillier: Appraisal of the breeding centres in China and Vietnam currently regarded as acceptable by the Home Office has not revealed any evidence that animals consigned to the United Kingdom have been bred other than at the Chinese or Vietnamese centre in question.

Following each shipment of non-human primates to the United Kingdom, the Inspectorate has access to the full-lifetime records of the individual animals to be used under project licence authority including details of their origin. Second and subsequent Inspectorate visits to overseas sources allow supplementary checks to be made of the reliability of the records provided to the United Kingdom users.

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many companies in (a) China and (b) Vietnam are designated as breeding and supply establishments to supply non-human primates to the UK for the purposes of scientific research. [321341]

Meg Hillier: The Home Office has no authority to designate primate breeders or suppliers outside Great Britain. However, the use of any non-human primate from an overseas source under the authority of a project licence issued under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 requires prior approval which is given only if the conditions at the supplying centre, and at the breeding

centre where the animals originate, if different, are acceptable to the Home Office at the time of the supply. There are three centres in China currently considered acceptable to provide non-human primates to UK designated user establishments and one in Vietnam.

Antisocial Behaviour

Mr. Hepburn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many reports of antisocial behaviour police forces in (a) Jarrow constituency, (b) South Tyneside, (c) the North East and (d) England and Wales have received in each year since 1997. [313498]

Mr. Alan Campbell: The total number of incidents classified as antisocial behaviour as defined within the National Incident Category List (NICL) in 2007-08 and 2008-09 are set out in the table. Data are not available by constituency and were only collected in 2007-08 and 2008-09.

These data are normally used for management information only and are not subject to the detailed checks that apply for National Statistics publications.

Force area	2007-08	2008-09
South Tyneside	19,030	16,233
North East of England ¹	298,864	271,707
England and Wales	3,868,002	23,669,100

¹ For policing purposes the Home Office define the North East region as consisting of three police forces: Cleveland, Durham, and Northumbria.

² This figure has increased by 7,602 compared to the figure in PQ ref: 289587 owing to a correction to Wiltshire's figure.

Note:

The data represent calls for service as recorded by police forces under the ASB categories and may be subject to local variation in reporting and classifying.

Arrest Warrants: Operating Costs

Mr. Andrew Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost to the public purse has been of enforcing European arrest warrants issued in each other EU member state in each year since 2003; and what the average cost to the public purse was of enforcing such a warrant in each of those years. [321191]

Meg Hillier [*holding answer 8 March 2010*]: The European arrest warrant has been in operation since 1 January 2004. The Home Office does not hold this data. It could not be accessed without incurring disproportionate cost.

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	£000 2008-09
Home Office, including UKBA	13,499	14,903	10,419	9,683	9,636	8,301
Identity and Passport Service	3	3	3	6	1260	1,177
Criminal Records Bureau	0	0	0	13	0	0

¹The Identity and Passport Service introduced compulsory face-to-face interviews for first time applicants in 2007-08. The first compulsory interview making use of an interpreter took place on 11 May 2007.

The Home Office figures in the table, for the financial years 2004-05 to 2007-08, do not include those for the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and the Office of Criminal Justice and Reform (OCJR), which transferred to Ministry of Justice on 1 April 2007: figures for NOMS and OCJR for 2003-04 could not be deducted from the Home Office total without incurring disproportionate cost.

Data prior to 2003-04 can only be extracted at disproportionate cost.

Firearms: Arrests

Anne Main: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many (a) arrests for possession of a firearm and (b) gun-related incidents were recorded in each year since 1997. [320893]

Mr. Alan Campbell: The relevant Home Office data collection includes information on the number of arrests for possession of firearms resulting from searches under the Firearms Act 1968 Section 47 and other legislation. Data on the number of arrests under these powers from 1997-98 to 2007-08 (latest available) are provided in Table (A). The information provided only covers arrests under these powers and does not cover other arrests for firearms.

Information on the number of arrests for possession of firearms not resulting from these searches is not available centrally.

Data on offences in which firearms (excluding air weapons) were reported to have been used from 1997-98 to 2008-09 are given in Tables (B) and (C). Statistics for 2009-10 are scheduled to be published in January 2011.

Firearms are taken to be involved in a crime if they are fired, used as a blunt instrument or used as a threat against a person.

The National Crime Recording Standard was introduced in April 2002. Firearm offences before and after that date are not directly comparable.

Departmental Translation Services

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what expenditure (a) his Department and (b) each of its agencies incurred on translators in each year since 1998. [317982]

Alan Johnson: The Department's expenditure on translation and interpretation services from 2003-04 to 2008-09, being the most recent period for which audited figures are available, is as follows:

	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08	£000 2008-09
Home Office, including UKBA	13,499	14,903	10,419	9,683	9,636	8,301
Identity and Passport Service	3	3	3	6	1260	1,177
Criminal Records Bureau	0	0	0	13	0	0

Table A: Number of arrests for possession of firearms following stops and searches under Section 47 of the firearms act 1968 and other legislation, England and Wales 1997-98 to 2007-08

	Number
1997-98	726
1998-99	707
1999-2000	756
2000-01	815
2001-02	899
2002-03	1,041
2003-04	924
2004-05	1,438
2005-06	1,417
2006-07	1,410
2007-08	1,496

Table B: Firearm offences¹ (excluding air weapons), England and Wales, 1997 to 2001-02

	Number of offences
1997-98	4,903
1998-99 ²	5,209
1999-2000	6,843
2000-01	7,471
2001-02 ³	10,024

¹ Firearms are taken to be involved in a crime if they are fired, used as a blunt instrument or used as a threat

² There was a change in the counting rules for recorded crime on 1 April 1998.

³ Figures may have been inflated by some police forces implementing the principles of the National Crime Recording Standard before 1 April 2002.

Table C: Firearm offences¹ (excluding air weapons), England and Wales, 2002-03 to 2008-09

	Number of offences
2002-03 ²	10,248
2003-04	10,338
2004-05 ³	11,069
2005-06	11,088
2006-07	9,645
2007-08	9,865

Table C: Firearm offences¹ (excluding air weapons), England and Wales, 2002-03 to 2008-09

	Number of offences
2008-09	8,208

¹ Firearms are taken to be involved in a crime if they are fired, used as a blunt instrument or used as a threat.

² The National Crime Recording Standard was introduced in April 2002. Figures before and after that date are not directly comparable.

³ More explicit guidelines for the classification of weapons introduced on 1 April 2004 may have increased the recording of firearm offences, particularly those committed by imitation weapons.

Intelligence Services

Mr. Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether the guidelines issued by his Department to officers of those intelligence services which fall within his responsibilities on interviewing prisoners abroad have been (a) seen and (b) agreed by him; and if he will make a statement. [321502]

Mr. Hanson: The draft consolidated guidance is being seen and agreed by the relevant Ministers, which includes myself, and, as the Prime Minister has made clear, will be published shortly.

Post Office

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he has discussed with Post Office Ltd. the award of the contract set out in tender notice 2009/S 247-354963. [319963]

Meg Hillier: The Secretary of State for the Home Department, has not discussed with Post Office Ltd. the award of the contract set out in tender notice 2009/S 247-354963.

Dr. Palmer: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he made an assessment of awarding the contract set out in tender notice 2009/S 247-354963 to Post Office Ltd outside the competitive process. [319964]

Meg Hillier: The National Identity Scheme Management Board and its professional advisers concluded that a competition was required to find partners to help provide the services set out in tender notice 2009/S 247-354963. They advised the Secretary of State for the Home Department accordingly.

Prisoners: Health

Jim Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent estimate he has made of the number and proportion of (a) youths, (b) adult males and (c) adult females in custody following sentencing who experienced (i) drug dependency health problems, (ii) alcohol dependency health problems and (iii) serious mental health problems in the last 12 months. [321122]

Phil Hope: I have been asked to reply.

The Department does not collect information on the number and proportion of sentenced prisoners (including young offenders (18 to 20 years), adult males and adult females) who experienced drug dependency and alcohol dependency health problems.

A source of information regarding prevalence of substance misuse among sentenced prisoners is "The problems and needs of newly sentenced prisoners: results from a national survey" published by the Ministry of Justice in October 2008. This reviewed 1,457 newly sentenced prisoners from 49 prisons.

In 2008, 703 sentenced prisoners were transferred from prison because of a mental illness severe enough to warrant treatment in a mental in-patient facility commissioned by the national health service.

UK Border Agency: Manpower

Damian Green: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many UK Border Agency staff were based in each overseas country on 1 December 2009. [313504]

Mr. Woolas: 661 UK-based UK Border Agency staff are posted or are working overseas.

Another 1,510 staff locally engaged by the Foreign and Commonwealth Office also work for the UK Border Agency are based abroad.

The following tables give the breakdown by each country:

Table 1: Entirety of work force¹, United Kingdom-based UK Border Agency staff posted or working overseas

Countries ²	Number
France	125
India	76
Nigeria	68
United Arab Emirates	43
Belgium	36
China	39
South Africa	25
Philippines	23
Russian Federation	21
Ghana	23
Pakistan	17
Bangladesh	12
Jamaica	10
Kenya	10
Turkey	10
Egypt	8
Thailand	8
Poland	6
Total of employees in countries with five or fewer posted UK staff ³	101
Total	661

¹ Border Force staff as at 31 December 2009, International Group staff as at 22 January 2009.

² Countries with more than five posted UK staff.

³ Total representation in countries with five or fewer posted UK staff.

Table 2: Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff who are locally engaged and are thus based overseas, who work for the UK Border Agency

Country	Locally engaged workers (Number)
India	208
Nigeria	133
China	110
United Arab Emirates	106
Pakistan	88
United States	66

Table 2: Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff who are locally engaged and are thus based overseas, who work for the UK Border Agency

Country	Locally engaged workers (Number)
South Africa	51
Bangladesh	43
Philippines	36
Russian Federation	34
Australia	33
Turkey	32
Ghana	31
Thailand	28
Kenya	26
France	18
Germany	18
Iran	17
Malaysia	16
Sri Lanka	14
Italy	13
Jamaica	13
Jordan	13
Saudi Arabia	13
Ukraine	13
Canada	12
Egypt	12
Ethiopia	12
Spain	11
Colombia	10
Gambia, The	9
Irish Republic	9
Kuwait	9
Cyprus	8
Morocco	8
Taiwan (China)	8
Brazil	7
Macedonia	7
Yugoslavia	7
Libya	6
Netherlands	6
Romania	6
Vietnam	6
Countries with five or less locally engaged workers	184
Total	1,510

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Electricity

Mr. Peter Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (1) whether he plans to bring forward proposals to set minimum standards for energy loss from distribution transformers in respect of (a) the installed base of transformers and (b) new units procured by distribution network operators; [321624]

(2) whether he has made a recent estimate of the potential carbon savings arising from the adoption of the highest energy efficiency standards in distribution of transformers distribution network operators; and if he will make a statement; [321625]

(3) what mechanisms are in place to encourage distribution network operators to procure the most

energy efficient distribution transformers; and if he will make a statement. [321627]

Mr. Kidney: DECC's policy is to ensure that grids, including at distribution level support the new generation mix we need to meet our targets.

Ofgem did consider setting minimum standards for losses as part of their review of the losses incentive in DPCR5 but opted to retain the output based incentive (which was improved in DPCR5) in order to encourage distribution network operators (DNO's) to manage losses both through low loss technology but also through network operations or network users and to incentivise them to identify ways to tackle the issue of theft.

The downside of setting minimum standards would be the need for Ofgem to specify equipment which could lead to the risk of equipment market distortion and could stifle DNO's innovation on technical loss reduction.

Insulation

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether his Department has made an estimate of the number of homes which require (a) additional loft insulation, (b) cavity wall insulation, (c) draught proofing and (d) new heating controls for the purposes of increasing their energy efficiency. [320327]

Joan Ruddock: The English Housing Survey published by the Department for Communities and Local Government provides annual estimates on loft insulation, cavity wall insulation and heating controls. Using the approach contained within the Energy Performance Certificate, the 2007 report from the survey identified the following number of homes that would benefit (that is their energy efficiency rating would significantly increase) in terms of loft insulation, cavity wall insulation and heating controls. The survey is not able to measure the benefiting impact of draught proofing.

This is an estimate of the number of properties that would benefit from this measure, but that does not imply any requirement for such measures. The survey also does not take into account any practical issues of installing such measures. Many of these homes will be performing to a reasonable standard in terms of their energy efficiency.

EPC recommended energy efficiency measures, 2007

	Size of applicable group ¹ (thousand)	Number of dwellings that would benefit from the measure (thousand)	Percentage
Loft insulation	19,908	8,871	45
Cavity wall	15,527	7,088	46
Heating controls	19,499	7,784	40

¹ The total number of dwellings that have some level of existing loft insulation; have cavity walls, including those already insulated; have heating systems appropriate for heating controls, including those with controls fitted.

Source:

English House Condition Survey 2007 Annual Report, Table 2.6, pg 119 CLG.

Figures for 2008 will be published later in the year.

Warm Front Scheme

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many households have had works funded by the Warm Front scheme in each month since January 2009. [320326]

Mr. Kidney: The following table shows the number of households which have received works funded by Warm Front in each month since January 2009 to January 2010, the latest month for which figures are currently available.

	<i>Number of households assisted</i>
January 2009	19,402
February 2009	30,023
March 2009	21,674
April 2009	17,690
May 2009	21,004
June 2009	19,960
July 2009	15,954
August 2009	19,676
September 2009	24,308
October 2009	20,664
November 2009	17,855
December 2009	15,982
January 2010	12,010

Wind Power

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent estimate his Department has made of the proportion of UK electricity that will come from (a) onshore and (b) offshore wind in (i) 2012, (ii) 2015 and (iii) 2020. [321255]

Mr. Kidney: The Renewable Energy Strategy (July 2009) contains recent analysis of the full technology breakdown to achieve the renewable energy target on a consistent basis across instruments and technologies. It is based on economic modelling of the costs and support for renewable technologies in the electricity, heat and transport sectors. The data below is based on the lead scenario from the Renewable Energy Strategy for large-scale electricity, which reaches 29 per cent. large-scale renewable electricity in 2020, and includes estimates of onshore wind additionally brought on through feed in tariffs. However these numbers are just an illustrative mix on how we could reach 29 per cent. large scale renewable generation. The Government do not set targets for individual energy generation technologies but takes a market-based approach to generation.

<i>Electricity generation from</i>	<i>Percentage</i>		
	<i>2012</i>	<i>2015</i>	<i>2020</i>
Onshore wind	4	5	9
Offshore wind	2	5	11

Source:

Data are based on analysis by independent consultants Redpoint/Trilemma and Element Energy for the renewable energy strategy.

CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

Building Schools for the Future Programme

Michael Gove: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families what the gross internal floor area (a) before and (b) after rebuilding was of each school that has been rebuilt under the Building Schools for the Future programme. [319982]

Mr. Coaker [*holding answer 2 March 2010*]: Neither the Department nor Partnerships for Schools routinely collects information about the gross internal floor area of schools before they are rebuilt under the Building Schools for the Future (BSF) programme. However we require all secondary schools to be in line with the Department's current area guidelines. For example, Building Bulletin 98 'Briefing Framework for Secondary School Projects', published in 2004 and Building Bulletin 82 'Area Guidelines for Schools', published in 1996. Prior to 1996 schools had to comply with statutory Minimum Teaching Area.

The following table shows the gross internal floor area for schools completed as part of BSF where data are available. It excludes 'quick win' projects (those in wave 1 of BSF that were accelerated for early completion) and 'one school pathfinders' (single projects for those local authorities in later BSF waves).

<i>Local authority</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Gross internal floor area m²</i>
Bradford	Titus Salt School	16,773
Bradford	Tong High School	15,145
Bradford	Buttershaw Business and Enterprise College	15,965
Bristol	Bristol Brunel Academy	13,056
Bristol	The Bridge Learning Campus	14,450
Bristol	Brislington Enterprise College	17,640
Bristol	Bristol Metropolitan College	11,200
Durham	Durham Johnston	13,100
Hackney	Stoke Newington School (Phase 1)	13,430
Hackney	Clapton Girls Technology College	11,077
Haringey	John Loughborough	2,977
Haringey	Highgate Wood Secondary School	11,970
Haringey	Alexandra Park School	12,256
Haringey	Gladesmore Community School	10,034
Haringey	Homsey School for Girls	11,739
Haringey	Park View Academy	12,462
Haringey	Northumberland Park Community School	13,985
Islington	Holloway School	8,215
Islington	Highbury Grove + New Sixth Form	12,626
Islington	Samuel Rhodes SEN School	2,834
Kent	Dane Court School	10,148
Kent	The Community College Whitstable	10,777
Kent	Northfleet School for Girls (phase 1)	9,861
Kent	St. George's Church of England Foundation School (phase 1)	8,242
Knowsley	All Saints Centre for Learning	10,872
Knowsley	St. Edmunds Arrowsmith Centre for Learning	10,315
Knowsley	Huyton Arts & Sports Centre for Learning	10,949

<i>Local authority</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Gross internal floor area m²</i>	<i>Local authority</i>	<i>School</i>	<i>Gross internal floor area m²</i>
Knowsley	Knowsley Park Centre for Learning—serving Prescot, Whitson and the wider community	10,844	Solihull	Archbishop Grimshaw Catholic School	12,086
Knowsley	Kirkby Sports College	10,872	Solihull	Smith's Wood	12,850
Knowsley	Halewood Centre for Learning	12,455	Solihull	Park Hall School	12,557
Knowsley	Christ the King Catholic and Church of England Centre for Learning	9,585	Solihull	Lanchester School	3,911
Lambeth	Stockwell Park	11,919	South Tyneside	Mortimer Community College	11,105
Lambeth	Elm Court Special School	1,272	South Tyneside	Jarrow School	9,383
Lambeth	Park Campus	2,399	Sunderland	Red House Academy	5,322
Lambeth	The Michael Tippett School	3,468	Sunderland	Castle View Enterprise Academy	7,880
Lambeth	Elmgreen School (temporary accommodation)	12,240	Sunderland	Academy 360	10,104
Lancashire	Sir John Thursby Community College	13,574	Sunderland	Washington School	8,903
Lancashire	Burnley Campus (Thomas Whitham Sixth Form)	13,262	Waltham Forest	Walthamstow School for Girls	9,614
Lancashire	Pendle Vale Campus	14,122	Waltham Forest	Frederick Bremer	9,519
Lancashire	Shuttleworth College	9,888	Waltham Forest	Kelmscott School	7,413
Leeds	Swallow Hill Community College	13,965	Westminster	Westminster City Boys	8,344
Leeds	Allerton Grange	13,528	Westminster	St. Marylebone CE	9,198
Leeds	Cockburn College of Arts	10,336	Westminster	Pimlico	12,769
Leeds	Allerton High School	12,114			
Leeds	Pudsey Grangefield School	10,528			
Leeds	Rodillian School	12,485			
Leeds	Temple Moor High School	11,811			
Leeds	Crawshaw	11,528			
Leicester	Soar Valley College	13,291			
Leicester	Judgemeadow Community College	10,750			
Leicester	Beaumont Leys	10,129			
Leicester	Fullhurst Community College	9,225			
Lewisham	Catford	8,873			
Lewisham	Sedgehill	15,227			
Liverpool	Lower Lee SEN School	4,631			
Manchester	Enterprise Academy	8,278			
Manchester	Health Academy	7,273			
Manchester	Our Lady's RC Sports College (Higher Blackley Education Village)	7,023			
Manchester	St. Matthews RC High School	9,541			
Manchester	Newall Green High School	5,028			
Manchester	Gorton Education Village	11,931			
Manchester	St. Paul's	13,112			
Manchester	Gorton Education Village (Melland High School)	4,110			
Manchester	Piper Hill	13,112			
Manchester	Meade Hill (Part of Higher Blackley Education Village)	2,745			
Manchester	Buglawton Hall	2,850			
Newcastle	Kenton School	19,382			
Newcastle	Benfield School (phase 1 of refurb)	11,461			
Newcastle	Walbottle Campus Technology College	17,106			
Newcastle	Thomas Bewick (Previous PFI delivered by LEP)	4,106			
Newham	Brampton Manor School	15,186			
Nottingham	Big Wood	7,759			
Nottingham	Hadden Park High School (phase 1)	9,728			
Sheffield	Yewlands Technology College (two phases)	9,143			
Sheffield	Talbot Special School	4,199			
Sheffield	Newfield Secondary School	8,366			
Sheffield	Silverdale Secondary School	10,913			

Note:

The gross floor areas are estimates based on returns from local authorities

Departmental Taxis

Ian Stewart: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families what contracts his Department has with private hire taxi companies; and what expenditure his Department has incurred on such contracts in each year since his Department was established. [300837]

Ms Diana R. Johnson: The Department for Children, Schools and Families was created in June 2007. The Department does not currently have any contracts with private hire taxi companies but does have an arrangement with the Government Car Despatch Agency (GCDA). Any other expenditure incurred would be through account arrangements or through spot hire.

Expenditure incurred for each year with companies through accounts or spot hire since the Department was established is as follows. These figures also include expenditure (GCDA).

	£
June 2007 to March 2008	247,738.00
April 2008 to March 2009	319,447.03
April 2009 to December 2009	237,359.30
Total	804,544.33

Stroud

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families if he will set out, with statistical information related as directly as possible to Stroud constituency, the effects on that constituency of the policies and actions of his Department and its predecessors since 2000. [321479]

Mr. Coaker: Since 2000 the Government have transformed education and child care with improved outcomes for children and young people. Figures showing the performance at Key Stage 2 and GCSE and equivalents in Stroud are given in the following tables:

Key Stage 2 results of 11-year-old pupils attending schools¹ in the Stroud constituency

Percentage of pupils gaining level 4 and above	2000	2009 ²	Percentage point improvement 2000-09
<i>Stroud</i>			
English	79	86	7
Maths	77	84	7
Science	89	92	3
<i>England</i>			
English	75	80	5
Maths	72	79	7
Science	85	88	3

¹ Includes pupils attending all maintained schools (including academies and city technology colleges).

² Revised data.

Source:

School and College Achievement and Attainment Tables.

GCSE and equivalents¹ results for pupils² attending schools³ in the Stroud constituency:

Percentage of pupils gaining	2000	2009 ⁴	Percentage point improvement 2000-09
<i>Stroud</i>			
5+ A*-C	61.3	70.2	8.9
5+ A*-G	95.1	94.0	-1.1
<i>England</i>			
5+ A*-C ⁵	49.2	70.0	20.8
5+ A*-G ⁵	88.9	92.3	3.4

¹ From 2004 results incorporate GCSEs, GNVQs and a range of other qualifications approved pre-16. Prior to 2004 results are based on GCSEs and GNVQs only.

² From 2006 figures are for pupils at the end of Key Stage 4. Prior to 2006 results are based on pupils aged 15.

³ Includes pupils attending all maintained schools (including academies and city technology colleges) and from 2000 does not include pupils recently arrived from overseas.

⁴ Revised data.

⁵ England figures also include independent schools as well as hospital schools and PRUs.

Source:

School and College Achievement and Attainment Tables.

Further information by constituency is provided within the Department's "In Your Area" website available at:

<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/inyourarea>

Information available at constituency level includes the number of specialist schools, number of operational academies, number of teaching assistants and other support staff, number of teachers and pupil:teacher ratios. Where information is not available at constituency level it has been provided at local authority level.

Additional information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Support for All: The Families and Relationships

Mrs. Maria Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families how much has been allocated to fund specialist relationship counselling services for families with disabled children as referred to in the Green Paper, Support for All: the Families and Relationships in the last 12 months. [318284]

Dawn Primarolo: The funding for the proposals outlined in "Support for All: the Families and Relationships" Green Paper has been allocated from current budgets. We have provided over £3.5 million of strategic funding to a range of third sector organisations, such as Relate, Marriage Care and the Asian Family Counselling Service, who provide relationship counselling for families, including those with disabled children. Over the past year, we have also provided funding of £3.1 million to support families through the recession, including £1 million to Relate for more face-to-face and telephone counselling to families, again including those with disabled children.

In addition, around £400,000 for 2010-11 has been re-prioritised from the current Aiming High for Disabled Children budget to provide specialist relationship counselling services for families with disabled children and to enhance helpline support for these families through third sector organisations.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces: Food

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the duration is of his Department's contract with Purple Foodservice Solutions for armed forces food supply; and when that contract will be reviewed for the purpose of inviting competitive bids. [320754]

Mr. Quentin Davies: The Ministry of Defence (MOD) food supply contract with Purple Foodservice Solutions (PFS) commenced in October 2006; it is a five-year contract with two two-year extension options. The MOD has taken up the first of these options and the contract is currently due to expire in October 2013. The MOD is considering the merits of extending the current contract with PFS against the benefits of competition.

Armed Forces: Health Services

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British soldiers have been treated at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre, Headley Court in each of the last five years. [321327]

Mr. Kevan Jones: The following table presents the number of personnel from all three services treated at the Defence Medical Rehabilitation Centre (DMRC) Headley Court from September 2008, by patient status (in-patient/out-patient/residential patient). Patients are treated for injuries and illnesses requiring rehabilitation that have arisen as a result of both operational and non-operational circumstances.

	2008 (September-December)	2009
In-patients	98	304
Out-patients	882	2,414
Residential patients	335	806
All	1,136	2,607

Notes:

1. An in-patient is a patient that has been admitted and allocated a ward bed. A residential patient is a patient that is on a three week rehabilitation course; they are not allocated a ward bed, but reside in dormitory style accommodation. An outpatient is a non-resident patient attending DMRC for treatment.
2. Patients include naval service personnel, Army personnel (including those from the Gibraltar Regiment), RAF personnel, and reservists. The totals shown exclude special forces and other nations service personnel.
3. The Defence Patient Tracking System (DPTS) is a live system that is constantly being updated. Therefore data are provisional and subject to change.

Information on the total number of patients treated at DMRC has only been captured by the DPTS since 1 September 2008. Prior to this date only patients treated at DMRC following aero-medical evacuation to the UK were captured on the DPTS. Figures between October 2007 and August 2008 are included in monthly statistics published by MOD's Defence Analytical Services and Advice (DASA) organisation on armed forces personnel returned to the UK from Iraq and Afghanistan as a result of an injury or illness who have been treated at the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine (RCDM) Birmingham and at Headley Court. Monthly reports for the whole of 2007, 2008 and 2009 are available both in the Library of the House and on the DASA website at the following link:

www.dasa.mod.uk

Equivalent verified data prior to this date are not available and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many British soldiers have been treated in Selly Oak Hospital in each of the last five years. [321331]

Mr. Kevan Jones: The Ministry of Defence's Defence Analytical Services and Advice (DASA) organisation publishes information on Armed Forces personnel returned to the UK from Iraq and Afghanistan as a result of an injury or illness, who have been treated at the Royal Centre for Defence Medicine (RCDM) Birmingham. Monthly reports covering the period October 2007 to January 2010 are available both in the Library of the House and on the DASA website at:

www.dasa.mod.uk

Equivalent verified data prior to this date are not available and could only be provided at disproportionate cost.

The following table offers a summary of the DASA data, showing Armed Forces personnel treated at RCDM Birmingham and the cause of their injury/illness.

	<i>Battle injury</i>	<i>Non-battle injury</i>	<i>Natural causes</i>	<i>All</i>
2007 ¹	54	65	31	150
2008	218	270	224	712
2009	411	285	211	907
Total	683	620	466	1,769

¹ October to December.

Notes:

1. A battle injury includes those wounded as a result of hostile action. This includes injuries sustained while avoiding direct and indirect fire. A non-battle injury is any injury that is not caused by a hostile act and includes any accidental injuries such as sports injuries, road traffic accidents etc.

2. Patient totals include Naval Service personnel, Army personnel (including those from the Gibraltar Regiment), RAF personnel, and reservists. These totals exclude Special Forces, other nations' Service personnel, and patients returned from theatres other than Iraq and Afghanistan. Numbers include both in- and out-patients.

3. Some data are provisional and subject to change.

Armed Forces: Rescue Services

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assessment he has made of the adequacy of the UK's long-distance fixed-wing search and rescue capability following the withdrawal from service of the Nimrod MR2. [321289]

Bill Rammell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 1 February 2010, *Official Report*, column 47W, to the hon. Member for Woodspring (Dr. Fox) and the answer I gave him on 25 February 2010, *Official Report*, column 678W.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the operational radius is for Sea King helicopters based at RAF Lossiemouth for the search and rescue task. [321291]

Bill Rammell: The maximum operational radius for the RAF Sea King Mk 3/3a is 240 nautical miles. The Sea King undertakes short range Search and Rescue tasks.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) what multi-agency radio communication equipment is available for RAF C-130 Hercules aircraft for communication with fishing and merchant vessels during long-range search and rescue missions; [321292]

(2) what onboard communications capability the C-130 Hercules has to co-ordinate search and rescue agencies involved in major off-shore incidents. [321322]

Bill Rammell: The Aeronautical Rescue Co-ordination Centre (ARCC), based at RAF Kinloss, is responsible for co-ordinating major off-shore incidents and multi-agency rescues. An on the scene co-ordinator may be designated, if required, by the ARCC. If appropriate, this could be an RAF aircraft.

RAF Hercules C130K and C130J have HF, UHF and VHF radios using aeronautical and marine frequency bands as standard equipment. This would enable them to communicate with and co-ordinate civil and military aircraft, ships and ground stations including the ARCC and HM Coastguard.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions a UK-based Hercules C-130 has been called out on a search and rescue mission in each of the last five years. [321324]

Bill Rammell: In the last five years a Hercules C130 aircraft has been utilised on a Search and Rescue task only once, to provide on-scene co-ordination for the rescue of a civilian casualty from a ship at sea.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on (a) how many occasions and (b) for what duration search and rescue assets at RAF Gannett have been unavailable during the last 12 months; and on what proportion of such occasions those assets were unavailable because of (i) aircrew shortages and (ii) technical problems. [321334]

Bill Rammell: During the period 1 March 2009 to 28 February 2010, the Search and Rescue aircraft at HMS Gannett were available for 97 per cent. of the time. There were 46 occasions when an aircraft was not available at the required notice of 15 minutes by day, 45 minutes by night. These occasions were all due to technical problems. The average down-time was three and a half hours, although there were four occasions when an aircraft was not available for a period of over 24 hours. These four occurred during a period when Gannett had loaned one of its complement of three aircraft to its sister SAR unit, 771 Naval Air Station based at RNAS Culdrose.

On an occasion when no aircraft was available, any calls for assistance received by the Aeronautical Rescue Co-ordination Centre at RAF Kinloss would have been channelled to RAF Stations at Lossiemouth or Boulmer or to the Maritime Coastguard Agency at Stornoway.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (a) how many S-92 helicopters his Department plans to procure for the UK-based search and rescue helicopter task and (b) where those helicopters will be based. [321335]

Mr. Quentin Davies: The future joint Ministry of Defence/Maritime and Coastguard Agency (MOD/MCA) Search and Rescue Helicopter service will be provided by the contractor Soteria under a service contract - MOD/MCA will not be procuring any helicopters. It will be the contractor's responsibility to ensure, throughout

the life of the contract, that they have sufficient helicopters to meet the requirement to be able to field one helicopter to incidents from each base during its operating hours. The helicopters will be based at RAF Boulmer, RMB Chivenor, RNAS Culdrose, Glasgow Airport, Leconfield, Lee On Solent, RAF Lossiemouth, Portland, Storaoway, Sumburgh, RAF Valley and Wattisham Airfield.

Armed Forces: Vehicles

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many vehicle urgent operational requirements of each type have been (a) ordered and (b) delivered to Headquarters Land Forces since 2006. [319489]

Mr. Quentin Davies: The breakdown of UOR vehicles by each type ordered and delivered since 2006 is as follows:

<i>Vehicle</i>	<i>Total qty ordered</i>	<i>Number of UOR procurements</i>	<i>Date of first order</i>	<i>Achieved/forecast date of last delivery to MOD/user</i>	<i>Qty issued to Purple Gate</i>	<i>Qty delivered to land forces</i>
Mastiff (1 and 2)	299	5	1 January 2007 2 August 2008	Spring 2011	275	207
Wolfhound	101	2	April 2009	Winter 2010/spring 2011	32	8
Ridgback	177	2	October 2008	Summer 2011	156	125
Jackal (1 and 2)	445	6	July 2007	Winter 2010	332	260
Coyote	76	1	April 2009	Spring 2010	52	36
Husky	333	2	February 2009	Spring 2010	218	86
Snatch Vixen (Plus)	100	1	March 2009	Summer 2010	87	49
Snatch Vixen	32	1	August 2008	Autumn 2008	31	0
Vector	198	5	June 2006	Spring 2011	178	127
Talisman Systems	6	1	July 2008	Spring 2010	0	0
Cougar	30	1	November 2008	Summer 2009	30	30
Warthog	115	2	December 2008	Autumn 2010	4	0
Springer	78	1	December 2008	Summer 2009	78	75
Total	1984 + 6 Talisman systems	30	—	—	1,473	1,003

The quantities delivered to land forces are for whole vehicle UOR platforms and do not include details of those vehicles delivered to MOD, awaiting receipt and inspection by land. It should be noted that while land forces is the major recipient of many of these UOR procurements, vehicles are also delivered to other defence users. Also excluded are non UOR vehicles which have had UORs added to them. In addition, I am withholding details of covert vehicles, civilian armoured vehicles, EOD vehicles and special forces procurements as this could compromise operational security.

Armoured Fighting Vehicles

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he expects the delivery of the order for the Light Protected Patrol Vehicle to be completed; [321708]

(2) pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 15 December 2009, *Official Report*, column 802, on Future Defence Programme, whether the £280 million funding for the new vehicles includes funding for the Light Protected Patrol Vehicle; [321721]

(3) when he expects the assessment phase of the Light Protected Patrol Vehicle programme to be completed; [321722]

(4) what the cost of the Light Protected Patrol Vehicle order is to (a) his Department's core budget and (b) the contingency reserve; [321723]

(5) whether a target (a) main gate and (b) in-service date has been set for the Light Protected Patrol Vehicle; [321724]

(6) how many tranches will form the full order of the Light Protected Patrol Vehicle; and what the total number of vehicles will be. [321725]

Mr. Quentin Davies: Two contenders, which could fill the Light Protected Patrol Vehicle (LPPV) requirement, are currently being assessed as part of a Concept Vehicle Evaluation. It is expected that this assessment phase will be complete in early April 2010. It is currently assessed that 200 LPPV will meet the need in Afghanistan. These 200 vehicles will form the first batch ordered under an Urgent Operational Requirement (UOR) as soon as the design was ready, in order to get them into theatre as quickly as possible.

Until the full military requirement has been refined we judge that it makes sense to order an initial batch of 200 vehicles with a view to further buys in future. Buying vehicles in tranches allows us to learn lessons, to modify the vehicle if necessary and helps speed up the delivery of future orders.

Due to commercial sensitivities, and while the full requirement is being refined, I am unable to comment on the likely cost of the full LPPV order, or the funding arrangements. I can, however, confirm that the initial batch of 200 vehicles will be funded from the Treasury reserve as a UOR. This will be over and above the £280 million for additional equipment announced by the Secretary of State for Defence on 15 December 2009. A business case will be submitted for the initial 200 vehicles in the coming weeks, once the assessment is complete. As the contract for the LPPV requirement has yet to be let, delivery details cannot be confirmed at this stage as they are still subject to commercial negotiations, but we intend that they should be delivered in 2011.

Departmental ICT

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what information technology projects initiated by (a) his Department and (b) its agencies were cancelled prior to completion in the last 12 months; and what the cost of each such project was to the public purse. [320428]

Bill Rammell: The Ministry of Defence and its Agencies (excluding trading funds) did not cancel any of its information technology projects, prior to completion, during Financial Year 2008-09. This excludes low value projects funded locally by individual units across the Department. This information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Interpreters

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many (a) Pashto and (b) Dari interpreters are employed by his Department. [321153]

Bill Rammell: No professional Pashto or Dari interpreters are currently employed by the Department. However, military personnel who have been trained to higher levels of proficiency in Pashto and Dari are available. Although not at the level of a professional interpreter, they are able to provide trusted translation and some consecutive interpreting capability.

When professional interpreting services are required, external provision is sought by the customer area from commercial agencies.

Joint Strike Fighter

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans he has for the future procurement of the Joint Strike Fighter. [321337]

Mr. Quentin Davies: The Government remain committed to the Joint Strike Fighter as stated by the then Secretary of State on 18 March 2009, *Official Report*, column 54WS, on the approval to purchase three Joint Strike Fighters to allow the UK to participate in Operational Test & Evaluation in the US. The Joint Strike Fighter remains the optimum solution to the UK's Joint Combat Aircraft requirement as part of our Carrier Strike programme. We have not made further investment decisions at this stage and cannot, therefore, announce overall numbers, variants or the in-service date.

Land Mines: Detectors

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his Department's policy is on the provision of pre-deployment mine detection training. [321367]

Bill Rammell: Personnel are trained in Counter-Improvised Explosive Device Tactics, Techniques and Procedures and how to use the Vallon Hand Held Metal Detector during pre-deployment training, if their operational role in theatre requires it. Additional training is provided on arrival in theatre to ensure that personnel are given the latest tactics, techniques and procedures. All pre-deployment training is reviewed constantly in the light of operational experience.

Military Aircraft: Deployment

Ann Winterton: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the maximum flight endurance time without mid air refuelling is for a (a) Typhoon eurofighter, (b) Harrier GR9, (c) Tornado GR4 and (d) Super Tucano; and what the average fuel consumption level is for each aircraft. [319849]

Bill Rammell: Flight endurance and fuel consumption depend on a number of factors including payload, operating altitude, weather conditions (including ambient temperature) and speed. To achieve maximum endurance, the aircraft types requested would have to be flown with no operational weapons and would be fitted with the maximum number of additional external fuel tanks instead. Combat aircraft do not fly in this configuration when conducting operations, as this would negate their combat capability.

For academic purposes given the same atmospheric conditions, a single-engine turboprop aircraft such as the Super Tucano flying in this configuration would have greater endurance and lower fuel consumption rate than fast jet types but would have less endurance than turboprop unmanned aerial vehicles like Reaper.

Fast jet aircraft have significant advantages in terms of faster transit times, higher operating altitudes and greater weapons, avionics and defensive aids payloads. This provides greater operational flexibility and agility. Furthermore, unrefuelled flight endurance is a relatively minor factor for fast jets, as the Tornado, Harrier and Typhoon would benefit from air-to-air refuelling.

Military Aircraft: Helicopters

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the (a) required and (b) actual number of pilots was for (i) Apache, (ii) Chinook and (iii) Merlin helicopters on the latest date for which figures are available. [320005]

Bill Rammell: The information requested is shown in the following table:

<i>Aircraft type</i>	<i>Required strength</i>	<i>Actual strength</i>
Apache	100	88
Chinook	124	118
Merlin Mk 1	60	50
Merlin Mk 3	80	71

All our operational commitments for these helicopters are being met.

Required and actual strengths will both naturally vary with time due to many factors including: operational requirements, the introduction of newly trained crew on completion of training courses at set times during the year, the number of trained personnel assigned to non-flying duties (as part of the necessary broader career development), injuries, and service leavers.

In addition, the RAF is going through a high level of change with aircraft drawing down, going through structure change, forming new squadrons or bringing new aircraft into service. Therefore, crew figures are fluctuating continually.

Warships

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with its (a) New Zealand and (b) Australian counterparts on joint co-operation in the procurement of (i) the Future Surface Combatant C1 vessels and (ii) the Future Mine Countermeasures, Hydrographic and Patrol Vessels. [321703]

Mr. Quentin Davies: Ministry of Defence officials have held a number of discussions with their Australian and New Zealand counterparts on a range of maritime issues, including potential ways of working together on areas of common interest in the new generations of Combat warships and Mine Countermeasures, Hydrographic and Patrol vessels. These discussions are at an early stage and it is too soon to say what the outcome will be.

HEALTH

Baby Care Units: Nurses

Miss Widdecombe: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he plans to increase the number of neonatal nurses. [321628]

Ann Keen: It is for primary care trusts in partnership with local authorities, strategic health authorities and other local stakeholders to determine how best to use their funds to meet national and local priorities for improving health, and to commission services accordingly.

Dental Services: Essex

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many and what proportion of the (a) child and (b) adult population resident in (i) Essex and (ii) Castle Point constituency attended an appointment with an NHS dentist in each of the last five years. [321440]

Ann Keen: Information is not available in the format requested.

The number of adults and children registered with a national health service dentist in England, as at 31 March, 1997 to 2006 is available in Annex A of the "NHS Dental Activity and Workforce Report, England: 31 March 2006". Information is provided by primary care

trust (PCT) and by strategic health authority (SHA). Annex B contains this information expressed as a percentage of the population. Annex C provides the number of adults and children registered with an NHS dentist for the same time periods by parliamentary constituency.

This information is based on the old contractual arrangements which were in place up to and including 31 March 2006. This report, published on 23 August 2006, has already been placed in the Library and is also available on the NHS Information Centre website at:

www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/dwfactivity

Under the new dental contractual arrangements, introduced on 1 April 2006, patients do not have to be registered with an NHS dentist to receive NHS care. The closest equivalent measure to 'registration' is the number of patients receiving NHS dental services ('patients seen') over a 24 month period. However, this is not directly comparable to the registration data for earlier years.

Information on the number of adult and child patients seen in the previous 24 months, in England, is available in Table D1 of Annex 3 of the "NHS Dental Statistics, Quarter 2: 30 September 2009" report. Information is available at quarterly intervals, from 31 March 2006 to 31 December 2009 and is provided by PCT and SHA, but is not available by parliamentary constituency. Table D2 provides this information expressed as a percentage of the population.

This report, published on 23 February 2010, has already been placed in the Library and is also available on the NHS Information Centre website at:

www.ic.nhs.uk/pubs/dentalstats0910q2

Departmental Location

Bob Spink: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much his Department spent on the relocation of staff from posts in (a) Essex and (b) Castle Point constituency in each of the last five years. [321428]

Phil Hope: This information is not held centrally. The national reconfiguration of primary care trusts (PCTs) in October 2006 saw Castle Point and Rochford PCT merge with Southend PCT to become South East Essex PCT, which involved staff relocation. This was managed by local national health service organisations.

Departmental Marketing

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Ruislip Northwood of 5 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 103W, on departmental marketing, how much his Department and agencies have spent on advertising, marketing, public relations and publicity in relation to the (a) Real Help Now and (b) Building Britain's Future themed campaign to date. [320456]

Phil Hope: Although the Department has used branding from Building Britain's Future on policy documents it is not aware of any expenditure on advertising, marketing, public relations and publicity directly related to the Real Help Now and Building Britain's Future campaigns.

Departmental Travel

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much (a) Ministers and (b) staff of each grade in (i) his Department and (ii) its agencies spent on first class travel in the last 12 months. [320398]

Phil Hope: In the last 12 months from March 2009 to February 2010 the Department and its agencies spent the following amounts on first class travel.

	Total (£)
<i>Department of Health</i>	
Ministers	7,908
All other grades	2,316,371
<i>Medicines and Healthcare products Regulation Agency</i>	
All grades	7,573
<i>NHS Purchasing and Supply Agency</i>	
Director/SCSI	6,106.39
Grade 6	3,378.10
Grade 7	2,496.54
SEO	4,121.88
HEO	401.22

National health service hospital and community health services: Qualified health visiting staff in England by South East Coast and South Central Strategic Health Authority (SHA) areas and by organisation as at 30 September each specified year

		2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Headcount	
								2007	2008
<i>South East Coast and South Central SHA</i>		941	2,006	2,016	2,006	1,911	1,646	1,552	1,473
<i>South East Coast SHA</i>		201	942	903	971	891	712	696	689
East Sussex Downs and Weald Primary Care Trust (PCT)	5P7	0	91	84	75	81	42	72	70
Eastern and Coastal Kent Teaching PCT	5QA	0	161	150	170	146	151	146	148
Hastings and Rother PCT	5P8	49	48	47	43	46	40	40	40
Medway PCT	5L3	0	71	71	89	85	69	65	58
Surrey PCT	5P5	0	260	236	240	242	200	179	163
West Kent PCT	5P9	111	143	158	154	135	43	49	91
West Sussex Teaching PCT	5P6	41	168	157	200	156	167	145	119
<i>South Central SHA</i>		740	1,064	1,113	1,035	1,020	934	856	784
Berkshire East Teaching PCT	5QG	29	104	100	100	101	96	94	78
Berkshire West PCT	5QF	115	116	117	113	114	111	109	87
Buckinghamshire PCT	5QD	165	178	181	182	176	133	106	103
Hampshire PCT	5QC	148	275	321	275	262	234	217	192
Isle of Wight Healthcare PCT1	5QT	30	29	28	2	19	16	16	19
Milton Keynes PCT	5CQ	49	71	67	54	63	66	64	58
Oxfordshire PCT	5QE	86	172	189	183	164	158	149	157
Portsmouth City Teaching PCT	5FE	43	53	49	51	53	52	53	48
Southampton City PCT	5L1	75	66	61	75	68	68	48	42

Notes:

- 2001-08 figures are mapped to their current organisational structure.
- 2000 and previous data do not provide comparative figures to the current organisational structures, and as such are not included in this table.
- It appears that data provided in 2004 were incorrectly coded for this organisation and corrected in subsequent years.
- Brighton and Hove PCT do not have any health visitors coded on their Non-Medical Census returns for the years provided.
- Date Quality

The NHS Information Centre for health and social care seeks to minimise inaccuracies and the effect of missing and invalid data but responsibility for data accuracy lies with the organisations providing the data. Methods are continually being updated to improve data quality where changes impact on figures already published. This is assessed but unless it is significant at national level figures are not changed. Impact at detailed or local level is footnoted in relevant analyses.

Source:

The Information Centre for health and social care Non-Medical Workforce Census.

No staffing grade breakdown is available for other users.

Health Services: Rural Areas

Charles Hendry: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what estimate he has made of the proportion of services provided by his Department which are targeted at people living in rural areas; [320570]

(2) what account his Department takes of the needs of disadvantaged people in rural areas in determining the targeting of strategies to deliver its services. [321271]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: Primary care trusts are responsible for assessing the needs of their populations and commissioning services to meet those needs. This includes ensuring that services meet the needs of all groups within their population, such as those living in rural areas.

Health Visitors: South East

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many health visitors have been employed in each primary care trust in the South East in each year since 1997. [321450]

Ann Keen: The information is shown in the following table.

HIV Infection and Hepatitis

Anne Milton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many full-time equivalent staff in his Department are working on policy on (a) HIV, (b) hepatitis B and (c) hepatitis C. [321149]

Gillian Merron: The information requested is shown in the following table.

<i>Infectious disease</i>	<i>Whole-time equivalent (WTE)</i>
HIV	2.4
Hepatitis B	0.65
Hepatitis C	1.55

In addition, the Offender Health team provides 0.2 WTE for work on HIV and other blood borne viruses in the prison setting.

Anne Milton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what epidemiology and surveillance studies commissioned by his Department are being undertaken into (a) HIV, (b) hepatitis B and (c) hepatitis C; [321150]

(2) spent on surveillance and epidemiology of (a) HIV, (b) hepatitis B and (c) hepatitis C in (i) 2008 and (ii) 2009. [321151]

Gillian Merron: Information on epidemiology and surveillance studies commissioned by the Department is shown by financial year in the following table.

Department of Health—epidemiology and surveillance studies 2007-08 to 2009-10

<i>Studies</i>	<i>Organisation</i>	<i>2007-08</i>	<i>2008-09</i>	<i>2009-10</i> (£)
Estimation of hepatitis C related morbidity	Health Protection Agency	62,697	5,211	73,423
Prevalence of hepatitis C in antenatal clinic attenders	Health Protection Agency	25,852	—	—
Prevalence of hepatitis C in genito urinary medicine clinic attenders in England	Health Protection Agency	25,684	—	—
Case finding and prevalence of chronic viral hepatitis in South Asians living in the United Kingdom	Health Protection Agency	37,349	—	—
Surveillance of hepatitis C testing	Health Protection Agency	125,217	65,267	65,267
Monitoring hepatitis C related care in the NHS: a one year pilot study	Health Protection Agency		17,205	65,267
Monitoring and modelling prognosis in the era of Highly Active Antiretroviral Therapy	University of Bristol	42,016		
Sexual attitudes and lifestyles of London's Eastern Europeans	University College London	72,230	145,957	73,726
Experiences of female migrant sex workers from Eastern Europe and effect of multiple vulnerabilities on risk of Sexual Transmitted Infections/HIV	London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine	50,776	119,703	34,463
British Paediatric Surveillance Unit - surveillance of HIV	Health Protection Agency	3,600	3,600	3,600

Influenza: Health Services

Dr. Richard Taylor: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has to ensure that the findings from his assessment of the swine influenza pandemic campaign will inform planning for the NHS response to seasonal influenza. [321088]

Gillian Merron: We have already learned many lessons from the swine flu pandemic, which we are currently consolidating. The national response to the swine flu pandemic will be subject to rigorous scrutiny to assess its appropriateness, effectiveness and value for money, alongside local and regional reviews of the national health service response. The timetable for this work has not yet been finalised. The Department always evaluates its public communications campaigns and uses the results to inform planning for future activity. This information is also shared with those involved in communications in the NHS.

The Department is currently planning for the 2010-11 seasonal influenza vaccination programme. These and

future plans will be informed by the experience from previous seasonal flu vaccination programmes, as well as the experience from the swine flu vaccination programme.

Mentally Ill: Community Care

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what proportion of patients subject to community treatment orders were referred to a doctor for a second opinion within 28 days of being released from hospital in each quarter since November 2008; how many doctors were available to provide second opinions for community treatment orders; and if he will make a statement. [321343]

Phil Hope: The following information has been provided by the Care Quality Commission (CQC), which is responsible for the appointment of second opinion appointed doctors (SOADs) in accordance with the Mental Health Act 1983.

The first table shows, by quarter, the number of requests received by CQC for SOAD opinions in respect

of patients on community treatment orders (CTOs) between 3 November 2008 and 8 March 2010 and the proportion of such requests which were received within 28 days of start of the CTO. The table shows that, overall, 60 per cent. of requests were received within the 28 day period. To improve this position and to help ensure that all requests are received and allocated within the first 28 days, CQC has written to mental health

providers to ask that requests be submitted within 48 hours of the start of a CTO.

The second table gives information on the number of doctors on CQC's panel of doctors who are available to be appointed to give SOAD opinions in individual cases (the SOADs panel).

Table: Requests for SOAD opinions for CTO patients by quarter, showing number and proportion received within first 28 days of the CTO

<i>Quarter</i>	<i>Total requests received</i>	<i>Number of requests received with first 28 days</i>	<i>Proportion of total (%)</i>
Q3 2008-2009 ¹ (3 November 2008 to 31 December 08)	419	313	75
Q4 2008-09 (1 January 2009 to 31 March 2009)	1,234	744	60
Q1 2009-10 (1 April 2009 to 30 June 2009)	1,199	694	58
Q2 2009-10 (1 July 2009 to 30 September 2009)	1,048	589	56
Q3 2009-10 (1 October 2009 to 31 December 2009)	1,049	642	61
Q4 2009-10 ² (1 January 2010 to 8 March 2010)	793	441	56
Total	5,742	3,423	60

¹ Information for the third quarter of 2008-2009 covers only the period from 3 November, when CTOs were first introduced, to 31 December.

² Information for the current quarter is complete to 8 March 2010.

Source:

Care Quality Commission.

Table: Number of doctors on CQC SOADs panel, by date.

	<i>Number of SOADs</i>
1 November 2008	101
1 January 2009	110
1 April 2009	98
1 July 2009	97
1 October 2009	107
1 January 2010	111
8 March 2010	115

Note:

Doctors on the panel may not have been available to give SOAD opinions at all times during each period.

Source:

Care Quality Commission.

Methadone: Young Offenders

Mr. Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health with reference to the answer of 6 July 2009, *Official Report*, column 589W, on methadone: young offenders, if he will take steps to record information on the treatment of young offenders with methadone and subutex; and whether his Department has undertaken an evaluation of (a) the value for money and (b) effectiveness of the use of (i) methadone and (ii) subutex for the treatment of drug misuse amongst young offenders in custodial settings. [321632]

Phil Hope: As stated in the answer of 6 July 2009, information on the treatment of young offenders with methadone and subutex is not currently available.

A joint Home Office, National Treatment Agency and Department of Health project has redesigned the Drug Information Record (DIR) and Prison Activity Form which came into use on the 1 April 2009. There are some changes to the DIR but most of the changes are to the Activity Form. The new Activity Form will be used for all new significant events (treatment starts and types of treatment, such as detoxification and maintenance prescription) for new clients and existing caseload clients.

The DIR form is used for data collection for all adults including those aged 18 to 20. As data quality

improves, we hope to have accurate baseline data next year for this age group for 2010-11.

Clinical interventions (including methadone and subutex) for drug treatment, whether for detoxification or maintenance purposes, are delivered as part of the Integrated Drug Treatment System (IDTS) and in line with the latest clinical guidelines.

Two providers are evaluating the impact of the implementation of the IDTS in prison and its effect on offenders, some of whom will be aged 18 to 20 years. Reports from the evaluation will be available in 2012.

Alongside the IDTS evaluation, Professor Lord Kamlesh Patel is chairing the Prison Drug Treatment Strategy Review Group. The group is specifically considering:

- the key outcomes needed to reduce substance misuse, both in prison and on release into the community;

- a set of national minimum standards for drug treatment in prison;

- opportunities for achieving efficiency savings to invest in prison and community drug treatment services;

- examining the case for prioritising the treatment needs for some drug dependent groups, both in prison and on release;

- the commissioning models and funding streams at national, regional and local level in order to target services more effectively; and

- systems for improved information sharing to support better quality performance management and case management.

This is a two-year work programme running from April 2009 to March 2011.

NHS: ICT

Mr. Bacon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his most recent estimate is of the number of user minutes on the Lorenzo software system at each of the NHS sites at which it is installed in the most recent month for which information is available. [320916]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information necessary to derive such an estimate is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Respite Care: Milton Keynes

Mr. Lancaster: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the amount of funding received by Milton Keynes Primary Care Trust as a result of the additional funding for respite care announced on 10 March 2008 in each month to date; and under what budgetary heading such funding has been spent. [321604]

Phil Hope: The data are not held centrally.

£150 million is being given to primary care trusts (PCTs) within their baseline allocations to provide breaks for carers. The Department does not break down PCT revenue allocations by policies at either a national or a local level and there is no weighted capitation formula specific to carers that would allow needs to be accurately identified at the local level. It is therefore for PCTs to decide their priorities for investment locally, taking into account their local circumstances and priorities set out in the NHS Operating Framework.

JUSTICE

Blackmail

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people convicted of the offence of blackmail since 1990 were sentenced to a period of imprisonment of seven years or more. [321277]

Claire Ward: The available information is provided in the table as follows:

<i>Custodial sentences of at least seven years for blackmail¹, 1993-2008</i>		<i>Total</i>
1990		1
1991		5
1992		6
1993		4
1994		4
1995		7
1996		10
1997		8
1998		2
1999		10
2000		5
2001		12
2002		5
2003		5
2004		4
2005		2
2006		18
2007		1
2008		4

¹ S.21 Theft Act 1968.

Notes:

1. These figures have been drawn from administrative data systems. Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system.

2. The data have been taken from the Ministry of Justice Court Proceedings database. The data are presented on the principal offence basis. Where an offender has been sentenced for more than one offence the principal offence is the one for which the heaviest sentence was imposed. Where the same sentence has been imposed for two or more offences the principal offence is the one for which the statutory maximum is most severe.

Information Commissioner's Office: Complaint

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many complaints made to the Information Commissioner's Office had not been investigated within eight months of the complaint having been made in (a) 2008-09 and (b) 2009-10; and what steps are being taken to reduce this number. [318381]

Mr. Wills: The Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) is the UK's independent authority established to promote access to official information and to regulate the protection of personal data.

Complaints received by the ICO are recorded and logged in a casework management system. The complaints are then allocated to a caseworker for investigation. Of a total of 22,237 complaints received in the financial year 2008-09, the ICO took more than eight months to allocate 1,552 cases for investigation. The ICO allocated a total of 20,681 complaints for investigation within eight months of receipt in 2008-09, with four cases still awaiting allocation.

A complete picture for the current financial year is not yet available. However, in quarters one to three of 2009-10 the ICO received 18,463 complaints. To date, 318 of these complaints were more than eight months old when allocated for investigation. In the first three quarters of 2009-10, 16,561 complaints were allocated within eight months of receipt, notwithstanding a 21 per cent. increase in freedom of information complaints and a 42 per cent. increase in the number of data protection complaints in comparison to the same period in the previous financial year. The remaining 1584 requests had yet to be allocated for investigation at the end of the third quarter. This information has been provided by the ICO.

The Information Commissioner is committed to speeding up the complaint handling process in his Office. The ICO is changing its internal systems and processes to focus on closing less complex cases more quickly. Additional grant in aid over and above its baseline funding has also been made available by the Ministry of Justice to help the ICO reduce its backlog of freedom of information cases in this financial year and the previous four.

Legal Aid

Mr. Baron: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) whether an assessment has been made of the appropriateness of funding by legal aid of concluded MMR vaccine litigation; [321634]

(2) whether an assessment has been made of the appropriateness of funding by legal aid the research carried out on claimants and controls in connection with concluded MMR vaccine litigation; [321635]

(3) whether an assessment has been made of purported ethical approval and clinical indication for lumbar punctures funded by legal aid performed on claimants in connection with concluded MMR vaccine litigation; [321637]

(4) whether there are plans to recover legal aid money paid to Dr. Andrew Wakefield in connection with concluded MMR vaccine litigation. [321622]

Maria Eagle: The MMR vaccine litigation involved allegations that, as a consequence of a national vaccination campaign, children were very seriously injured because the vaccine in question was defective. Legal aid funding, which covered litigation services, advocacy and disbursements for experts, was granted in the early stages of the case, and was supported by the opinions of leading counsel, which took into account the expert evidence available at the time.

The Legal Services Commission (LSC) is obliged to review continually the merits of funded litigation, and to withdraw funding where a case no longer meets the legal merits test. Funding for MMR claims was therefore discontinued when they no longer met this test. Since the MMR vaccine cases concluded, the civil legal aid Funding Code guidance has been revised, and there are now more stringent criteria for funding high-cost cases, and a presumption that legal aid will not be used to fund new scientific research.

We are not aware of any assessment of the ethical approval of procedures carried out as part of the expert evidence provided for this case. This would be a matter for the General Medical Council, not the Ministry of Justice or the LSC. The LSC has no plans to recover legal aid fees paid to Dr. Andrew Wakefield in connection with expert advice in the concluded MMR litigation.

National Offender Management Services: Licences

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the cost was of the licences purchased by the National Offender Management Service from (a) MPLC and (b) Filmbank. [316316]

Mr. Straw: The showing of films by video/DVD to groups of prisoners or staff requires a licence as it constitutes public performance.

There are two licences as no one licensing body covers all the main studios.

The cost of licences in the 2008-09 financial year for the Motion Picture Licensing Company (MPLC) and

Filmbank was £315,883 and £39,774 respectively. This equates to £3.60 per prisoner per year (or 1p a day).

Films have been shown to prisoners for many decades.

Property: Sales

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice pursuant to the answer of 1 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 940W, on property: sales, how many property transactions took place where the sale price was more than (a) £60,000, (b) £125,000, (c) £175,000 and (d) £250,000 in each (i) local authority area and (ii) region since 1997. [321283]

Mr. Wills: Land Registry is able to provide information based on the total number of residential properties sold at full value¹ in the requested categories in each year since 1997. The information has been placed in the House of Commons Library.

¹ Full value = residential property transactions where the full price has been paid. The figures exclude a number of transactions including right to buy sales at a discount, properties sold by way of a gift and properties sold under a compulsory purchase or court order.

Youth Custody

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many and what proportion of sentences handed down to (a) juveniles and (b) young adults of each sex from (i) magistrates' courts and (ii) Crown courts were custodial sentences in (A) 2008 and (B) 2009. [321595]

Claire Ward: The requested information for 2008 is shown in the following table, data for 2007 have also been supplied. Data for 2009 will become available once Sentencing Statistics 2009 is published in the autumn.

This information is also available in Sentencing Statistics 2008 via the following link:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/publications/sentencingannual.htm>

Number and percentage of persons sentenced to immediate custody, by court type, age band and sex, 2007-08

		Magistrates court			Crown court		
		Immediate custody	Total sentenced	Proportion (percentage)	Immediate custody	Total sentenced	Proportion (percentage)
2008	Male						
	10 to 17	3,421	71,438	4.8	1,609	2,583	62.3
	18 to 20	5,436	101,358	5.4	7,186	13,222	54.3
	Female						
	10 to 17	368	13,479	2.7	78	215	36.3
	18 to 20	434	20,010	2.2	355	1,120	31.7
2007	Male						
	10 to 17	3,864	80,153	4.8	1,497	2,466	60.7
	18 to 20	6,320	107,921	5.9	7,167	12,849	55.8
	Female						
	10 to 17	340	14,494	2.3	129	274	47.1

Number and percentage of persons sentenced to immediate custody, by court type, age band and sex, 2007-08

	<i>Magistrates court</i>			<i>Crown court</i>		
	<i>Immediate custody</i>	<i>Total sentenced</i>	<i>Proportion (percentage)</i>	<i>Immediate custody</i>	<i>Total sentenced</i>	<i>Proportion (percentage)</i>
18 to 20	472	18,507	2.6	332	999	33.2

Notes:

1. These figures have been drawn from administrative data systems. Although care is taken when processing and analysing the returns, the detail collected is subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large scale recording system.
2. These data have been taken from the Ministry of Justice Court Proceedings database. These data are presented on the principal offence basis. Where an offender has been sentenced for more than one offence the principal offence is the one for which the heaviest sentence was imposed. Where the same sentence has been imposed for two or more offences the principal offence is the one for which the statutory maximum is most severe.

Mr. Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether his Department has received a copy of the National Audit Office's draft report on custody placements in young offenders institutions; if he will bring forward proposals to improve his Department's system for reporting costs of custody in the youth secure estate; and if he will make a statement. [321629]

The work of the NAO is a matter for the NAO's Comptroller and Auditor General. The Department welcomes any recommendations the NAO have to secure greater value for money and would carefully consider its response thereafter. Details on the costs of custody are published in the Youth Justice Board's annual report and accounts.

Maria Eagle: The Ministry of Justice is not aware of any such report by the National Audit Office (NAO).

Ministerial Correction

Thursday 11 March 2010

HOUSE OF COMMONS COMMISSION

Members: Allowances

Mr. Frank Field: To ask the hon. Member for North Devon, representing the House of Commons Commission pursuant to the answer of 22 February 2010, *Official Report*, column 38W, on Members: allowances, how much has been spent under each budgetary heading referred to in the answer.

[319926]

[*Official Report*, 8 March 2010, Vol. 507, c. 3-4W.]

Letter of correction from Mr. Nick Harvey:

An error has been identified in the answer given to the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr. Field) on 8 March 2010. The original answer did not include bills

received after the date for answer but before the answer was sent. It did not therefore fully reflect “the costs to date”.

The correct answer should have been:

Nick Harvey: The costs to date, inclusive of VAT, are as follows:

	£
<hr/>	
<i>Sir Thomas Legg's review</i>	
Work commissioned	870,784
Staff costs	306,534
Office supplies	5,889
	1,183,207
<hr/>	
<i>Sir Paul Kennedy's work</i>	
Work commissioned	21,456
Travel	767
Office Supplies	180
	22,403
<hr/>	

ORAL ANSWERS

Thursday 11 March 2010

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