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**HOUSE OF COMMONS
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY
DEBATES**

(HANSARD)

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(FORMED BY THE RT. HON. GORDON BROWN, MP, JUNE 2007)

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OFFICIAL REPORT

IN THE FIFTH SESSION OF THE FIFTY-FOURTH PARLIAMENT OF THE
UNITED KINGDOM OF GREAT BRITAIN AND NORTHERN IRELAND
[WHICH OPENED 11 MAY 2005]

FIFTY-NINTH YEAR OF THE REIGN OF
HER MAJESTY QUEEN ELIZABETH II

SIXTH SERIES

VOLUME 508

EIGHTH VOLUME OF SESSION 2009-2010

House of Commons

Monday 22 March 2010

The House met at half-past Two o'clock

PRAYERS

[MR. SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

Oral Answers to Questions

HOME DEPARTMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Counter-terrorism

1. **Mr. David Heathcoat-Amory** (Wells) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his Department's efforts to counter Islamic extremism.

[322938]

12. **Tony Baldry** (Banbury) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Government's counter-terrorism strategy.

[322952]

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Alan Johnson): Contest is a world-leading counter-terrorism strategy that endeavours to meet the serious threat this country faces from international terrorism. I have today published the first annual report setting out progress against the objectives in the strategy. Since 11 September 2001, 230 people have been convicted of a terrorism-related offence and more than a dozen terrorist plots have been disrupted. The Prevent strand of Contest is aimed at

addressing the causes of terrorism by challenging the ideology of violent extremists, supporting vulnerable individuals and building community resilience.

Mr. Heathcoat-Amory: Does the Secretary of State accept that Islamism is a threat because of its refusal to accept the separation of religion and the state, its social intolerance, particularly as regards the status of women, and its attempted subversion of moderate Islam? If he does, will he undertake not to allow the introduction of sharia law into this country in any form?

Alan Johnson: First I should say that the threat comes from violent extremism. There are people with all kinds of views with which we may disagree, but it is when those views turn into violent extremism that counter-terrorism kicks in and those views become unacceptable. On sharia law, I should say that the law of this country is absolutely paramount. Where sharia law has been introduced in some small experiments in local communities it does not, in any way, subvert or detract from the law of this country.

Tony Baldry: Does the Home Secretary agree that we have to work with the Muslim community? In Banbury, the Thames Valley police force consciously seeks to recruit Muslim men and women as special constables, because when the Muslim community has people that it knows working with the police force, it is more likely to talk to them about things that are causing it concern. We therefore need to work with the Muslim community, as well as being suspicious of it on occasion.

Alan Johnson: I agree completely with the hon. Gentleman. Not only in Banbury but elsewhere, the police and the local communities are working to break down these barriers, and part of that involves working with the Muslim community—indeed, the Prevent strand of our counter-terrorism strategy has about 1,000 projects, where work is being undertaken with 40,000 people in various communities. This is something that politicians and chief constables cannot do from on high; it must be tackled in the community and, as the hon. Gentleman rightly says, in part by recruiting people from the Muslim community into the police and other authorities.

Ms Diane Abbott (Hackney, North and Stoke Newington) (Lab): Does the Home Secretary agree that if by “Islamism” one means people who support the religion of Islam, that is not, in itself, a threat? However, subversive and criminal activity is to be found among some members of the Muslim community. The danger of trying to tar the entire Muslim community with the same brush is that that undermines our efforts to engage with the community, and to fight terrorism and crime.

Alan Johnson: I agree entirely with my hon. Friend. The only way in which we will succeed in this area is by demonstrating that the vast majority of Muslims just do not buy into the rhetoric of the ideologues and those promoting violence and division. That is the measure of success. It is essential that we in no way give the impression that our counter-terrorism policy is anti-Muslim, because it is not; it is very much pro-Muslim and pro the vast majority of the Muslim community, who believe in peace, justice and freedom.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) (Lab): Is it not absolutely essential, as my right hon. Friend has pointed out, to make the greatest distinction between the overwhelming majority of Muslims, who, like ourselves, totally oppose and detest terrorism, and the very few religious fanatics who distort their religion and glory in death? There is absolutely no link between those two groups, and we should never try to pretend, as some do, that Muslims are any more in favour of terrorism than adherents of any other religion.

Alan Johnson: Again, I agree with my hon. Friend, who has made an important contribution to these issues while serving on the Select Committee on Home Affairs. The only point that I should make here—this reinforces the one that he has made—is that giving people in Muslim communities, particularly younger Muslims, the arguments and empowering them so that they can try to argue back against what are sometimes very forceful arguments coming from much older people in their community must be an important part of our counter-terrorism strategy. That is why Prevent is the crucial strand that it is.

Mr. Crispin Blunt (Reigate) (Con): In the light of the Home Secretary’s efforts to separate Islamic issues from terrorism, I wonder whether he has noted the following written evidence to the Select Committee on Communities and Local Government’s inquiry into the Prevent arm of the counter-terrorism strategy:

“Inconsistent and generalised language or loose terms weaken public confidence and hamper the debate around Prevent. In addition and more specifically, they also provide opportunities for Muslim Rejectionists at the grassroots.”

Given that countering Islamic extremism is linked to, but is not the same as, a counter-terrorism strategy, does grouping these issues today not illustrate the point being made to the Select Committee?

Alan Johnson: The hon. Gentleman talks about grouping these issues, and I think it would be strange if we had a counter-terrorism strategy that did not seek to prevent people from getting involved in terrorism in the first place, just as it would be strange to have a policy on drugs that did not try to prevent youngsters from getting involved in drugs, or to have a policy on knives, guns

and gangs that did not have a strand that aimed to prevent people from getting involved in the first place. We have to be very careful about the terminology—that is the hon. Gentleman’s point—but we also have to be careful to realise that there are those who are opposed to Prevent because they are opposed to any voice of reason and to our trying to help vulnerable youngsters, in particular, to argue back against those who seek to persuade them down the route of violence. We must recognise that those people are against our strategy—not our Prevent strategy but against our whole Contest counter-terrorism strategy. We have to be aware of the devices they will use to try to suggest, for instance, that Prevent is about spying when it patently is not.

Dogs (Crime)

4. **Mr. Andrew Robathan** (Blaby) (Con): What recent estimate he has made of the incidence of the use of dogs in crime. [322941]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Meg Hillier): The data are not collected centrally but we are aware of the growing concerns about the use of dangerous dogs to harass and intimidate people. This has prompted the Government to introduce the new gang injunction power under the Policing and Crime Act 2009 and to launch a public consultation on managing and controlling dangerous dogs.

Mr. Robathan: Let me get this right: the Home Secretary announces, for a headline in the pre-election period, that he will force all dog owners to take out insurance on their chihuahuas, or whatever their dog might be, but then the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs says that is absolutely ludicrous because it will penalise all responsible dog owners and it will have no effect on those who already have dogs that are used as weapons. Does the Minister agree with her colleague, the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, that this was a lunatic idea and take some responsibility on behalf of the Home Office for this ridiculous electioneering?

Meg Hillier: Let me make it clear that the proposal and consultation are a joint effort between the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and the Home Office. It is right that we consider extending dangerous dog laws to cover places such as private property and give more powers to police and councils, including for dog control orders where necessary. The issue of insurance was raised with the Government because of the horrific injuries caused and so it was included in the consultation, although it has now been ruled out. I have not spoken to my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs personally about this but we are still interested, certainly from a Home Office perspective, in views on third-party insurance, particularly if a dog control order is in force.

Mr. Brian Jenkins (Tamworth) (Lab): My hon. Friend will realise that dog owners such as myself get very upset when we hear the term “dangerous dogs”. It is not the dog that is the problem but the ownership and control of the dog. When are we going to start tackling

this in the correct manner in this country by considering it a privilege to own a dog rather than thinking that there is an automatic right for irresponsible people to own or train a dog?

Meg Hillier: I look forward to responses from my hon. Friend and his constituents to the consultation. Responsible ownership is at the heart of what we need to consider. It is the deed not the breed that we are primarily considering but some breeds are bred to be violent. Unfortunately, that is one reason why we have to reconsider this issue. We must consider the full range of options.

Mr. Greg Hands (Hammersmith and Fulham) (Con): In my constituency of Hammersmith and Fulham, this has been an ongoing problem in many of our local parks, including the local park at the end of my road, Normand park. Just today, I have had an e-mail from a constituent of mine, Robert Hardman, who talks about an appalling incident in Normand park next to the playground where his children were playing last Thursday. There was a savage attack on a puppy by a free-range pit bull—we appreciate that it might not actually have been a pit bull—and the owner of the said pit bull hurled abuse and threats at witnesses, the children were distraught and the victim's owner is now faced with a £3,000 vet's bill. Is not one of the solutions to all this for the police to be able to deal with the dogs in situ rather than necessarily having to take them off to kennels?

Meg Hillier: There are a number of issues exactly like that that the consultation seeks to iron out. I can echo the hon. Gentleman's words from Hammersmith to Hackney: much the same problems are raised with me by my constituents on estates, by gangs and in parks. It is clearly an issue that we need to tackle. There are real problems and that is why I hope the House will back the consultation. I look forward to hearing and seeing the responses.

Kelvin Hopkins (Luton, North) (Lab): Some time ago, one of my constituents was savagely attacked by what was clearly a weapon dog. Finally, on appeal, she was granted criminal injuries compensation of £5,000. Only then did she learn that the dog had made two previous attacks, and we still do not know whether it has been destroyed. Whatever my hon. Friend does, will she make absolutely sure that such dogs are taken out of circulation permanently?

Meg Hillier: Obviously I do not know about that individual case, but I agree that when horrific incidents happen, proper action needs to be taken. If necessary, that sometimes includes destroying the animal.

Andrew Rosindell (Romford) (Con): It has taken the Government a very long time to address this extremely serious issue, only for them to get it badly wrong. Will the Home Secretary or the Minister tell us why a flagship policy of introducing compulsory dog insurance was announced two weeks ago, but then overruled and killed off by the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs? Surely the Home Secretary should admit that he has been muzzled on this issue.

Meg Hillier: Clearly the hon. Gentleman does not know the Home Secretary as well as I do, because he is a very difficult man to overrule. Indeed, he is not someone who is overruled. We need to be clear that we all want a solution to this problem, which was looked at in a consultation—let me correct any misapprehension that it was a Government policy. It is important that we should still consider insurance, particularly when dog control orders are in force, as we have heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Luton, North (Kelvin Hopkins). We need to consider that, and I hope we can all agree that this vital issue needs to be tackled. It is interesting that the Opposition choose to concentrate more on the process than on the outcome, in which we all have a shared interest.

Offences

5. **Simon Hughes** (North Southwark and Bermondsey) (LD): How many criminal offences have been created in legislation sponsored by his Department since May 1997. [322942]

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Counter-Terrorism (Mr. David Hanson): Since 1997, the Home Office has brought forward legislation as necessary, to address the needs and challenges of the day. When legislation has included criminal offences, these have been proposed only after careful consideration and with the support of Parliament.

Simon Hughes: That is a cop-out of an answer. The Minister knows that there have been 4,200 new offences over 13 years of Labour Government. Looking back, at the end of that time, does he think we would have done far better to pass far fewer laws and to take far longer to make sure that we got them right? Would not the best legacy that he could leave be a penal code so that people could find all the laws in the same place?

Mr. Hanson: I do not accept that there are too many laws. We have put in place a range of legislation that is designed to protect the public, cut crime and increase confidence. I can name three pieces of legislation that the hon. Gentleman has voted against—measures on DNA retention, the Anti-social Behaviour Act 2003, and measures on tackling disorderly drinking in the streets. I know that those things matter to people in Southwark and throughout the country, so I am sorry that he voted against them.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West) (Lab): Bearing in mind the careful consideration that my right hon. Friend has just mentioned, will he tell the House how many of the new criminal offences that were created by the Labour Government never came into force before then being repealed by the Labour Government?

Mr. Hanson: I am grateful to my hon. Friend, as ever, for his helpful question. He will know that there are occasions when the situation changes, people look at the legislation and Ministers take decisions accordingly. He will also know that, as a result of legislation that we have introduced, crime has fallen by 36 per cent., violent crime is down, burglaries are down and confidence in policing is up to a record 50 per cent.—all things that never happened before we considered that legislation.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): May I suggest that when criminal offences are introduced, great care should be taken not to attach prison sentences to them unless absolutely necessary? We are creating an atmosphere in which prison becomes approved by Government, but we should not do that. We should be sentencing people to imprisonment only when absolutely necessary, and we need to be careful about the penalties that we attach to criminal offences.

Mr. Hanson: I am grateful to the right hon. and learned Gentleman for those comments. He will know that the Ministry of Justice, where I spent two years before coming to this post, is concerned to ensure that we encourage community-based sentences where possible, and to ensure that they will, on some occasions, have a better chance of preventing reoffending than does a short-term prison sentence. We need to consider those issues in the round. Happily, the separation of the judiciary and the legislature is part of the UK's constitution, so the judiciary will ultimately decide the appropriate sentences for offences.

“Cutting Crime”

6. **Alun Michael** (Cardiff, South and Penarth) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment he has made of the implications for his Department's policies of the recommendations in the first report from the Justice Committee, “Cutting crime: the case for justice reinvestment”, HC 94-I; and if he will make a statement. [322943]

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Counter-Terrorism (Mr. David Hanson): The Government are grateful to the Justice Committee for its contribution to the debate on how to cut crime, reduce reoffending and manage some of the most difficult individuals in our society. My right hon. Friend the Minister of State, Ministry of Justice published our response on Tuesday 16 March.

Alun Michael: I am delighted that the response is so positive. The strength of the Committee's report is that it looks across the whole criminal justice system instead of being trapped in one part of it. What victims want—other than not becoming victims in the first place—is not to become victims again. Given that, is it not essential that all parts of the criminal justice system, whatever Department they come under, are clear that they are required to focus on reducing offending and reoffending?

Mr. Hanson: It is absolutely vital that we tackle reoffending. That is key to preventing further offending because, sadly, a number of people still go through the prison and justice systems but then ultimately reoffend. Reoffending rates for both adults and youths have fallen by 20 per cent. since 2000, but we need to do more. I know that there is a consensus on that in the House, and it means we must look at employment opportunities, housing and reintegration, and at ensuring that people leave prison in a better place than when they went in.

Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD): I welcome the Government's positive response, but does the Minister accept that the Home Office has an opportunity to develop strategies that will save people from ever becoming victims of crime in the first place—especially

if he is able to get his hands on some of the money that might otherwise be committed to further prison expansion?

Mr. Hanson: One of the key things that I have tried to encourage, both as a Justice Minister and now as a Home Office Minister, is integrated offender management. That means that we look at managing offenders through the system, from prison through release and back into the community, where police and probation services work together with important local authority services to make sure that everyone has an opportunity not to reoffend in the future. I welcome the right hon. Gentleman's report. I think that it has some merit, and the Government have responded in what I hope is a positive way.

Administrative Burden (Police)

7. **Mr. David Amess** (Southend, West) (Con): What steps his Department has taken to reduce the administrative burden on police forces in the last 12 months. [322944]

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Counter-Terrorism (Mr. David Hanson): We are committed to reducing police bureaucracy, including the time spent on unnecessary administrative tasks. This is why I have taken steps to reduce the amount of data that we collect from police forces, scrapped the lengthy stop-and-account form and invested in mobile phone technology to allow officers to work in a much more efficient and smarter way.

Mr. Amess: The Minister will know that, whenever the police are criticised for how they do their job, they invariably say they are hampered by the number of forms that they have to fill in. The Home Secretary said that he would deal with the matter in a radical way. How exactly has he addressed form filling and bureaucracy in a radical fashion?

Mr. Hanson: I take it that the hon. Gentleman has not looked at clause 1 of the Crime and Security Bill currently going through the House of Commons. Has he? I suspect that he has not. If he had, he would have seen that it contains radical proposals, approved by this House, to reduce the stop-and-search form—a measure that by itself will ensure that around 700,000 hours of police time are saved.

In addition, we have accepted 13 recommendations from Jan Berry, the independent adviser on police bureaucracy. We will implement them over the next six to nine months, so I hope that the hon. Gentleman will keep up to speed on these matters.

Keith Vaz (Leicester, East) (Lab): When the deputy commissioner of the Metropolitan police, Tim Godwin, gave evidence to the Select Committee last Tuesday, he said that only 30 per cent. of his officers had hand-held devices. The Minister will know that we recommended in our report last year that every front-line officer should have a personal digital assistant, as that would help to cut bureaucracy significantly and ensure that police officers are more visible outside police stations. What are the Government going to do about to ensure that every officer has such a device?

Mr. Hanson: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend, who will know, I hope, that we have invested £80 million in securing support for mobile data services. They will save an average of 30 minutes per shift for officers who will not have to go back to the station to complete paperwork that the House does not wish them to do. We want to extend that. I was in Manchester this morning, visiting the Stockport police. They are due to receive their hand-held devices in the next week or so, and that positive approach is being rolled out across the country to ensure that we reduce bureaucracy and improve efficiency.

Chris Huhne (Eastleigh) (LD): Will the Minister tell us what actions, in addition to those that he has set out, have been taken to introduce voice recognition technology? In his answer, he mentioned the Government's approach to hand-held computers for police on the streets, but what steps are being taken with regard to hiring civilian staff to help to complete forms over the telephone? What progress has been made in pilot schemes to cut the proportion of officers' time spent on paperwork?

Mr. Hanson: There are a number of measures. In the Bill currently before Parliament, we have reduced stop-and-search forms, which will save time, and we have invested £80 million in hand-held devices. I am looking at how we can develop still further the use of modern technology to reduce paperwork and, as I mentioned, through Jan Berry's work in her second year, we will look at implementing the recommendations that we have already accepted to reduce paperwork. There is more that we can do, we have an appetite to do it, and I am confident that that will help support police officers to be more efficient and to reduce the unnecessary paperwork that is being undertaken.

Chris Huhne: We can all agree on the need to cut red tape, even if we disagree on the speed at which the Government have moved. Despite the latest initiatives, the figures show that England and Wales are under-policed by international standards. We had 264 police officers per 100,000 population, compared with a European average of 357. Does the Minister agree that that is the main reason why our offences per head of population are so much higher than in other countries, and that a real increase in police numbers, such as that proposed by my party, is what is needed to cut crime?

Mr. Hanson: There are 24,000 more police officers than when the Government were elected in 1997—147,000 police officers now. There are 17,000 police community support officers, whereas there were zero when the Government were first elected. Crime is down by 36 per cent., burglary is down, robbery is down and violent crime is down. That is a record worth defending. We can do more, we should do more, and we are committed to support the funding. The hon. Gentleman can always outbid us because he knows he will never be in a position to have to implement any of those decisions.

Linda Gilroy (Plymouth, Sutton) (Lab/Co-op): What assessment has my right hon. Friend made of the role of the on-the-spot fines in reducing bureaucracy and in effective policing?

Mr. Hanson: My right hon. Friends the Home Secretary and the Justice Secretary are undertaking a review. We hope shortly to be able to publish further details on that.

Chris Grayling (Epsom and Ewell) (Con): In a speech earlier this month, the Prime Minister said that the Government's

"commitment to protecting the record numbers of police officers . . . is clear."

Can the Minister guarantee to the House that if the Government are re-elected in May, over the course of the next Parliament there will be no reduction in the total number of police officers currently serving in England and Wales?

Mr. Hanson: The hon. Gentleman will know that for 2010-11 we have given a 2.5 per cent. minimum increase, and that my right hon. Friends the Prime Minister and the Home Secretary have said that there is no reason whatsoever why police forces should reduce the number of warranted officers or police community support officers because the resources will be available. That commitment contrasts with the position of the hon. Gentleman.

Chris Grayling: I notice, interestingly, that the Minister did not answer my question. The reason is straightforward. Last week the Home Office published details of progress on its plans to modernise the police work force. Its document specifically refers to it being difficult for forces to use work force modernisation

"as one of their levers to meet the cost pressures ahead if they are not able to reduce officer numbers."

Why is the Prime Minister promising to protect record numbers of police officers, if the Home Office is quietly working on plans to cut officer numbers?

Mr. Hanson: Let us be clear about this. The Home Office is not planning to cut police officer numbers. The Home Office will support sufficient resources to ensure that the number of police officers and police community support officers that we currently have can be kept in place, should police chiefs wish to do so operationally. The challenge is for the hon. Gentleman to match that commitment on resources when we go in to the election. Last year the hon. Member for Bury St. Edmunds (Mr. Ruffley) would not commit to the funding for next year's police funding. That is the challenge, and the electorate will see it.

Chris Grayling: I will be delighted to answer questions from the right hon. Gentleman if we swap sides in the House after the election in May.

The document to which I am referring clearly states "Home Office" on the front of it. Last time I looked, he and his colleagues were Ministers for the Home Office. The document concludes that

"there will need to be constructive engagement"

with politicians and staff associations

"regarding the impact on officer numbers."

The Government are quietly planning cuts in police officer numbers. Why can they not tell the truth for a change?

Mr. Hanson: The hon. Gentleman will know that there is a commitment from the Government to maintain the level of numbers if police chiefs wish to have those numbers. We will maintain the resources to do that. We have a record of 24,000 more officers and 16,500 to 17,000 police community support officers. I do not believe that that record would have been maintained if an alternative Government had been in place. I commend that to the House in due course.

Drugs (Young People)

9. **Mr. David Evennett** (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of his Department's steps to tackle drug-taking by young people. [322947]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Meg Hillier): We are committed to preventing and reducing drug use by young people. Drug use among young people has continued to fall over the last decade—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I apologise for interrupting the Under-Secretary, but I think that she is seeking to group this question with Question 11.

Meg Hillier: Forgive me, Mr. Speaker. I am indeed seeking to group those questions.

11. **Sir Nicholas Winterton** (Macclesfield) (Con): What recent estimate he has made of levels of drug misuse among young people. [322951]

Meg Hillier: Fifteen per cent. of young people aged 11 to 15 used drugs in 2008, compared with 20 per cent. in 2001.

Mr. Evennett: I thank the Minister for her reply. Mephedrone, the substance that contributed to the deaths of two young men last week, is a legal high that can allegedly be bought for as little as £4. Should the Government not take more seriously the threat that legal highs pose? What steps is the Minister taking to get across to young people the consequences of taking such substances?

Meg Hillier: The hon. Gentleman makes very important points about a very worrying issue. The Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs is reviewing mephedrone and other legal highs as a priority, after a schedule of work that the Home Secretary set last summer. The report on mephedrone is due on 29 March, and if we need to lay an order before Parliament in order to get a measure through, we will do so.

Sir Nicholas Winterton: The Minister will know that legal highs are killing young people. She will know also that many headmasters and headmistresses throughout the country believe that consideration should be given to banning these drugs. When will the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs report on that matter and, I hope, say that those drugs will be banned, so that young people are not tempted to take them to get a temporary high—and do not kill themselves in the process?

Meg Hillier: I refer the hon. Gentleman to my previous answer: 29 March. However, we seek to continue to educate young people and their parents about the matter, mainly through the Frank website, which has reported on mephedrone issues in particular since September and has regular updated guidance.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend believe that the Government invest enough money in early intervention programmes, which result in less criminalisation of so many of our young people later in their lives?

Meg Hillier: We always keep an eye on that issue, but we already invest more than £55 million each year in tackling young people's substance misuse, and that includes funding treatment, area-based grant work for under-18s' misuse, Positive Futures and the Frank website.

James Brokenshire (Hornchurch) (Con): At the last Home Office questions in February, when the use among young people of legal highs such as mephedrone was discussed, the Home Secretary said that the consideration of the issue was now an absolute priority for the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs and the Government. Yet it is reported today that the Home Office was advised five years ago of the problem of those synthetic drugs being bought online. Why did the Government fail to act sooner?

Meg Hillier: The Government have acted, and I shall explain a little of the background to the report to which I believe the hon. Gentleman refers. It was a report on the internet discussing the availability of psychoactive medications only, and our drug laws apply a criminal sanction whatever the route of availability. That report was looking at, and horizon-scanning on, drug futures up to 2025. It set out possibilities rather than realities and made no recommendations to the Government. However, as a result of a number of issues, the Government commissioned more work, and that led last year to the Home Secretary asking the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs to look at this, which it is doing to its normal time scales.

Human Trafficking (Lap-dancing Clubs)

13. **Mr. Anthony Steen** (Totnes) (Con): What recent representations he has received on allegations of exploitation of victims of trafficking in lap-dancing clubs. [322953]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Meg Hillier): I have not received any specific representations on the exploitation of victims of trafficking in lap-dancing clubs. Human trafficking is a serious offence and the police will of course investigate allegations of trafficking wherever they occur.

Mr. Steen: I wonder whether the Minister has any plans to ensure that local authorities, which from 1 April have powers under the Policing and Crime Act 2009, will be able to do anything in the 350 relevant lap-dancing clubs that have been identified, bearing in mind the fact that local authorities have no experience of identifying human trafficking victims. Is she thinking of involving the police, or just relying on local authority officials?

Meg Hillier: The police go into lap-dancing clubs, as necessary, and as the House would expect them to do, in order to catch traffickers. It is important that they work closely with local authorities, such as my own in Hackney, which is getting a real grip on the issue now that local authorities have much more say about the licensing of such premises. It is crucial that in something as important as trafficking the right expertise is deployed, but I do not believe that there are any problems in that direction.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) (Lab): On the human trafficking of youngsters, will the Minister have a word in her Department about the cases where young teenage women who have been transported from other parts of the globe are rescued or identified by the local authority and brought into care, but when they reach the ages of 19, 20 and 21 cannot get any papers regularised in the United Kingdom and are falling between two stools? Will that be addressed with some urgency and dispatch?

Meg Hillier: We do, on occasion, grant people leave to stay in those situations. Clearly, every case is individual, and I will happily talk to my hon. Friend if he has any particular cases that he wishes to raise.

Yarl's Wood

14. **Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire) (Con):** If he will request Her Majesty's chief inspector of prisons to undertake an immediate inquiry into the recent protests at Yarl's Wood immigration removal centre. [322954]

The Minister for Borders and Immigration (Mr. Phil Woolas): The UK Border Agency has commissioned a management review of the incident which will report shortly. The investigators have not raised any concerns thus far, so it is not expected that the matter will require further investigation. However, if overriding concerns are identified, we will of course review that decision.

Alistair Burt: I appreciate the Minister's answer. I also appreciate the involvement at a personal level of the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), which is very helpful. Will the Minister reconsider the involvement of Dame Anne Owers? He will be aware that there is increasing concern about the condition of some of those who have been refusing food, that there were reports that some were taken to hospital last week, and that there have been allegations of suicide attempts. There is a continuing difference between the views of those health issues taken by Serco and the UK Border Agency and by those outside who look after detainees, and that will not be ended unless there is an independent review by Anne Owers rather than a management review.

Mr. Woolas: I thank the hon. Gentleman. This is an issue in his constituency. He wrote to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary on 18 March, and a reply is being drafted for him. I take the point that he is making. Thus far, we have found no substance whatsoever in the allegations; indeed, the opposite is the case. If you will indulge me, Mr. Speaker, let me point out that the resident who claimed that she was not a criminal has in fact served time for drug supplying and has attacked

two of our officers. CCTV footage is available, and the independent monitoring board, which has written to me and to my hon. Friend the Under-Secretary, was witness to the alleged incidents, but I have an open mind on the hon. Gentleman's point, because it may be needed to give status—let me put it that way—to these concerns.

Photography Restrictions (Public Places)

16. **Norman Baker (Lewes) (LD):** Whether he has issued guidance to police forces on restrictions on members of the public taking photographs in public places. [322956]

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Counter-Terrorism (Mr. David Hanson): The National Policing Improvement Agency and I have issued guidance and circulars to the police that make it clear that counter-terrorism powers should not be used to stop innocent people taking photographs. I have also written to all chief constables who have section 44 authorisations to reiterate the point.

Norman Baker: I thank the Minister for that reply, but I have to tell him that the system is not working. Only last week, a journalist from Meridian Television, Phil Hornby, was threatened with arrest and confiscation and deletion of his tape merely for filming an exterior shot of Worthing station. Other individuals have been stopped for taking sunset photographs of St. Paul's and photographs of the Christmas lights in Brighton. Clearly, the guidance that the Minister has issued does not seem to be getting through. What further steps will he take to ensure that we do not slide towards east Germany in this country?

Mr. Hanson: I think that the guidance is helpful. However, last week I met my hon. Friend the Member for Great Grimsby (Mr. Mitchell) and a delegation of a range of individuals involved in photography issues. We agreed with Craig Mackey, the chief constable of Cumbria, who deals with these matters on behalf of chief police officers, that we would consider police training issues. I make this offer to the hon. Gentleman: if there are individual cases where there are concerns, we will look at them to see whether the guidance has been followed. If he wishes to send me further details, I will certainly look into them with Craig Mackey.

Student Visas (Language Schools)

17. **John Howell (Henley) (Con):** What assessment he has made of the effects of tier 4 student visa changes on language schools following the review of November 2009 and the further measures announced in February 2010. [322957]

The Minister for Borders and Immigration (Mr. Phil Woolas): The changes came into force on 3 March, and we continually monitor tier 4 to ensure its effectiveness. Our policy is designed to protect the integrity of our immigration system and the reputation of the UK's education providers.

John Howell: The English language industry is worth £1.5 billion a year to the UK economy, which is money we cannot afford to lose. Will the Minister visit with me the many genuine English language schools in my constituency to see the effects that the changes are having on those businesses, many of which are small and family-run?

Mr. Woolas: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his interest. I know he shares my desire to protect the robustness of the immigration system and at the same time enhance the reputation of genuine providers. I do not believe that the changes that we have made to achieve the former are damaging the latter. We continuously review the system—that is part of the strength of tier 4 and the points-based system overall—and although it probably too early to tell, I have yet to see evidence of a detrimental effect. We have to protect the genuine student, who has sometimes been exploited by unscrupulous colleges.

Mr. John Grogan (Selby) (Lab): Would my hon. Friend be a little more precise about the level of English that prospective students on English language courses must attain? Language schools throughout Europe classify their courses as pre-intermediate, intermediate, advanced intermediate and advanced. Can English language schools still teach advanced intermediate courses?

Mr. Woolas: Yes. Some urban myths have been perpetuated in this campaign, so let me be clear that English language courses of six months and below, which are subject to a different visa regime, will be protected. Members of Parliament representing Scotland, which has different terminology, will be pleased to hear that foundation courses are maintained. The problem was with level 5 and below, where there was abuse of the system. As a result of the points-based system, we have significantly cut down the abuse of immigration law and protected the genuine college and, importantly, the genuine student.

Mr. Nigel Evans (Ribble Valley) (Con): The Minister is right to hit the phoney colleges, but we need a rigorous regime that does not hit established colleges and schools as well. As he is wandering around the country over the next five weeks, will he pop up to the Ribble Valley with me and come to Stonyhurst college to speak to the headmaster? It is clearly not a phoney establishment, and the headmaster believes that the current visa regime is hitting established businesses.

Mr. Woolas: I will not be wandering around anywhere; I will be purposeful and focused in my travels—wherever the Secretary of State sends me. The hon. Gentleman makes a serious point about genuine colleges, and I have been very careful not to say that the private sector is bad and the public sector is necessarily good. There is good and bad on both sides of the divide. We have had support from the sector, because its reputation will benefit. I have established a unit in the points-based system tier 4 to deal with such cases, and it is best to do so quickly. Of course, if the hon. Gentleman wants to invite me up to his beautiful constituency, I would be more than happy to go again.

Special Constables

19. **Bob Russell (Colchester) (LD):** If he will bring forward proposals to increase the number of special constables recruited from businesses. [322959]

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Counter-Terrorism (Mr. David Hanson): In August 2008, a three-year funding programme was announced for the National Policing Improvement Agency to increase the number of special constables in England and Wales through the establishment of nine regional co-ordinator posts. As part of that we have an employer-supported policing programme, which was launched in October 2009, which will ensure further development.

Bob Russell: May I urge the Minister to continue the programme for the foreseeable future? I often think that the role of the special constabulary is underplayed. It plays a vital role in the policing of our communities, and the business community getting involved and releasing staff for training provides a vital pool of additional special constables. I encourage the Government to extend that programme.

Mr. Hanson: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his support. We are aiming to get about 20,000 special constables in place in the near future and we are raising our game to ensure that we recruit more. We need the support of the business community to do so. I visited specials in Flint, in my constituency, only three or four weeks ago and saw the wide range of activities and specialist work that they undertake on a voluntary basis in support of the full-time service.

Mr. Russell Brown (Dumfries and Galloway) (Lab): Has the Minister engaged with the devolved Administration in Edinburgh at any point about the successes or otherwise that they have had in recruiting specials?

Mr. Hanson: To be honest, I have not spoken directly to the Minister in Edinburgh, but my hon. Friend makes a good suggestion. We need to co-ordinate, particularly in constituencies such as his, where there are cross-border issues, and the Cumbrian force could equally support those in the south of Scotland.

Front-line Policing

20. **John Hemming (Birmingham, Yardley) (LD):** What assessment his Department has made of the relationship between the number of police officers in police forces and their effectiveness in carrying out front-line policing. [322960]

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Counter-Terrorism (Mr. David Hanson): The Government's investment in the police is at record levels. There are record numbers of police officers and police community support officers on the streets. Crime is down by 36 per cent. and confidence in police is increasing. Fifty per cent. of the public agree that antisocial behaviour and crimes that matter to them are being dealt with effectively. I think that that demonstrates the relationship between the issues that the hon. Gentleman mentioned.

John Hemming: There are wide discrepancies in efficiency or effectiveness between one force and another. For example, the detection rate for violent crime in the Met is just 37 per cent., compared with more than half in other urban forces. What is the Home Secretary doing specifically to improve lagging forces so that they meet the standards of the best?

Mr. Hanson: I hope that the hon. Gentleman knows that we have encouraged inspections of police forces and police authorities to ensure that we examine discrepancies and value-for-money issues when they arise. There has been a recent police report card from Denis O'Connor, Her Majesty's inspector of constabulary, and there has been the same—and will be again—for police authorities. We want to encourage openness about performance so that we can improve it and understand where forces are failing.

Sentencing (Publicity)

22. **Mr. Philip Hollobone** (Kettering) (Con): If he will provide support to Northamptonshire police's project to publicise sentencing outcomes from Crown courts and magistrates courts. [322962]

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Counter-Terrorism (Mr. David Hanson): The Government recognise the importance of providing communities with information about those brought to justice. Through the policing pledge, forces have committed to publicising local outcomes regularly. Her Majesty's Courts Service continues to support that work, including developing a website, which will enable magistrates court outcomes to be accessible to the public online.

Mr. Hollobone: If we are to improve the public's confidence in our criminal justice system, do we not need much less sympathising and understanding of why criminals commit crime, and much more naming and shaming?

Mr. Hanson: The hon. Gentleman knows that, while not naming and shaming as such, we support visibility of outcomes in the criminal justice system. That is why the Ministry of Justice introduced orange jackets for community offenders 18 months ago, why we are trying to get individuals involved in picking projects for community work, and why we are trying to ensure that the community knows what happens to people—the outcomes of criminality. Those matters are important, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman supports them.

Topical Questions

T1. [322963] **Bob Spink** (Castle Point) (Ind): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Alan Johnson): In October, I asked every community safety partnership in England and Wales to commit publicly to minimum standards for dealing with antisocial behaviour. I am pleased to report that 99.7 per cent. of local authority areas have confirmed that such standards are either in place or will be in place by the end of

March, making clear to the public the response that they are entitled to expect when they report antisocial behaviour.

Bob Spink: Does the Home Secretary agree that it is important for local councils to co-operate with the police to fight jobs and antisocial behaviour, particularly in providing fencing and gating, lighting and CCTV in areas where antisocial behaviour is prevalent, such as Richmond car park in Benfleet or King George V's playing fields on Canvey Island?

Alan Johnson: I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Although the police have a responsibility for antisocial behaviour, they share it with other agencies. Indeed, in all the areas where antisocial behaviour has been tackled effectively, the police work in partnership with local authorities, social services and often with local communities that have decided to fight back against those who are plaguing their lives. I therefore agree that such co-operation is an important part of tackling antisocial behaviour—we went through the local crime and disorder reduction partnerships to get that sort of response.

Mrs. Betty Williams (Conwy) (Lab): Is my right hon. Friend aware that Mr. Ryan Hilton, an events manager with the pub crawl firm, Carnage UK, was convicted in court in Llandudno last week of assaulting my constituent, Mr. Mark Aelwyn Roberts, causing him actual bodily harm? He will be sentenced at Crown court. Will my right hon. Friend please note that North Wales police had objected to that event in Bangor? Does he agree that that vicious assault sends a message to all licensing authorities that Carnage UK is a disreputable organisation, which causes havoc in our university towns?

Alan Johnson: I was not aware of the individual circumstances that my hon. Friend just outlined. I agree that those disreputable organisations need to be tackled. Indeed, in most places throughout the country, there is a realistic and meaningful partnership between local police and licensees to ensure that licensees do not have their reputations undermined by organisations such as the one that she mentioned.

T2. [322964] **Mr. Edward Timpson** (Crewe and Nantwich) (Con): Pursuant to my recent written question on the number of ID card applications made by residents of Crewe and Nantwich in Cheshire, the Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department, the hon. Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), who I can see is bursting to answer this question, replied:

"The Identity and Passport Service is not able to provide information relating to particular constituency or county for identity card applications."—[*Official Report*, 8 March 2010; Vol. 507, c. 123W.]

Why cannot a scheme that is designed to assist in identifying individuals provide even basic information such as the uptake in my constituency?

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Meg Hillier): I forgive the hon. Gentleman for not appreciating that an Act of Parliament passed by this House in 2005—before he was elected—states that it is illegal to interrogate the database to gather such information.

Mr. Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich, West) (Lab/Co-op): While crime in the west midlands has dropped—in some cases quite spectacularly, particularly burglary—there is still a problem with business crime. On Friday, I visited a business improvement district that had reported a substantial drop in crime as a result of the measures it had taken. What steps is the Minister taking to assess the impact of BIDs and what measures might he contemplate to roll out that prototype in other areas?

The Minister for Policing, Crime and Counter-Terrorism (Mr. David Hanson): I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who identifies an issue that we need to examine in detail. The Government are firmly committed to working with business and trade associations to find effective solutions. Part of that includes the national retail crime steering group, on which the Home Office and the British Retail Consortium are working together to look at how we deal with crime, particular for those in business communities in town centres. I will certainly look at any particular suggestions that my hon. Friend has, but that is an area on which we need to continue to focus.

T3. [322965] **John Hemming** (Birmingham, Yardley) (LD): Research from the university of Groningen demonstrates that the presence of graffiti encourages other crime. An appropriate penalty is to make someone clear up the graffiti that they have created. Why do the Government still oppose fixed penalty notices for community service for graffiti?

Alan Johnson: As my right hon. Friend the Minister for Policing, Crime and Counter-Terrorism said earlier, we are looking at the whole question of fixed notice penalties with the Ministry of Justice, and a report will come soon. I agree with the hon. Gentleman about the importance of deterring graffiti. Indeed, up and down the country, community payback is ensuring that those who have engaged in such activity are very visibly and publicly—wearing orange jackets—clearing up the mess that they have made.

Dr. Stephen Ladyman (South Thanet) (Lab): I heard what the Minister for Borders and Immigration said earlier about the new visa arrangements for English language schools, but may I just point out that last Thursday I met a young man from Taiwan who was studying English in this country preparatory to going to Sheffield Hallam university and who will need four or possibly even five visas to achieve that? Indeed, under the new arrangements he may even have to go back Taiwan to make one of those applications. Will my hon. Friend at least consider all the material that I have sent to him and to the Secretary of State and reconsider the position?

The Minister for Borders and Immigration (Mr. Phil Woolas): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the work that he is doing—the language schools sector and overseas students are very important parts of his constituency and its economy. The answer to his question is that we very much want to protect that. On the other hand, I am sure that the House agrees that we need to prevent visa abuse. What we have tried to do is provide that seamless route for the genuine student at the genuine college.

Mr. Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): I apologise, Mr. Speaker, for not being present earlier. With regard to the specific issue of the use of dogs in crime, will the Minister reassure us that any future bright ideas that the Home Office has will focus on individual owner responsibility and deed not breed, so that responsible dog owners are not punished for the sins of the minority?

Meg Hillier: I am tempted to say that I refer the hon. Gentleman to my previous answers, which he can read in *Hansard*. However, as I said earlier and now repeat, we want to look mostly at the deed not the breed, but we recognise that some breeds are inherently violent and we need to take that into account as well. However, responsible ownership is the main line.

Jeff Ennis (Barnsley, East and Mexborough) (Lab): Since the beginning of the recession, the number of bogus charity clothes collectors has risen very sharply across the country, taking away much needed revenue from bona fide charity shops, such as Cancer Research UK shops in Barnsley and Doncaster. Unfortunately, many chief constables throughout the country are giving that type of crime a very low level of priority. Will the Secretary of State write to all chief constables in England to ensure that they treat such crimes with a great deal more seriousness in future?

Alan Johnson: I will talk to chief constables about that. I go on the basis that if my hon. Friend the Member for Barnsley, East and Mexborough (Jeff Ennis) says that there is a problem, there is a problem. I am only sorry that he will not be here to raise these important points at Home Office questions after the next general election, and I wish him well.

T4. [322966] **Mr. John Baron** (Billericay) (Con): My constituents, Mr. and Ms Adedoyin, have received a phone call from someone claiming to be a Home Office caseworker wanting cash in return for their documents, which we had previously been told had been lost by the UK Border Agency. The response from the Home Office to my inquiries to date has been very disappointing. Will Ministers look into this issue as a matter of urgency and meet me to discuss the situation?

Mr. Woolas: Of course we will. The Border Agency is, from time to time, subject to mischievousness, but the response must be professional. Of course I will look into this and then meet the hon. Gentleman if that proves necessary after my investigation.

Rob Marris (Wolverhampton, South-West) (Lab): A few years ago, the UK Border Agency shunted a load of old asylum and refugee cases into a pile called legacy cases, which are due to be dealt with by next year. Is the Minister aware that there is a new pile building up of cases that have been overlooked? We will have the same problem all over again with a second pile of legacy cases.

Mr. Woolas: I do not agree with that analysis of the situation. The UK Border Agency will, as my hon. Friend says, deal with the legacy cases by the summer of next year, but as we have explained to the Select Committee we are also in the process of archiving cases that go back—I do not wish to make a partisan point—to 1981.

The time to conclusion on asylum is now under six months for 60 per cent. of cases. In 1997—to make a partisan point—the average time to a decision, not a conclusion, was 22 months. The Government and the agency should get some credit for dealing with the legacy problem.

T5. [322967] **Simon Hughes** (North Southwark and Bermondsey) (LD): If we are to have a real increase in the visibility of police on the streets of Britain and in the clear-up rate for offences, and a real reduction in police response times and the time that they spend behind closed doors, is not the suggestion this morning by Sir Hugh Orde, the president of the Association of Chief Police Officers, that we should have a full review of policing one that should have the immediate agreement of the Government?

Alan Johnson: Sir Hugh Orde was calling for a royal commission. I do not agree with that suggestion, although I am keen to talk to Sir Hugh Orde about this. He is a man of great experience and I respect his views considerably. However, it is not the case that because the last royal commission was in 1962 there has to be another one at intermittent periods. We used to have royal commissions that went on for a long time during which everything was preserved in aspic because nobody knew what would happen next. We should consistently review our methods of policing to ensure that they keep pace with advances in technology and changes around the world, for instance in counter-terrorism, and we are doing that. Ronnie Flanagan's report, the Green Paper and the White Paper, and many other changes over the last few years, have revolutionised the way in which the police do their work. We need to continue to change to meet the challenges of our times.

Mr. Speaker: Let us make a real effort to speed up now, as I wish to get some more questions in.

Dr. Brian Iddon (Bolton, South-East) (Lab): Several times in the past few weeks, including today, I have heard the claim that mephedrone is killing young people. The cases that I have looked at suggest that the young people concerned were taking more than one drug, including alcohol. Should we not be getting across to young people the fact that if they choose to take a cocktail of drugs, they are putting their lives at risk? Mixing cocaine and alcohol, for example, produces the very toxic cocaethylene.

Alan Johnson: My hon. Friend, with his usual scientific analysis, is making the case for why we have to wait for the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs to report on wide-ranging and close analysis of the problem before saying whether mephedrone is a dangerous drug. We might all have views on that, but they should be driven by the scientific evidence. Once that report is made to me—I hope that that will happen as soon as possible after 29 March, when the council's next meeting is scheduled—then we can make an informed decision.

T6.[322968] **Mr. Greg Hands** (Hammersmith and Fulham) (Con): To return to the issue of dangerous dogs, the Minister will know that the London Mayor, his deputy Kit Malthouse and various local authorities, such as Hammersmith and Fulham, are working extremely

hard on the problem. As a follow-up to my earlier question about the incident in Normand park last Thursday, the resident concerned was clear in praising his local councillor, Councillor Sarah Gore, along with Greg Smith and his team. Will the Minister agree to meet Councillor Greg Smith and Kit Malthouse to see how local authorities can do something serious about the problem, rather than using the Government's failed insurance scheme?

Meg Hillier: We are always keen to work with anyone, and I will certainly pass on the request for an invitation to the Under-Secretary of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr. Campbell), who deals with the issue on a day-to-day basis.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) (Lab): Why did it take over two years to set up the Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, and, bearing in mind that it is a mass meeting of 22 members who were appointed in February, what opportunity does it have to report back during this Parliament? What is its current programme and what are the Minister's expectations?

Mr. Speaker: Order. There were at least three questions there, but one answer will suffice.

Alan Johnson: My answer is that I am rushing off after this Question Time to appear before that very body; it is the first time that it has called Ministers to appear before it. My hon. Friend raises an important point about the role of the Committee. The only thing that I am absolutely convinced about is the need for such a Committee. However, as it is new, and as it deals with such wide-ranging issues, to a great degree it has a major say in how it shapes the way its work will pan out in future.

T7. [322969] **Mr. David Burrowes** (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Does not the recent concern about legal highs demonstrate the contrast between the speed at which new dangerous drugs can come on to the market and kill people, and the slow process of the Advisory Council on the Misuse of Drugs and the Government in taking real action to tackle the issue? Is it not the case that serious questions are now being asked about whether the ACMD and the classification system are fit for purpose?

Alan Johnson: The hon. Gentleman is being unfair to the ACMD. For a start, it has led the world on legal highs such as Spice and GBL, and it was there before anyone else. Secondly, the ACMD could have been a lot quicker in bringing its report forward if—

Chris Huhne (Eastleigh) (LD): If Professor Nutt had not been sacked.

Alan Johnson: One of the newspapers said that Professor Nutt's sacking had delayed the report by six months, but as I sacked him only five months ago, that seems a bit difficult. To return to the important point, however, the report could have been done more quickly had the ACMD looked just at mephedrone. However, it decided—this had the support of the House when we discussed the matter—to look at that generic group of drugs, so that when it makes a decision, and if that decision is

carried into law, we do not allow the manufacturers of such drugs to make small chemical changes and continue to make them available. The hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr. Burrowes) is doing a disservice to the ACMD, whose vision has enabled us to deal with that whole family of drugs, rather than just one.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. I am sorry not to be able to accommodate the remaining colleagues, but time is against us, although, as I am kindly exhorted from a sedentary position, I will not worry.

Lobbying and Paid Advocacy

3.33 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Ms Harriet Harman): With permission, Mr. Speaker, I would like to make a statement about paid advocacy and lobbying. These issues are, rightly, of great concern to this House and to the public. The highest standards are expected of Ministers, former Ministers and Members of this House. The public are entitled to be completely confident that, when Ministers make a decision, it is made in the public interest and that there is no impropriety whatever.

Allegations have been made in respect of ministerial decisions in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills in respect of food labelling, ministerial decisions in the Department for Transport in respect of National Express and the east coast main line, and a decision in the Department of Health in respect of that Department's advisory group for a programme board for people with mental health problems and learning difficulties in the criminal justice system.

I can tell the House that Ministers in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and in the Department for Transport are clear that those decisions were made properly in the public interest. Civil servants in the Department of Health who took the decisions on the advisory group are satisfied that they made the correct decision in the public interest and were not responding to any inappropriate or undue influence. In each of the cases raised, the Departments concerned have looked into the allegations and confirmed that they are satisfied that the decisions have been made without the impropriety alleged.

The Prime Minister today sought the Cabinet Secretary's assurance that the Departments had looked into those claims. The permanent secretaries made inquiries, as they would into any such serious allegations, and they have assured the Cabinet Secretary that they were satisfied that there had been no improper influence on Government policy or ministerial decisions. They are setting this out in public statements today.

I want to reassure hon. Members and the public that Ministers act in the public interest. They make decisions in the public interest. That is a fundamental part of the duties of their office. Ministers are bound by the ministerial code, which is based on an acceptance that ministerial office brings with it serious responsibility and a duty to the nation. The code was strengthened and updated in July 2007. Allegations of a breach of the ministerial code are investigated by Sir Philip Mawer, the independent adviser on ministerial standards. Ministers have to act within the ministerial code, and, if they do not, they cannot continue as Ministers. That requires them to act in the public interest and not in any private interest. From 1 October last year, the Government now publish, for the first time, on a quarterly basis, details of Ministers' meetings with outside interest groups. It is therefore fully transparent which organisations a Minister has met and what the meeting was about.

The position on former Ministers is that they must not take any proposed employment of any kind unless it has been approved by the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments. That has been the position since 2007, when we strengthened the process by making it a requirement for two years after leaving ministerial

office instead of one year, and making it a requirement to get approval rather than just to notify, as was previously the case. Former Ministers are also governed by the rules that apply to all Members of this House or, if they are in the House of Lords, the rules that apply to all peers.

Members of this House are required to abide by the code of conduct for Members of Parliament, which was reissued, updated and strengthened in June last year. Fundamental to the code of conduct is the requirement for hon. Members to abide by the seven principles of public life. The rules that embody those principles are stringent and extensive, and breach of the rules is dealt with, following a complaint or a self-referral, by an investigation by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards and, if necessary, by action by the Standards and Privileges Committee. Any allegation that a Member of this House has broken the code of conduct will be thoroughly investigated by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards so that the House can, if necessary, impose the appropriate sanction. We have high standards, clear rules and a clear remedy for breach, and that is how it should be.

Members of Parliament are paid a salary. If an hon. Member takes on any other work for which they are paid, they are, since June 2009, required to register every payment made to them, including the amount and what they were paid for. That ensures that, if any hon. Member is getting paid over and above their MP's salary, the public know who is paying them and for what. Failure to register a payment is a breach of the code of conduct.

The rules relating to civil servants state that they are required to abide by the civil service code, which has now been put on a statutory footing in the Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill. Breach of the code is dealt with by the Cabinet Secretary and the civil service commissioners.

I turn now to those who seek to be MPs. Following the recommendation of the Committee on Standards in Public Life, the Government have issued guidance to all candidates standing at the next general election about the voluntary disclosure of their financial interests, including their tax status.

Following the report of the Public Administration Committee in January last year, the Government have been working with the lobbying industry to establish a register of lobbyists. Building on that work, and in the light of the latest allegations, we think that that should be put on a statutory footing. There should be a legal register of lobbyists, which would require people to register as lobbyists and to register the identity of the clients on whose behalf they were acting. This is necessary to give the public confidence that that is the law and that it will be complied with. I commend the statement to the House.

Sir George Young (North-West Hampshire) (Con): I thank the right hon. and learned Lady for an advance copy of her statement. However, it leaves a number of unresolved issues. The fact that the Leader of the House has had to come to the House to explain the situation is a clear indication of the seriousness of these allegations, which threaten to become, as my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) warned, the next big scandal in Westminster. Does she agree that the

[*Sir George Young*]

sight of former Cabinet Ministers offering to lobby Government on behalf of corporate interests for private gain, in one case as a kind of “cab for hire” for up to £5,000 per day, will have deeply appalled the public and further undermined trust in politics at a moment when we all hoped that we were turning the corner.

The public will now expect the Government to treat these revelations with the seriousness they deserve, but rather than clarifying the facts, Downing street appears to be doing the opposite. Does the Leader of the House not recognise that the Prime Minister’s decision to rule out a proper inquiry before the television programme has even gone out was simply the wrong response, particularly as the Secretary of State for Transport has just confirmed in another place that he spoke to the right hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mr. Byers) about the east coast franchise? Does she not agree with me that the allegation that public policy was in some way altered by ex-Ministers lobbying for corporate clients to the possible disadvantage of the taxpayer and the consumer needs to be fully and impartially investigated and that the Cabinet Secretary should carry out an appropriate review, as requested by my right hon. Friend the Member for Horsham (Mr. Maude)?

The House will have heard what the Leader of the House said about the internal departmental review, but does she not agree with her colleague, the Chairman of the Public Administration Committee, who said on the radio at 1 o’clock that

“the Cabinet Secretary will want to assure himself that nothing has gone wrong at the Departmental end”.

Should not the results of this review be put in the public domain? In ruling out an inquiry, has the Prime Minister followed due process? Who exactly has he consulted in the course of the last 24 hours to satisfy himself so quickly as to the veracity or otherwise of these claims?

Does the Leader of the House recall that I asked her for a debate on the Public Administration Committee’s report into lobbying back in October at my first business questions? With the benefit of hindsight, does she regret never finding time for that debate? Why did the Government drag their feet on this report for months? The Committee published its original report in December 2008, but the Government did not respond for almost a year, instead of the recommended six weeks. The original PAC report clearly stated that

“with the rules as loosely and as variously interpreted as they currently are, former Ministers in particular appear to be able to use with impunity contacts they built up as public servants to further a private interest.”

In reply, the Government did not agree with

“the general assertion that former Ministers in particular are able to use improperly and with impunity contacts they have built up while in office”.

Does she now regret that response and, in paragraph 31, rejecting statutory regulation, which she accepted a few moments ago?

Moving forward, does the right hon. and learned Lady agree with me that the advisory committee on public appointments should be placed on a statutory basis? If she does, what explanation does she have for the Government not supporting the amendment to the Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill tabled on 2 March in my name and that of my hon. Friend the

Member for Chichester (Mr. Tyrie), which would have done exactly that? Does she agree that we need to review the two-year time limit for ex-ministerial appointments, giving a longer horizon than is currently the case?

The country will expect the Government to deal with these issues thoroughly and promptly. If they are not finalised before Dissolution, does the right hon. and learned Lady agree that it will be the first responsibility of an incoming Government to instruct the Prime Minister’s adviser on the ministerial code to undertake a full review of this episode so that Government can learn the lessons of what has gone wrong and then change the rules to prevent a recurrence of this scandal in the future?

Ms Harman: The shadow Leader of the House referred to the “cab for hire” quote. I think I can say on behalf of all hon. Members that that is not what anyone in this House of Commons wants to see, and it is certainly not what the public want to see. The matter is to be investigated by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

The right hon. Gentleman said that public policy had been altered in respect of transport. I refer him to what I said in my statement, and to today’s statement by the Secretary of State for Transport in the House of Lords. Public policy was not altered in any way. It is absolutely refuted and strongly denied that there was any alteration of public policy. The Secretary of State for Transport said that

“there is no truth whatsoever in the suggestion that Stephen Byers came to any arrangement with me on any matter relating to National Express.”

He went on to say:

“I told Mr. Byers that such a move would undermine the rail franchise system and would not be in the best interests of taxpayers.”

Further to that, the permanent secretary to the Department for Transport has said:

“I have looked into the allegations made over the weekend about improper influence by former ministers on departmental policy making and decision making in relation to National Express rail franchise business. Having made inquiries, I am satisfied that there was no impropriety on the part of ministers or officials in the Department. The Secretary of State for Transport has also made a statement in the House of Lords which rejected any allegation of impropriety.”

I ask the right hon. Gentleman to accept that.

The right hon. Gentleman asked why we had not found time for a debate on the register. We found time to debate a motion that I had tabled and to which the House agreed, although it was not without controversy. We found time to ensure that information about every penny earned by Members of Parliament over and above their pay as Members would be available, so that the public would be fully in the picture in regard to who was paying Members of Parliament over and above their salaries, and for what.

We found time to amend the code for Ministers to ensure that, without waiting for Freedom of Information Act requests—incidentally, it was this Government who introduced the Freedom of Information Act—Ministers must publish quarterly information about all organisations that they have met, and specify the subject of those meetings. That will now be in the public domain. We also found time to amend and tighten the rules relating to former Ministers, extending the one year that had

obtained previously to two years, and introducing a requirement for not just notification but approval before any job is undertaken by a former Minister.

I understand that there was no proposal for the Advisory Committee on Business Appointments—if that is the committee that the right hon. Gentleman meant—to be put on a statutory footing by any Member in any part of the House during the passage of the Constitutional Reform and Governance Bill. However, it is worth looking into. The current arrangement appears to be working well at present, but if hon. Members want that—*[Interruption.]* Well, we will consider it.

Mr. David Heath (Somerton and Frome) (LD): I thank the Leader of the House for advance sight of her statement. However, I think it very unlikely that it would have been made today had it not been for the revelations in the press.

The depressing fact is that the House of Commons always has to react to what happens, rather than taking the necessary action in advance. We did the same in the case of the expenses system. We did not react in time, and we have seen the consequences. We have done the same in relation to party political funding: we have not taken the appropriate steps, and we see what is happening as a result. Now there is the issue of lobbying, which we all knew would eventually hit the newspapers.

What will our constituents think when they read that right hon. and hon. Members of this House think that they should be paid, on top of their parliamentary salary, more for two days' work than a pensioner gets in a whole year? That is the reality of the situation. And what is that for? It is for asking a few cosy questions of their chums in government or, in the case of the hon. Member for Luton, South (Margaret Moran), of what she describes as the "girls' club"—I am not sure what that comprises. We are talking about questions being put not on behalf of constituents or the national public interest, but for the partisan commercial interest of whoever is prepared to pay the cab fare, and that cannot be right.

On the individual decisions, I note, as the right hon. and learned Lady has done, that the Transport Secretary has just answered an urgent question in another place. That was done in another place because the Transport Secretary cannot come here to answer elected Members on a key matter of public interest, and neither can the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills—neither of them are Members who have been elected to their current office. In order to dispel any lingering doubts, will the Leader of the House arrange for every record of meetings on this matter, as well as letters, e-mails or any other contacts, to be made openly available so that we can judge whether there has been any influence on policy?

The Leader of the House referred to the ministerial code and the work of Sir Philip Mawer, who was asked to investigate. We must remember that he can investigate only at the request of the Prime Minister; the Prime Minister is the only one who governs the ministerial code. I have very little confidence in the Prime Minister in this respect, because I happen to know that my hon. Friend the Member for Lewes (Norman Baker) has sent three letters to him with complaints about a former Minister who may have breached the ministerial code and he has not yet received a reply. So what confidence

can we have in that code? Should the code be adapted so that Ministers and civil servants are required not even to entertain approaches from Members of this House if they are made on behalf of commercial interests—if they are made on behalf of paid advocacy? There is no reason why Members should have access to Ministers on that basis; they are not working on behalf of their constituents, so why should they have that privileged position?

The Leader of the House has said that she is interested now—suddenly—in what the Public Administration Committee said about the statutory register for lobbyists, but she has had that report for some time and parliamentary vehicles were available for that to have been enacted. Why was it not? We have had plenty of time to debate lots of other things, so why did we not have a debate and an amendment—a Government proposal—on this subject? Why did she not accept the amendment tabled by my hon. Friend the Member for Cambridge (David Howarth) to the Companies Act 2006, which would have required companies to register when they decide to hire a Member of this place in order to do their business? Why did the Government resist that amendment and not let it through?

The fact is that we are tougher on the lowliest parish council member than we are on Members of this House. It seems to me that paid advocacy in Parliament for commercial or partial interests is not compatible with the duties of a Member of this House.

Ms Harman: The hon. Gentleman says that we are taking action after the event. I have set out the action that we have already taken to make sure that details of meetings with Ministers, which previously were completely secret and not known to the public, are all routinely put in the public domain. I have explained to him that we have taken action to extend the period of time in which former Ministers must seek permission for a job they do. I have also set out to the House that whereas previously Members could be paid by companies or any organisation and it was shrouded in secrecy, we brought a motion before this House that now requires Members to register all the income they receive for work done in addition to their work as Members of this House. I ask him to recognise that we are not taking action after the event; we have taken action before the event. The allegation about my right hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mr. Byers) will be investigated by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards.

As far as the civil service code is concerned, we have put that on a statutory footing. As for people being paid on top of their salary, I agree with the hon. Gentleman, and the step that we have taken is to ensure that instead of its being shrouded in secrecy, it is known to the public. He should recognise that the House took that decision. Previously, that information was shrouded in secrecy and now all members of the public can see it.

The hon. Gentleman asked me to put in the public domain information about meetings held by the Transport Secretary prior to the National Express decision. Because since 2007 we have decided automatically to make public the meetings that Ministers have, that information should already be in the public domain for decisions that were made in July and November last year. The hon. Gentleman is asking me to put information in the public domain—not only the fact of the meeting but what the meeting was about must be put in the public domain.

[Ms Harman]

The hon. Gentleman says that we are suddenly interested in the report of the Public Administration Committee. That is not the case—

Mr. Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): So you are not interested then?

Ms Harman: No, what has happened is that there have been ongoing discussions about establishing a register of lobbyists so that there can be more transparency about who is acting on whose behalf. Because of the public concern that has arisen out of the most recent allegations, we think that it is right to move that forward on to a statutory footing to reassure the public that there is a statutory register. The law will require those who are lobbyists to register the fact that they are lobbyists as well as who their clients are.

The hon. Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr. Heath) asked why companies should not have to register when they hire an MP. I would answer that it is the responsibility of the MP to register that they have been hired. That is certainly an important first step, which did not exist before last June, when it came into effect. We have just started to register that information.

I would share with the hon. Gentleman—I think all hon. Members would do so, too—a sense that we do not want anybody in this House to bring the House into disrepute. We do not want anybody to bring Government into disrepute or to throw a cloud of suspicion over a Government who are acting in the public interest. That is why it is important for me to be so emphatic, so that we reassure the public that whatever actions have been taken by individual Members of this House, they will be investigated. I can assure hon. Members that when it comes to decision making by Ministers, the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills or the Secretary of State for Transport, they have taken those decisions as Ministers of the Crown in the public interest.

Several hon. Members *rose*—

Mr. Speaker: Order. No fewer than 21 hon. and right hon. Members are seeking to catch my eye. Accommodating all of them will require short questions and short answers.

Mr. David Winnick (Walsall, North) (Lab): Although I recognise the steps that have already been taken and what my right hon. and learned Friend has set out, may I ask her this question? Why should any hon. Member be involved in lobbying for commercial interests? No one has been elected to do that and it is understandable that if we are to continue to clean up Parliament, such lobbying should be totally outlawed. There is no justification for it and I hope that my right hon. and learned Friend recognises the strength of public opinion on this issue.

Ms Harman: I certainly do. I think that I have made my views on this known to the House on a number of occasions. I know that my hon. Friend will be aware of them. It was a very important step for the public—who, after all, are the people who vote for us to be in this House of Commons—to know whether a Member of Parliament whom they have been sending to the House of Commons is doing work that is different from or over and above the work that they were elected to do. Their constituents should know that. Before we took

that step, it was not possible for the public to know that. The fact that it has made a difference has been attested to by the fact that a number of Opposition Members, including possibly some shadow Cabinet members, have decided to relinquish outside interests rather than fully registering them. It shows that it has made an important difference.

Sir Peter Tapsell (Louth and Horncastle) (Con): Despite the seriousness of the allegations levelled against the Privy Counsellors, does the Leader of the House agree that they pale into insignificance when compared with assertions that Mr. Blair has been seeking to make money for himself through ventures in Iraq of all places?

Ms Harman: Mr. Blair is a private citizen who is entitled to do whatever is within the law. That is not a responsibility of this House, or a responsibility of mine as the Leader of the House.

Paul Flynn (Newport, West) (Lab): The Member in question is not the first man to indulge in boastful fantasies while talking to a young woman, but should not this shameful episode convince the House of the need to follow the fine example of the Public Administration Committee, which united to make an all-party, tough recommendation to make sure that MPs could never again be for hire?

Ms Harman: I agree with the sentiments of my hon. Friend, and I think that important steps forward were taken by having full transparency. The register of lobbyists will also take things forward on a statutory basis.

Justine Greening (Putney) (Con): Why does it always take a crisis before the Government ever take any action on preserving the integrity of the House? With an election just weeks away, why will the Leader of the House not finally agree to have a fair, impartial and independent inquiry into all this?

Ms Harman: I would respond to the hon. Lady's question in two ways. First, I do not want to have to reiterate to her all the action that we have already taken to toughen up the system and to make sure that it is transparent, that there are clear rules and that those rules are enforced. I have explained to the House that, in respect of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mr. Byers), there is going to be an investigation into his conduct by the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards. If my right hon. Friend's conduct is found to have fallen short of the principles of public life, set out in the code of practice for Members of Parliament, further action will be taken. That investigation is under way.

As far as the question now is concerned, in respect of the decisions taken by the Government, as I said in my statement, the Prime Minister has sought the Cabinet Secretary's assurance that Departments have looked into the claims. One would not expect them to wait after allegations of such seriousness had been made. They looked into these matters right away and, as impartial civil servants, they have given their view that there was "no improper influence on Government policy and decisions."

I hope that the hon. Lady and the public will be reassured about this.

Colin Burgon (Elmet) (Lab): Is the Leader of the House aware of the revulsion that is felt by many Labour MPs about the attitude of so-called Labour colleagues? Surely, the answer to all this is to cut the Gordian knot and make sure that all MPs, especially Labour MPs, have no outside work at all when they are MPs. On a lighter note, will she at least say that this could mark the final nail in the coffin of the new Labour project?

Ms Harman: If my hon. Friend looks at the previous Register of Members' Interests, he will find that by far the most registered interests for people earning outside Parliament were not from those on our side of the House. I did not make that point in my statement, but he has provoked me to explain what the reality was. That is why we have argued for greater transparency.

Mr. Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): Are we not seeing a tired, worn-out Government who are mired in sleaze? We cannot go on like this; it must be time for change.

Ms Harman: I strongly refute the allegation that there has been any impropriety on behalf of Ministers. I have already referred the House to what has been said by the Department for Transport, and I can refer the House to what was said by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. The permanent secretary has said:

"I have looked into the allegations made over the weekend about former ministerial influence on policy-making. I am satisfied in the light of these investigations that there has been no improper influence on officials in my Department."

In addition, I can report to the House that the Business Secretary has said that he has not spoken to my right hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mr. Byers) about food labelling regulations, and that he would not expect to.

Mr. Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Does my right hon. and learned Friend agree that, on many occasions over the past many years, I have raised the question of Members of Parliament serving two masters and taking money from outside? There is only one solution to the matter, and it is that all Members of Parliament, on all sides of the House, must have one job and one job only—serving their constituents. Is it not high time that we put that in the manifesto and presented it to the people? Opposition Members would treat such a pledge in the manner that we expect, because they have so many lobbyists. No one starves on £60,000 a year, so let's get on with it.

Ms Harman: I sympathise with my hon. Friend's sentiments, and he and I have discussed this on many occasions. I think that the public ought to be absolutely confident that their Member of Parliament is acting in their interests. They need to know who Members are taking money from, and for what.

Mr. Elfyn Llwyd (Meirionnydd Nant Conwy) (PC): The Leader of the House has sought many times today to reassure the House that the individuals involved did not, and could not, influence Government policy. Should they not be investigated for attempting to obtain pecuniary advantage by deception?

Ms Harman: If there is any evidence of criminal wrongdoing, that is something that the police will decide independently to investigate. It is not for me as Leader of the House, or indeed for Ministers, to direct police investigations. It is for the police to work out what they want to investigate, and to take that forward with operational independence.

Mr. Gordon Prentice (Pendle) (Lab): We on this side of the House are all scandalised by the behaviour of the Member for North Tyneside (Mr. Byers). It was a disgrace, and absolutely shaming. I want to congratulate my Friend on saying at the Dispatch Box that the Government—hopefully the next Government—will bring forward a mandatory register of lobbyists. However, I did not hear the Gentleman who speaks for the Opposition commit his party to bringing in a mandatory register.

Ms Harman: We will put the mandatory register proposal in our manifesto, and we hope that all parties support it. A reading of the previous Registers of Members' Interests shows that large sums of money have been taken, overwhelmingly by Opposition Members. They held something like 70 per cent. of directorships, whereas something like 30 per cent. were held by Members on this side. We should recognise that the rules that we have brought in are important for all Members of this House.

Alistair Burt (North-East Bedfordshire) (Con): But on what terms are briefings given to former Secretaries of State about future Government policy? An example would be briefings given by the Ministry of Defence to the former Secretary of State for Defence. It cannot be within the terms of such briefings that they are available for use for commercial gain by private companies, as the former Defence Secretary himself has alleged.

Ms Harman: Briefings are not given to former Ministers unless they have a particular responsibility to carry out on behalf of the Department or of the Government. If they have such a responsibility, they carry it out in the public interest, and not for any private interests.

Mr. John Grogan (Selby) (Lab): The noble Lord Whitty recently attacked the influence of lobbying companies representing producer interests in securing important amendments to the Digital Economy Bill. Given that, would it not be an affront to our democracy if that Bill, which has been so heavily influenced by lobbyists, were to be rushed through its Second Reading on Easter Tuesday—possibly as the Prime Minister is on his way to the Palace to seek the Dissolution of Parliament—and then rushed through its final stages in the wash-up?

Ms Harman: The Digital Economy Bill is of great concern not just to lobbyists, but to consumers and providers of digital services. We will look for an opportunity to bring it back to the House for debate. There is no intention to rush it through, and certainly no intention to serve the interests of lobbyists. The intention is to serve the interests of this country.

Mr. Brooks Newmark (Braintree) (Con): Can the Leader of the House say whether the Prime Minister spoke to the Cabinet Secretary or even the Business Secretary before ruling out a Government investigation?

Ms Harman: The Prime Minister today sought the Cabinet Secretary's assurance that Departments had looked into the claims. Inquiries had already been made, as they would following any such serious allegations. As soon as such an issue is raised, the relevant Departments will immediately look into them. The relevant permanent secretaries at the Department of Health, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills and Department for Transport have assured the Cabinet Secretary that they are satisfied that there has been no improper influence on Government policy or decisions. That is their assurance, which they are setting out in public statements later today. That is the information that the Prime Minister sought.

Mr. Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): Given that the apparent defence of the right hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mr. Byers) to these very serious allegations is that he is a liar, does the right hon. and learned Lady regard him as a fit and proper person for elevation to the House of Lords, which presumably is what he is looking for, come the next election?

Ms Harman: The Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards will be investigating the conduct of the right hon. Member for North Tyneside. It is not for me to pronounce on that. It is a matter for the commissioner, as far as the House is concerned.

Mr. Bernard Jenkin (North Essex) (Con): Did Lord Adonis inform the permanent secretary as soon as he had been approached by the right hon. Member for North Tyneside, who was representing the interests of National Express? Is not the real problem that we are relying entirely on a Minister's word that the ministerial code has been complied with? Who enforces the ministerial code? Is it not Ministers themselves and the Prime Minister? Is there not a case for putting the ministerial code for Ministers and former Ministers on to a statutory footing?

Ms Harman: The Secretary of State for Transport has answered questions on precisely that issue in the House of Lords today. The hon. Gentleman will know that the foremost responsibility of a Minister is to Parliament. Ministers are bound not to mislead Parliament. The Secretary of State for Transport has answered questions at the Dispatch Box. He told the House of Lords that he has acted with total propriety at all times. He has given that absolute assurance to the House of Lords, and I hope that the hon. Gentleman and other hon. Members will accept that.

Mr. Andrew Robathan (Blaby) (Con): In her statement the Leader of the House said that partially to avoid "any inappropriate or undue influence . . . details of Ministers' meetings with outside interest groups and individuals" are published. Given that we are told, and we see on the television, that Charlie Whelan has regular access to 10 Downing street and is alleged to have a desk in 10 Downing street, can the Leader of the House assure us that any meeting between the Prime Minister and Charlie Whelan is published?

Ms Harman: I will have to write to the hon. Gentleman about the situation in relation to the Prime Minister's diary. I know that if Ministers meet representatives of organisations, those meetings are reportable on a quarterly basis.

Mr. Douglas Hogg (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): The right hon. and learned Lady will know that I am a practising barrister. I have always declared that and, as such, I have always defended the right of hon. Members to have declared external interests. I make no comment about the three Members referred to in *The Sunday Times* article because I have no special knowledge at all, but what surely would be wrong and very difficult to justify would be for an hon. Member to use their position as a Member of Parliament to perform parliamentary functions in return for a specific payment. What would be quite impossible to justify would be doing that without declaring the fact. Is that not where the evil lies?

Ms Harman: I think that that would count as paid advocacy. No one can be paid for taking a particular action in this House, whether it is making a speech or tabling a question. We outlawed paid advocacy, but I agree that, notwithstanding what my hon. Friend the Member for Bolsover (Mr. Skinner) said, the public distinguish between people who pursue their profession before they entered the House, perhaps as a doctor or even as a lawyer, and people who take on commercial interests once they have entered the House. That is the big dividing line about which the public are concerned. Notwithstanding that, it is important that all payments are revealed, including payments to those who sit as judges on the bench and those who act as lawyers.

Andrew Mackinlay (Thurrock) (Lab): May I reiterate to my right hon. and learned Friend that the overwhelming majority of constituents and, I think, Members here believe that being a Member is a seven-day-a-week job, 52 weeks a year? There is simply no room for other employment, and it should be outlawed. Will she look at the attendance of some of our colleagues who are subject to criticism? They do not turn up to vote—some of them, I forget what they look like. I believe that we should work right up until the final whistle blows on 9 August, or whenever it is, and until we reach that stage everyone should be here every day.

Ms Harman: For those hon. Members who are standing for re-election, it is their constituents who will decide what is appropriate based on what they have done; it is their constituents who will judge their record of attendance and what they have said while they have been here; and it is their constituents, too, who will judge the work that they have done in their constituencies, because hon. Members work not only in this House, but in their constituencies. Ultimately, the electors will have the final say, and rightly so.

John Hemming (Birmingham, Yardley) (LD): A few years ago a lobbyist offered me a sum of money to make a speech in support of redundancies at the National Blood Service, which I found very strange, but because the speech would have taken place outside, not inside, the House, I could not get the Parliamentary Commissioner for Standards to intervene. In reviewing the rules, could we ensure that MPs are able to report lobbyists who ask for improper actions outside, as well as inside, the House?

Ms Harman: I think that any money that is paid to Members for what they do inside or, indeed, outside the House—every single pound that is paid in that respect—has got to be registered so that the public can see and the voters can make their judgment.

Mark Pritchard (The Wrekin) (Con): Can the Leader of the House inform hon. Members whether the Prime Minister spoke to the Transport Secretary before ruling out an inquiry into all those shady dealings?

Ms Harman: The Prime Minister sought assurances and received those assurances, but, obviously, permanent secretaries and the Cabinet Secretary would keep all those things under consideration. However, the Prime Minister sought the assurances and received them.

Bob Spink (Castle Point) (Ind): This is another low ebb for the House—as bad as cash for questions and 1997. Does the Leader of the House think that it is perhaps time for more Independents in this House?

Ms Harman: No, but I do think that it is time for the tough rules that we have to be swiftly and effectively enforced.

Mr. Shailesh Vara (North-West Cambridgeshire) (Con): The Leader of the House has been very precise in her choice of words. She said that the civil servants advised that there had been no improper influence. By inference, there was influence, therefore, and it was proper, so will she tell the House the extent of that influence?

Ms Harman: It is an unusual accusation—that I have been precise in the imprecision of my words. I have simply tried to assure hon. Members, including the hon. Gentleman. People would be rightly very troubled if they thought, and were right in their fear, that massive and important decisions such as those on food labelling and the distribution of franchises for rail operators were made because a Minister listened to a former colleague who was being paid. The public would be rightly horrified—we all would be—and I want to assure the hon. Gentleman and the House that that was not the basis on which those decisions were taken. If there is a question of wrongdoing by those other than Ministers, such as those who are being investigated, that is not a matter for me. However, I assure the hon. Gentleman that there was no impropriety or undue influence when those very big and important decisions were taken.

Points of Order

4.20 pm

Mr. Simon Burns (West Chelmsford) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. May I seek your guidance and advice? My understanding is that when a Department seeks to group questions together at Question Time, it is a common practice and courtesy that hon. Members whose questions are going to be grouped together are notified in advance by the Department that that is going to happen. I have spoken to a number of my colleagues who had their questions grouped at today's Home Office questions, and they all tell me that none of them had been notified in advance. I certainly know that a few weeks ago I had a question grouped and the first time I knew about it was when I saw it on the monitor rather than from any notification to my office. Can you confirm that Departments should still be continuing the practice whereby they notify hon. Members, and could you use your offices to ensure that they return to the courtesy that we always expected from them?

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his point of order. His understanding of the custom and practice is entirely correct, and that custom and practice should continue. It most certainly should have applied on today's occasion and, indeed, on all others. It is helpful that the Leader of the House is present when I am answering the hon. Gentleman's point of order, and she may wish to respond. She is not obliged to do so, but she may wish to do so. I can say only that I regard it as a fundamental courtesy that when a grouping is proposed the ministerial team should notify Members affected in advance and without fail. Does the Leader of the House wish to comment?

The Leader of the House of Commons (Ms Harriet Harman) *indicated dissent.*

Mr. Speaker: Okay. However, I have made the position very clear and those on the Treasury Bench have heard it.

Mr. Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): On a point of order, Mr. Speaker. I wish to seek your guidance having already given you prior notice in writing. On 15 March, the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Dewsbury (Mr. Malik), issued an answer to this written parliamentary question from me:

“To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether the regional fire control rooms in London will be operational and live by September 2011.”

The Minister's reply was as follows:

“Under current planning assumptions the regional fire control centre for London is due to become operational during September 2011. Planning assumptions are currently under review.”—[*Official Report*, 15 March 2010; Vol. 507, c. 666W.]

That gave a clear impression that the London fire control centre was still on course to be operational by September 2011. As we know, Mr. Speaker, the Olympics run from July to September 2011. [*Interruption.*] In 2012—I beg your pardon. However, I have subsequently discovered that on 9 March the Minister wrote to the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority to say:

“I have asked the FiReControl team to begin discussions with your project team about how we can move to a planning assumption that London would only join the FiReControl network after the Olympic Games.”

[Mr. Stewart Jackson]

The ministerial code states that

“it is of paramount importance that Ministers give accurate and truthful information to Parliament, correcting any inadvertent error at the earliest opportunity”

and that Ministers should

“be as open as possible with Parliament and the public”.

In this context, the Minister’s reply represents a significant and inadvertent misleading omission in failing to indicate that he was preparing to delay the project. I therefore ask what guidance you can give so that we can bring the Minister to the Dispatch Box to make a full statement to the House.

Mr. Speaker: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman both for his point of order and for giving me advance notice of it. It is not, of course, for me to adjudicate on the accuracy of answers. It is open to the Minister to issue a correction if his answer was erroneous. Otherwise, the hon. Gentleman may seek advice from the Table Office about ways of pursuing this matter.

Justice and Northern Ireland

Mr. Speaker: Order. Before I call the Secretary of State to move the first motion, I understand that it may be for the convenience of the House if the three instruments are debated together.

4.24 pm

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Shaun Woodward): I beg to move,

That the draft Northern Ireland Court Service (Abolition and Transfer of Functions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010, which was laid before this House on 10 March, be approved.

Mr. Speaker: With this we shall discuss the following motions on Northern Ireland:

That the draft Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Devolution of Policing and Justice Functions) Order 2010, which was laid before this House on 10 March, be approved.

That the draft Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Amendment of Schedule 3) Order 2010, which was laid before this House on 10 March, be approved.

Mr. Woodward: Today’s business will enable the completion of devolution in Northern Ireland through the transfer of policing and justice powers to Stormont. The three orders before the House will give effect to the historic vote at Stormont on 9 March. The vast majority of the Northern Ireland Assembly voted to request the transfer of those powers, which was hoped for from the time of the Belfast agreement and envisaged in the St. Andrews agreement. An agreement on a timetable was reached at Hillsborough castle earlier this year.

The completion of devolution will see the arrangements for sharing power fully realised on 12 April. It will ensure that local politicians in Northern Ireland can take responsibility for decisions that should and can be taken in Northern Ireland. Today we complete our responsibilities for the peace process and complete the political process for which we have responsibility, and we enable the Assembly at Stormont to complete its arrangements for full devolution.

I am grateful to all those who have enabled us to reach this crucial moment in the history of Northern Ireland. I thank the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and all the Assembly party leaders in Northern Ireland, even if agreement was not quite unanimous last week. That Northern Ireland can today live with its disagreements and ensure that division is contained within democratic institutions sends a signal of how the political process and the peace process have transformed Northern Ireland. Today in Northern Ireland we can disagree, but we can be certain that politics will be the only way forward to reconcile disagreements. Today’s Northern Ireland has demonstrated that politics has come of age, and when the will of a cross-community majority is respected, we know that we have succeeded.

We could not have made such progress without the political will of right hon. and hon. Members of all parties and the Members of another place. Cross-party support has been essential, and that has been true for many years. I want to take this opportunity to thank the Irish and American Governments for their respective roles in helping to reach political agreement. I am sure the House will want to place on record its thanks especially to Secretary of State Clinton and the United

States economic envoy for all that they have done, and continue to do, to bring the dividends of political agreement to people in every community in Northern Ireland.

The three orders before us give effect to the devolution of policing and justice matters in Northern Ireland, in line with the framework set out in Acts of Parliament since the Good Friday agreement. They reflect the Hillsborough castle agreement and the request of the Assembly for the devolution of policing and justice responsibilities approved in its cross-community vote of 9 March.

The Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Amendment of Schedule 3) Order 2010 is the key document. It provides for policing and justice matters, which until now have been reserved, to be transferred so that the Assembly can legislate on them without having to seek consent. The matters being transferred reflect the Assembly's request of 9 March. Some matters, such as national security, will remain excepted; some will remain reserved, one of which is parading. The Hillsborough castle agreement, however, envisages that responsibility for parading will transfer after a cross-community vote, once the proposed new and improved framework has been agreed and finalised.

Also reserved is the special provision for 50:50 recruitment to the Police Service of Northern Ireland. We are confident that we shall reach our target of 30 per cent. Catholic composition by March of next year, and we are committed to returning to Parliament and ending the provision at whatever point in the year it becomes clear that we will reach that target. National security remains excepted under the order. It remains just that—national security—and it will remain the responsibility of UK Ministers, accountable to this House.

The second order, the Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Devolution of Policing and Justice Functions) Order 2010, makes a large number of amendments consequential on the changes in legislative competence. They largely involve the transfer to Northern Ireland authorities of executive functions, reflecting the transfer in legislative responsibility. The main recipient of those functions is the new Northern Ireland Department of Justice, which the Assembly has already legislated to establish.

In the case of some functions that will transfer, there is potentially an interface with national security matters. That will remain the Secretary of State's responsibility. In those cases, the order makes clear the respective roles and responsibilities of the Northern Ireland Justice Minister and the Secretary of State. The order provides, in line with the Hillsborough castle agreement, that quasi-judicial decisions may be made by the Justice Minister, and need not go to the Northern Ireland Executive.

The order also gives effect to various transfers of property and of most of the staff in the current Northern Ireland Office. Those staff will move to the Northern Ireland Department of Justice, leaving a small number who will continue to work to me as Secretary of State on my remaining responsibilities.

Finally, the Northern Ireland Court Service (Abolition and Transfer of Functions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010 transfers functions of the Court Service in Northern Ireland, which are currently the responsibility of my right hon. Friend the Lord Chancellor, to the Northern

Ireland authorities, generally the Department of Justice. The staff of the Court Service will also be assimilated into that Department.

The orders will come into effect on 12 April, in line with the Hillsborough castle agreement. The Justice Department will be well provided for financially as part of the £800 million of additional money that my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister promised for the new Justice Department. All but £26 million—2 per cent. of the Northern Ireland Office's current baseline budget—will transfer to the Northern Ireland Executive as will the entire Northern Ireland Court Service baseline budget. The Department will be well provided for in finance, people and ideas to carry forward its work.

I readily acknowledge that not everyone was entirely satisfied by the outcome of the Hillsborough castle agreement. I believe that much of that dissatisfaction is unfounded, as the arrangements for the talks were designed to bring all the parties together in a process, which was designed from its inception to be inclusive. Even if, after 10 days, the talks were somewhat exhausting, I believe that, at the end of them, the agreement that we reached has allowed the peace process and the political process to be completed.

I am particularly aware of the remaining concern about the arrangements for the Justice Department in May 2012, if there has not been further agreement on the ministerial model for that Department. However, as set out in the Northern Ireland Act 2009, the Department of Justice will dissolve on 1 May 2012 unless the Assembly has resolved on a cross-community basis to continue the current model for appointing the Justice Minister or passed an Act to put in place alternative arrangements.

When Parliament passed the legislation in March 2009, the House was aware that the arrangements reflected agreement between the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister—specifically that the arrangements set out in their November 2008 statement should be time limited to end in May 2012.

Clearly, further work is needed to agree the post-2012 arrangements. However, we should be optimistic. The parties, both at Hillsborough castle and more recently, have demonstrated their ability to meet far greater challenges and to work through all the obstacles that may be placed in their way.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (UUP): I am so sorry to interrupt the Secretary of State, but he will he just reassure the people at home about the Policing Board in particular? He knows that it has been very successful and that there is unfortunately some disquiet that, when a justice scrutiny committee is set up in the Assembly, it might inadvertently undermine the Policing Board's confidence, role and status. Will the Secretary of State please address that issue?

Mr. Woodward: The hon. Lady asks an important question. Like many questions that she has asked in the course of the past few months' work, it is to the point. The arrangements for the Policing Board, those with the Chief Constable and those that envisage the Assembly's setting up a committee were imagined in the Patten architecture. It was always envisaged that there would be an important relationship between the Policing Board, the Chief Constable, the Department of Justice and the committees that would be set up. I believe that that is

[Mr. Woodward]

properly outlined in the protocols and memorandums that we have supplied on policing architecture. Like Patten, I do not see that there would be a problem for the Chief Constable's independence, for the Police Service of Northern Ireland's operational capacity, for the Policing Board's fully representative functions of the political parties or for the scrutiny work to be carried out by an Assembly justice committee.

It is, of course, for the Assembly to decide the functions of such a justice committee. However, I remind the hon. Lady that, as she knows well, that arrangement was always envisaged by Patten, and it is not a new addition by this Government or a new arrangement. I believe that it is quite possible to see how what is effectively a tripartite organisation will work effectively together in terms of the objectives of policing and scrutiny. Again, that matter will be resolved far more easily when the architecture is put in place in practice, which we will see after 12 April.

As I was saying, we of course regret the decision by the Ulster Unionist party not to vote for the transfer with the rest of the Assembly in the cross-community vote on 9 March. That remains a matter of regret not just for me, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister and the Government, but for many, not least the majority of the public and many of those who would have voted, or had intended to vote, for the Ulster Unionist party in future.

If we look at the arrangements, however, we see that they inspire confidence. I congratulate all the Northern Ireland Assembly parties on establishing successful community confidence in the past few weeks. With the vote taken last week, it is time for all parties in Northern Ireland, and all Assembly Members from every party, to again put differences to one side and work together. The majority in the Assembly expressed its view last week, and I very much hope that that majority view will now be allowed to prevail. In that spirit, the task for all the parties in the Assembly and Executive is to ensure that all aspects of the settlement work most effectively for all the people from every community of Northern Ireland.

To that end, one of the most important outcomes of the Hillsborough castle agreement was the decision by the First Minister and the Deputy First Minister, who listened at Hillsborough castle to the concerns of all the Assembly parties, to improve the functioning of the Executive. It is very much to the credit of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister that as part of the Hillsborough castle agreement, a number of working parties were established precisely because they had listened to the concerns of the other Assembly parties as well as members of their own parties not only at Hillsborough, but in the previous months. That is why we welcome the role of Sir Reg Empey, along with that of the leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party, Margaret Ritchie, who will chair one of the working groups that has been specifically set up to enhance the effectiveness of the Executive.

At Hillsborough, the parties also agreed to address and find consensus on remaining outstanding issues and existing problems. On parades, for example, the working group has already produced a report for the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister.

It is appropriate to record in this House the support given by the Orange Order to the progress to date on, and the work to find local solutions to, parading issues and contentious parades, which has been established as a result of the work at Hillsborough castle.

In short, I remain convinced that no outstanding issues are incapable of resolution in today's Stormont and today's shared-power Executive in Northern Ireland. None the less, a very small number of people in Northern Ireland, who are extremely dangerous, will never accept democracy and are the enemies of democracy. We have never said that the simple fact of completing devolution and taking responsibility will overnight remove the threat that those dangerous criminals continue to pose. However, as the Independent Monitoring Commission rightly said at the end of last year, early devolution will be a potent intervention, because it shows that politics is the only way ahead, and it demonstrates that it is possible to reconcile even the seemingly irreconcilable through dialogue and politics.

The successful cross-community vote last week was the best signal that we could possibly send to those dissidents that however delusional their ambitions, they have no future in Northern Ireland. The PSNI and the Chief Constable will have the support of all Assembly Members, and continue to enjoy the support of all Members of this House and the other place and of the Government, in meeting the challenges ahead. The PSNI will have the resources that it needs, including an extra £28.7 million this year, ring-fenced—and at least £38 million next year—specifically to deal with the challenges posed by that small group of criminals who, I remind hon. Members, have little or no support in any of the communities in Northern Ireland. The policing structures are in place and the politics are in place.

I have spoken of some of those who have played a leading part in the transformation of Northern Ireland. But in truth the real heroes of this remarkable story are the people of Northern Ireland whose indefatigable spirit and courage is exemplified in the words of Kate Carroll, whose husband Stephen was murdered by dissident republicans as he served the community exactly a year to the day before the vote on 9 March. Stephen's wife said:

"It is time to move on. We are not in the past any more. We want to speak for ourselves. We want to rule ourselves. Just get up and get on with it".

These orders will help Northern Ireland to do precisely that.

4.42 pm

Mr. Owen Paterson (North Shropshire) (Con): The Secretary of State has today made a written statement on the Saville inquiry. I thank him for that statement and the measured tones in which it is written. We endorse the arrangements that he proposes, but given the sensitive nature of the subject matter and the huge size of the report, it is not appropriate to publish it in the weeks before a general election, when the atmosphere becomes increasingly charged. We understand the frustrations of all those connected with the report about further delays, but we believe emphatically that it needs to be published and considered in a sober manner in the calmer weeks following the election.

Turning to the orders, I am grateful to the Secretary of State for setting out the details today. I begin by paying tribute to the police, the judiciary and all those involved in the criminal justice system in Northern Ireland over the past 40 years. They have often worked at great personal risk and many have suffered terribly, with some making the supreme sacrifice. We owe an enormous debt of gratitude to everyone who ensured that the integrity of the criminal justice system was upheld.

As the Secretary of State made clear, these orders give effect to the agreement reached between the DUP and Sinn Féin at Hillsborough on 5 February, and the vote in the Northern Ireland Assembly on 9 March. Once these orders pass through the House and the other place, the devolution of policing and justice powers to the Assembly will take place on 12 April. The last major element of the Belfast agreement, made almost 12 years earlier to the day, will have been completed. For the first time since the powers were taken away from the Northern Ireland Government in March 1972, Stormont will once again exercise powers over policing, criminal justice, the courts and local security issues.

The Conservative party has long supported in principle the devolution of policing and justice powers. We said so as far back as 1998 in our submission to the Patten commission, and our view has not changed. These powers are best exercised in Northern Ireland by politicians accountable to the electorate there, not by Ministers in this House. That is why we supported legislation this time last year, even though we believed that it could have been improved with a little more time. It is why my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition met the First and Deputy First Ministers in the autumn and rapidly pledged that, should we win the election, we would honour the substantial post-dated financial package agreed by the Prime Minister.

We welcomed the Hillsborough castle agreement, and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition expressed his hope at the time that it would lead to the completion of devolution. Indeed, following the vote on 9 March, a spokesman for the US State Department referred to the constructive role played by the Opposition throughout the recent negotiations. At all times our overriding objective has been a peaceful, stable and prosperous Northern Ireland in which all its people have a shared future. Whether we remain in opposition or return to government in a few weeks, that is the approach that we shall continue to take. We therefore support the orders before the House today.

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): I commend the hon. Gentleman very much on the approach that he has outlined. The history in recent years is one in which Northern Ireland business has been approached in a non-partisan way, and I am delighted to hear that that will continue. May I therefore invite him to disown the remarks of one Ian Parsley, who I understand is a Conservative candidate in the constituency of North Down? He has commended the Ulster Unionists in a blog post on being alone in standing up for the people of Northern Ireland, saying:

“The wide-ranging attacks on the Ulster Unionist Party for failing to back the devolution of justice prior to improvements in the functioning of the Executive are an example of the complete loss of morals that now typifies the ‘Peace Process’.”

Surely that cannot be acceptable coming from a Conservative candidate.

Mr. Paterson: I am most grateful for that intervention, but if the hon. Gentleman can restrain himself, I will return to the issue of the vote in a few moments.

Mr. Carmichael: What about Ian Parsley?

Mr. Paterson: I will come to that.

Even if any Member of this House had had misgivings about the vote on 9 March, they should remember that it represented the democratically expressed will of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Members of this House should have no business seeking to frustrate that; it is how devolution works across the United Kingdom. Equally, we should be careful in this House about seeking to force parties in the Northern Ireland Assembly into voting in a particular way. Devolution is about locally elected politicians using their judgment to make decisions on devolved issues in the best interests of Northern Ireland and based on their knowledge and experience. It is the role of Parliament to respect those democratic decisions and not to interfere. Of course, we could all use our influence, but ultimately, votes in the Assembly are for the Northern Ireland parties represented there to decide. That is a fundamental principle of how devolution works, and I trust that hon. Members in all parts of the House will continue to respect that.

Lady Hermon: I am the sole voice of the Ulster Unionist party in this House, and although I am happy to support the legislation this afternoon, I find myself in a minority position, because my party executive, my party leader and my Assembly colleagues have all voted against the devolution of policing and justice. I very much regret that. As policing and justice are currently reserved, can the hon. Gentleman explain to the House what efforts his party leader, the right hon. Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron), made in conversation with Sir Reg Empey, my party leader? Can the hon. Gentleman explain how often the leader of the Conservative party spoke to my party leader, and say how much effort was expended in trying to persuade the Ulster Unionists to support the devolution of policing and justice in the Assembly?

Mr. Paterson: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for intervening, but I do not see why she cannot ask her party leader herself. I assure her that my right hon. Friend the Member for Witney (Mr. Cameron) had several conversations with her party leader. However, as I have explained, we believe in devolution, and a national party in this place is in no position to force a local party to make a decision based on its own experience. Members of the Ulster Unionist party had a number of genuine and legitimate concerns—about education and the work of the Executive as a genuine four-party coalition—and it was the failure to deal with them satisfactorily that prevented the Ulster Unionists from backing the Assembly vote.

The Ulster Unionists are not alone in expressing dismay at the lack of a genuine four-party coalition: the new leader of the Social Democratic and Labour party made the same points in Washington last week. We hope that those outstanding issues can now be resolved in a spirit of genuine partnership and compromise in the working group at Stormont. We cannot go on with two of the coalition partners feeling excluded from key

[Mr. Paterson]

decisions, which runs counter to the inclusive basis on which the power-sharing institutions were established. Our understanding is that the working group established under the Hillsborough castle agreement to look into the issue is currently stalled. Will the Secretary of State take this opportunity to agree with us that it is vital that we return to a genuine four-party coalition working as envisaged in the Belfast agreement?

Once the devolution of policing and justice takes place next month, that issue will become more important than ever, if the transfer is to take place in a stable political environment. The imperative for all elected representatives is to ensure that devolution works to deliver effective law and order for the entire community in Northern Ireland. Of course, as the Secretary of State acknowledged, the immediate priority is to deal with the threat from dissident republicans. In recent weeks and months, they have increased their activities as they seek to bring death and destruction to Northern Ireland's streets and to drag us back into the past. Barely a day goes by without the bomb squad being called out, and as recently as last Saturday shots were fired at police investigating a suspect package near the railway line in Newry. They are at risk every day, and our thoughts are with Constable Heffron who remains seriously ill. It would be wrong to exaggerate the popular support for the dissidents; equally, it would be irresponsible to underestimate the danger that they present to the public. Will the Secretary of State clarify an important point? Under the new system, who will be responsible for requesting additional support for the civil power should that need arise?

We share the hope that returning policing and justice powers to local politicians will lead to increasing isolation of the dissidents, who offer absolutely nothing to the people of Ireland, north and south. But the fullest support and backing of the police and the criminal justice system is required from everyone. Following devolution, any lingering reluctance to co-operate with the police must end. We welcome the acts of decommissioning in recent months, but tackling lawless criminality must also be a priority. People in Northern Ireland are concerned not just about paramilitary-related crime; in many neighbourhoods, they are concerned about the same issues that are far too commonplace on this side of the water, including antisocial and yobbish behaviour, lack of respect and so-called low-level crime, which blight people's lives.

As the Executive take on their powers, a number of challenges lie ahead. The arrangements that will be put in place after 12 April are interim ones, and they will expire in May 2012. There will need to be a clear focus on establishing a permanent system following the next Assembly elections. Those matters will be for the Executive in the Assembly to decide, but in the absence of agreement before May 2012, what role is envisaged for the Secretary of State to ensure that policing and criminal justice continue to function properly?

We should be clear today about what is not being devolved to the new Justice Minister. He or she will have neither the power to run the police, nor the right to interfere with the judiciary. The Police Service of Northern Ireland will remain under the control and direction of the Chief Constable, who is primarily accountable to

the Policing Board. Operational independence, as the Prime Minister said in response to my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition in February, remains vital, and it will be preserved. Those with responsibility for the administration of justice are under a legal obligation to uphold the independence of the judiciary. Those are absolutely cardinal principles for policing and justice throughout the United Kingdom. They must apply equally to Northern Ireland, and I ask the Secretary of State to reaffirm that we will not tolerate any political interference in such matters.

These developments in the police process are significant. They were begun by the previous Conservative Government and taken forward by the current Government. Our sincere hope is that with devolution complete, politicians in the Assembly will begin to focus on the other issues that really matter to the people of Northern Ireland.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) (Con): Does my hon. Friend believe that the outcome of the Bloody Sunday inquiry will not destabilise any of the arrangements on the ground as far as the order is concerned?

Mr. Paterson: I commented on that in my opening remarks. Some sensitive matters will be published in what will be an enormous document, and we would like it to be published after the general election in a calm and sober atmosphere, when it can be considered in its entirety. It would be inappropriate to publish that significant report as we build up to a general election, when the atmosphere will be anything but calm.

Peter Bottomley (Worthing, West) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that although we will not know the report's conclusions until after the election, proceedings were, despite their length, held in an open way with the stenographer's notes available to all, and that little in the report will not already be known to people?

Mr. Paterson: It would be inappropriate for any of us to prejudge the inquiry, but I repeat—I think, for the third time—that it is most important that this significant report is published in a calm atmosphere, and I propose that it is published after the election.

To sum up, it is our sincere hope that, with devolution complete, politicians in the Assembly will begin to focus on the other issues that really matter to people in Northern Ireland. It is important to get policing and justice right, but people on the ground are also concerned about key issues such as jobs, health, transport, schools and social deprivation. It is only through making progress on all those issues that devolution will be shown to have worked. We will support the orders today, and we wish the Assembly and the Executive well in exercising their new powers.

4.55 pm

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I rise to express my support for the orders before us today, consistent with what has already been approved in the Assembly in relation to taking devolution forward towards its fuller, more rounded completion. Those of us who took part in the negotiation of the Good Friday agreement—and in its early, faltering implementation—are glad that we are now looking at the consummation of the new politics and the new beginning for policing, both of

which derive from that agreement. It has been a hard and difficult course, which has involved taking institutions through all sorts of uncertainties and stalemates, as well as various suspensions and collapses, and taking the controversies surrounding the Patten report and driving and delivering its successful implementation, in spite of opposition and harassment from others—not least Sinn Féin and its supporters.

To have reached a point at which we can see the devolution of justice and policing powers, alongside the other competences of the Assembly and the Executive, is a significant achievement and development. Many of us have pursued those goals in the various negotiations that have taken place since the Good Friday agreement. Those have included the Mitchell review, the Hillsborough talks, the further talks at Castle Buildings and the discussions at Leeds castle and in various other places here and there. We have always argued for implementation calendars that included setting a clear timetable for the devolution of justice and policing, among other things. We therefore welcome the fact that we are now, finally, making moves in that direction.

These, and other issues, were addressed in the negotiations at St. Andrews. Coming out of those negotiations, certain false claims were made that the devolution of justice and policing was guaranteed by May 2008. That was clearly not the case, however. We in the Social Democratic and Labour party told the truth about that; Sinn Féin, however, lied about it to many, many people. Notwithstanding all the difficulties that were experienced then and since, we are now making welcome progress.

That progress is not complete, however. Some Members here have talked about the completion of the devolution of justice and policing, but we are not seeing a complete transfer of those powers. Indeed, the orders today reveal that certain matters remain reserved and excepted. Questions will arise, not only about the relationship between the Minister of Justice, the Executive and the wider Assembly, as they did at Hillsborough, but about the interface between devolved and non-devolved powers. We, as legislators, need to acknowledge that fact today.

Mr. Cash: The hon. Gentleman has a long, distinguished record of fighting hard for his cause. In the light of what he is saying, and of the whole concept of devolution, where does he believe that devolution would end and home rule begin?

Mark Durkan: I had better not start on the issue of home rule. In Ireland, history is current affairs, but I shall try to keep to more current affairs in relation to these matters. The hon. Gentleman has raised a fair point, however, and I was going to touch on a number of the questions that are still likely to arise.

We want to give the public confidence that the devolution of justice and policing is complete and that we are faithfully delivering on Patten and on the political institutions as envisaged by the agreement, but questions will arise about some of the residual matters that have not been fully and properly transferred to the control of the devolved institutions. There are a number of examples.

This House passed the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007. Among its controversial provisions is the continuing facility for no-jury courts in Northern Ireland, which was a breach of a previous commitment by this Government to ensure that all the emergency

legislation would be repealed. We saw instruments to let those powers go by the wayside, but then we saw a number of those emergency provisions recycled in the 2007 Act—for example, giving the Army powers of search and arrest, which are not subject to the police ombudsman and do not have to be a matter of record for the police, even though any such police powers do have to be a matter of full record.

Particularly controversial were the provisions for no-jury trials—not on the basis of the old Diplock system relating to certain scheduled offences, but on the basis of a new system whereby the Director of Public Prosecutions would issue certificates, which could not be challenged in a court, or indeed by a court. The power to change the legislation that provided for the ability to issue those certificates for no-jury trials does not transfer to the Assembly, but remains here in this House.

In this scenario, someone might face a charge and the DPP might issue a certificate for a no-jury trial. The DPP's grounds for doing so might be that the person is or was a member of an illegal organisation or is or was a friend, relative or associate of such a person, or that they or an illegal organisation might interfere with the due process of law by intimidating witnesses and so forth. Those are the grounds on which the DPP can issue the certificate, but in issuing it, he specifies no grounds and the person is effectively unable to challenge or question because these decisions are not in any way judicially reviewable.

We thus see the possibility of someone faced with such a certificate writing to a devolved Minister to say, "You are the Minister for Justice. My lawyer and I are being told that this is going to a no-jury trial and I have no means of contesting this. You are the Minister of Justice, so how can you stand over this? After all, we are told that everything in Northern Ireland has changed, moved on and gone to normalisation. What is being done about this?" The Justice Minister will say, "I am powerless to do anything about this" and the matter will go before the Assembly committee responsible for dealing with justice matters. It will say the same thing: "Yes, it is happening in our courts; yes, it is a certificate issued by an officer, namely the DPP, who is appointed under devolution and is meant to be working under the authority and auspices of devolution, but this power exists under an entirely ulterior, unaccountable and unquestionable basis". The fact that the Assembly and the Justice Minister are not even in a position to question that gives rise to further questions about the completeness of devolution.

Another example is where the Director of Public Prosecutions might be instructed by the Advocate General for Northern Ireland—namely, the Attorney-General in London, who will become the Advocate General for Northern Ireland whenever Northern Ireland gets its own Attorney-General. If trials collapse or are withdrawn on grounds of national security or on the very wide and specious grounds of the "public interest" under the direction of the Advocate General for Northern Ireland, again nobody will be able to question it and the Justice Minister will again be, at best, an idle spectator, left to plead ignorance and impotence as to why. It might be on a matter of public controversy or in a very significant case such as the Denis Donaldson case of a few years ago. When that collapsed, all sorts of parties and all sorts of people were asking all sorts of questions—why has this happened; why do we not know?

[*Mark Durkan*]

In how credible a position are the devolved Administration, not only the Justice Minister, going to be if they say, “We don’t know; this is not devolved to us; there is nothing we can do. We cannot ask, we cannot be told and even if some of us are told, there is nothing we can say anyway”? That does not square with the vision of accountable devolution to which we all subscribed when we supported the agreement and as we have developed the institutions in the years since then. That is an important issue, which needs to be taken into account when we consider the limitations.

When we were involved in the Hillsborough talks, as well as addressing all the other issues relating to the relationship between the Minister and the Executive and making submissions, both written and oral, about various matters including the work of the Executive, we raised questions about the interface between devolved and non-devolved areas. One issue that arises in that context is relevant to the orders, to the associated documents relating to concordats and handling arrangements, and to the annexe on arrangements. A couple of agreements between the British and Irish Governments have been thrown in as well. Parts of those documents, and part of the main order with which we are dealing, impose serious restrictions related to national security on what information can be shared, how it can be shared, and where competence and control lie.

The Minister of State, who will reply to the debate, has heard me speak about these issues many times both publicly and privately, and he knows that the SDLP has had profound misgivings for many years. As a party that was totally committed to the Patten vision of policing, we were committed to the idea that the lead on intelligence policing in Northern Ireland should rest with the Police Service of Northern Ireland. That is what Patten recommended. He recognised that there would be national security issues that would have to be reported to the Secretary of State or a successor Minister, but he made clear his belief that, because of the history and experience of policing in Northern Ireland, the PSNI should take the lead.

That, of course, changed. The Government announced their intention a number of years ago, and got away with confirming the change during the St Andrews negotiations on the basis of the Blair-Adams document. The document conceded that MI5 would have a remit in Northern Ireland, that it would take the lead in intelligence policing, and that issues relating to intelligence policing would thenceforth be immune from any scrutiny following an investigation by the Police Ombudsman for Northern Ireland, which had not been the case previously. That was significant in the context of, for instance, the investigation by the ombudsman of the handling of the Omagh bombing. All those changes have made an important difference in terms of scrutiny and accountability.

A family in my constituency recently lost a son, partner, nephew and brother to members of the Real IRA, who murdered him. They left him stripped to his underwear with his hands taped behind his back, having shot him twice in the head. It was a very chilling old Provo execution-style killing. The family, of course, totally repudiate and condemn the Real IRA for what it

has done and said, but they have also raised very serious questions about the experience to which the man had been subjected at the hands of MI5 agents who were active in and around Derry.

This is not some fanciful notion that I have conjured up about the possibility of concerns in the future. These are not theoretical concerns, but real concerns. That man’s partner told me in her grief at the wake that she had written a letter which she had not yet posted before he died. The letter, addressed to the Minister of State, expressed her concern about what was happening to her partner—the harassment to which he was being subjected, and the offers that were made to him. Mobile phones were thrown into his car, and he was told “Ring Justin—Justin will be in touch with you soon.” She has said to me, as has Mr. Doherty’s uncle and father, that it was not just people who were comporting themselves as MI5 agents who were doing this; they are saying that members of the PSNI, or people appearing in PSNI uniform, also were stating to them that they knew that this was going on and were giving advice to contact “Justin” and saying that he would be in touch. This raises fundamental concerns about whether or not policing will be transacted and conducted in the light of all the Patten principles and all the Patten promises, so we still have deep reservations about this dangerous twilight zone that exists in relation to the interface between national security, the regional policing interest and the full accountability of devolution.

Many of us saw the old Peter Sellers Clouseau movies. In one of them—I cannot remember which one—Clouseau approaches a man who is sitting with a dog and asks, “Does your dog bite?” The man replies, “No, my dog doesn’t bite”, so Clouseau goes to pat the dog, which then nearly bites his arm off. Clouseau says, “I thought you told me that your dog did not bite”, to which the man replies, “That is not my dog.” I do not believe that those of us who believe in the devolution of justice and policing and who want it to be clear and complete can fall for that excuse, so where we have reservations that devolution is not clean enough or complete enough we have the right to state that here today.

The Secretary of State also talked about these arrangements inspiring confidence. The steps that we are taking reflect much wider and growing confidence, but there are limitations to the extent to which some of the arrangements, in themselves, inspire confidence. I am thinking in particular about one for which this House has legislated and which has continued to be defended in Northern Ireland by the two main parties: the curious sunset clause that exists in relation to the new Justice Department that will be created as a result of these orders and the other instruments that have been passed elsewhere. That sunset clause tells us that unless there is an agreement to continue with the arrangement currently envisaged of electing a Minister by virtue of cross-community support, rather than appointing a Minister under the d’Hondt system as per the agreement, and to renew it beyond 2012 or replace it with something else, the Justice Department will dissolve in May 2012. That is provided for in legislation passed by this House last year.

We are talking about these steps inspiring confidence, so why do we not have enough confidence to do away with that accident—the breakdown and collapse—waiting to happen which is represented by that sunset clause? If

people believe that this agreement represents—I shall use the Prime Minister’s words—an

“end to decades of strife”

and guarantees stability, why do we need a sunset clause that represents an invitation to huge instability? That danger does not just lie in May 2012, when the sunset clause would apply; the difficulty could kick in earlier. The sunset clause obviously relates to the fact that the Democratic Unionist party was determined to have a veto at all times on the appointment of a Justice Minister. Sinn Fein had at one point conceded that, but when it finally woke up to the permanent veto that it had conceded, it had to claw that back. The best that Sinn Fein could do by way of clawing it back was to put in a limitation by virtue of the sunset clause.

This is now already a matter of a little difference and contention between Sinn Fein and the DUP. Even in recent weeks, as the DUP has been selling the Hillsborough agreement, the DUP has been advertising the sunset clause in 2012 and saying, “We will ensure that not only we will have a veto now to prevent someone from Sinn Fein from being appointed Justice Minister, but we will defend and insist on that veto beyond 2012.” Meanwhile Sinn Fein is, of course, saying that it will reject and resist that veto in May 2012, and will not agree to any such thing continuing thereafter. The chances are that come the next Assembly election, scheduled for May 2011—although it could be before then, of course—those two parties will set out manifesto claims and calls on these matters. We might find that after that election there is a delay in electing a Justice Minister under the scheme that we have at the minute as they test each other out on those issues. So we could have a Department without a Minister in 2011 and then, of course, we could have a Minister without a Department in May 2012.

Those are not just political questions about what sort of crisis there might be in the Assembly and about whether or not we have a Minister. We should remember what it means for the Department to be dissolved. Under one of the orders, the Northern Ireland Court Service, for instance, will be abolished and will become part of the Department of Justice. It will not be a freestanding service in its own right—it will be part of the Department. Of course, the House already has legislation that states that the Department could be dissolved in 2012. Similarly, the Northern Ireland Prison Service is not a separate non-departmental public body or a separate freestanding agency. We call it the Northern Ireland Prison Service, but it is simply a part of the Northern Ireland Office, as is reflected in the orders that we are passing today. Similar facts apply to the Youth Justice Agency and the Compensation Agency. If the Department is dissolved in May 2012, as has been provided for already and as continues to be provided for in legislation, what will happen to all those functions? How are they to be exercised?

Although the Secretary of State has said today that there are no outstanding issues that are incapable of resolution, I would say that there are outstanding issues that still need further resolution. Although we have progress today, we need to go further and we need to see more.

In spite of all the reservations that I have rehearsed—there are many more that hon. Members will be glad to hear that I shall not rehearse—we, nevertheless, are determined that we must go forward with the devolution of justice

and policing. We cannot make perfection a precondition for progress. Too often, politics in Northern Ireland has been marred by people insisting that objectives—often very good objectives—should be turned into preconditions. That has turned out to be a self-frustrating stance. That is not the position that we have taken. In spite of our many reservations about the conduct of the Assembly and of the Executive, we are clear and unambiguous about where we need to go with the devolution of justice and policing. We want to go further.

We also want to place on record that, like others, we have our criticisms of how the process has been conducted and managed—of the heavy focus on the positions of Sinn Fein and the DUP and of the complete aberration from the rules of democratic inclusion laid down in the agreement. That has provided for one party and the whole d’Hondt process to be bypassed for the appointment of the Justice Minister.

The original Stormont regime in the 1920s interfered with key provisions for proportional representation that were laid down for local government—those were abolished. Then they did away with the provisions for proportional representation in the Stormont Parliament. We have some concern that in this Stormont regime the parties in power have begun to do away with the provisions for proportional inclusion in the Executive. They have come up with a different scheme that allows them to deny parties that are entitled by mandate and to appoint parties that are not on the basis of patronage or other favour. In the old days, that was called gerrymandering. In these days, it is called an historic agreement—indeed, Sinn Fein calls it the best agreement ever. I record that fact not just out of concern for our own party’s position or plight, but as a matter of principle.

I want to underline that, as regards the concerns that I have outlined about the limitations of devolution, I feel for anyone—of whatever party—who will be the Justice Minister in Northern Ireland and will find themselves coming up against some of those difficulties and challenges. They will find themselves in an invidious position. In dealing with difficulties and challenges such as those that I have outlined and in dealing with the challenges caused—as the Secretary of State has rightly emphasised—by the ongoing nefarious activity of so-called republican dissidents and others, whoever is the Minister responsible for justice and policing will certainly have the support of our party in doing the job of representing the Northern Ireland Administration and the Northern Ireland Assembly in dealing with and coping with those challenges, as we must. Whatever other quibbles or issues we have, I want to make sure that nobody will be able to turn any difficulty or difference between us and anyone else into anything that could be exploited to create any wider instability or to undermine the credibility of the institutions in Northern Ireland.

5.20 pm

Mr. Alistair Carmichael (Orkney and Shetland) (LD): May I crave your indulgence for a minute, Mr. Deputy Speaker? I wish to place on record, as the hon. Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) did in relation to the report of the Saville inquiry, the fact that I, too, have received correspondence from the Secretary of State, subsequent to the written statement that he placed before the House. The arrangements that he outlined in that statement, and the reasons for making them, seem

[*Mr. Alistair Carmichael*]

to me entirely sensible and legitimate. He certainly has the support of the Liberal Democrats in taking these matters forward in the way that he has outlined.

The hon. Member for North Shropshire did not avail himself of the opportunity to disown the comments of the Conservative candidate for North Down, which is unfortunate given the importance of this matter. I suspect that North Down must be an interesting place to be these days.

Lady Hermon: Very.

Mr. Carmichael: We have a Conservative who supports the Unionist position rather than that of his own Front Benchers, and we have a Unionist MP who apparently supports the position of the Conservative Front Benchers. I have only ever been a member of the Liberals or the Liberal Democrats, but if I were a member of the Ulster Unionists who had enjoyed the representation of the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) and I then found Mr. Parsley taking her place, I might feel a little short-changed. The hon. Lady has been a hard-working, effective and articulate representative for our community since 2001. I do not know what her future intentions are, but I think there is broad consensus across the House in wishing her well.

The hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) made a very interesting and thoughtful speech, much of which was conjecture about the politics of how the devolution of criminal justice might evolve. In that respect, this subject could more properly be discussed by the parties in Northern Ireland rather than by Members such as me in this House. I was very interested in his remarks about the interface between devolved criminal justice and reserved national security matters. This is not unique to these islands. We have had devolved criminal justice in Scotland since 1999, but it has quite properly remained the case that matters of national security are dealt with by the Government here in Westminster and Whitehall. Some of his concerns are capable of being addressed if he bears in mind two factors. First, the independence of Law Officers is supremely important. As he has said, the Director of Public Prosecutions plays a central role in this issue. I first met the current DPP when I was a trainee solicitor in Edinburgh, more years ago than I care to remember, and he is a man of unimpeachable independence. I hope that that independence will be respected by the Governments here and in Belfast.

The importance of Law Officers being independent in these circumstances is that it is a significant protection for the rights of the individual, about which the hon. Member for Foyle expressed some concern. The accountability aspects are also legitimate concerns, but I remind him that people in Northern Ireland have a direct line of accountability through the representation provided by him, his colleagues and hon. Members of all parties. They must do the job that they are elected to do—to be here at Westminster and hold to account decisions made by the Government here and their agencies, as far as that is possible with matters of national security.

Mark Durkan: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that proposals like this have been put to us before? My party was told at the St. Andrews negotiations that our concerns

about national security could be met if we took seats on this Parliament's Intelligence and Security Committee. We were told that that would mean that we had accountability, but that of course is absolute nonsense. The idea that we would satisfy our constituents, given their experience of these issues and the suspicions that are out there, merely through belonging to something like the ISC here would not convince anyone.

Mr. Carmichael: I think that the hon. Gentleman goes too far when he says that that proposition is "absolute nonsense", but I certainly grant him that it is a less than complete solution. It is a compromise of a sort that we have all had to learn to live with over the years. When it comes to matters of national security, the normal rules of accountability do not apply: indeed, it is not reasonable for us to expect them to apply in the way that they do to other Departments dealing with health, education or any other business of Government.

There is a compromise to be struck here. No solution will ever be perfect, and the problem is especially difficult when it comes to dealing with the interface between devolved and reserved government in the absence of any overarching constitutional framework.

In many ways, this is devolution by salami slicing, but problems must be capable of resolution on a case-by-case, day-by-day basis. That can happen if those engaged in resolving problems and making the devolution settlement work approach their task in good faith.

The orders before the House are very much to be welcomed, as they cement in place the final piece of devolution—namely, the devolution of criminal justice. They reflect the wishes of the Northern Ireland Assembly, as expressed earlier this month by a cross-community vote. They represent a significant step, a step that one hopes is the last in the journey.

As the hon. Member for Foyle reminded us, however, there are a number of elements that could still go wrong. That is a matter for the parties in Northern Ireland: whether they make the structure there work or not is up to them. I have always believed in devolution—as a Liberal I have always believed in home rule, although I hesitate to say so, given the loaded nature of the word in the Northern Ireland context—and I welcome the challenge. I hope that those who are now left to pick up the baton in Belfast will approach their task from the point of view that they, too, are determined to make devolution work.

In many ways, the devolution of the criminal justice system to the Assembly in Belfast should allow better government in many other aspects of life. Before I came to this House as a Member of Parliament, I earned my living as a solicitor working in the criminal courts. One cannot underestimate the extent to which criminal justice interacts with health, education, social work and many other aspects of Government business. To try to operate them without having criminal justice under the same umbrella has never made sense to me. I think that these proposals will lead not just to comprehensive devolution but to better governance for the people of Northern Ireland.

That is the prize now available to the people of Northern Ireland—better governance, integrated government, joined-up government, to use the somewhat hackneyed expression. It is up to them whether they

take it. I believe and I hope that they have the capability to do so. We offer the orders a fair wind as they leave the House.

5.30 pm

Mr. Jeffrey M. Donaldson (Lagan Valley) (DUP): I welcome the opportunity to participate in the debate. I declare an interest as a Member of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and I apologise on behalf of our party leader, my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson). He is on his way here. He had to participate in First Minister's questions in the Assembly this afternoon and was delayed, but hopes to join us before the end of the debate.

There have been many occasions during my time as a Member of Parliament when I have opposed legislation that was being introduced on Northern Ireland, because I had concerns about that legislation and its impact on the people whom I represent. I am glad to be here today to support the orders at a critical juncture in the development of Northern Ireland in what we hope and expect will be a more peaceful environment for the people who live there.

Sadly, at the weekend we had more examples of the fact that there remains within our community a tiny element who cannot accept the prospect of peace, who cannot accept that politics is a way to resolve our differences, who cannot accept the will of the people, whose desire is for peace and progress, and who continue to engage in acts of violence. We had the gun attack in Newry on police officers investigating a suspect device, and there were other incidents in various parts of Northern Ireland. We do well to remind ourselves that the task that we are engaged on is dear to the hearts of many in Northern Ireland. It is about making progress and moving away from the dark days of the past.

It saddens me that there are still some who want to drag us back to those dark days. They offer no hope to the people of Northern Ireland. They were at it again last week, with their disruption in Belfast, Londonderry and other places, trying to drive away investment at a time when Northern Ireland Ministers were in Washington winning investment, winning jobs for our young people, and offering them the hope that for decades they did not have, when they had to leave Northern Ireland in their droves to find employment and seek the opportunities that we could not provide for them. Now that we are providing them, let us hope that the young people will remain, will see that there is a future, and will not allow the men of violence to drive them away from their homes, their families and the prospect of employment and a better future.

In the end, that is what we are about. We talk about politics, policing and justice, but what matters to the people who live in Lagan Valley whom I represent, and those who live in North Antrim and North Down, is that their families have the hope of a better future, their children have the hope of a good education, they have a good quality of life, and yes, they can go about their business without having to look over their shoulder and wonder whether they will be the next victim of a bomb or a shooting. Thankfully, we have moved a long way from those times.

I say to the men of violence—to those who would seek to use the gun and the bomb once again to try and drag us back—that I believe the resolve is there among

the politicians and the people not to allow them to succeed. Today is another indication that we will not allow them to succeed. Some of the difficulties that we face have been mentioned; the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) highlighted some of them. When we look at the legacy of the past, there is still an enormous job to be done as we seek to deal with the things that have happened and address the sense of injustice felt by many in Northern Ireland.

I remind the House that we have almost 3,000 unsolved murders in Northern Ireland. That is one of the terrible aspects of the troubles that beset Northern Ireland for more than three decades. We have many who still wait for justice—and have not yet been given that justice.

The legislation before the House is important, just as the legislation before the Northern Ireland Assembly previously was important. Indeed, we welcomed the Assembly's decision a couple of weeks ago, and my party was pleased to be there and support the motion that was brought before that House. For sure, some in Northern Ireland continue to have reservations and doubts, and I understand where they are coming from. Many in Northern Ireland support with reluctance the political progress that has been made, and their reluctance is not because they do not want things to move forward, but because there are still dark memories. There is still a lot of pain and hurt, which we need to deal with, and when they look at some in government they wonder, understandably, whether they can yet fully trust the new political dispensation.

As someone who has seen the impact of the violence on families, on the people whom I represent, on my own family and on comrades with whom I had the privilege of serving in the Ulster Defence Regiment, I understand where people are coming from, yet I know that there is no alternative but to move the process forward. Difficult and challenging though it is, we must offer to this generation and to the next the hope of something better. If that means that we have to work with people with whom we have difficulties and have had differences, and if that is the price that we have to pay for the hope of peace in Northern Ireland, it is a price that I, my party and others have been willing to pay.

The process is founded on important principles, however, because we ensured that, before the Government who now exist in Northern Ireland were formed, every party to that Government would support the rule of law and the police. Sinn Féin, among others, has given that support to the police and recognised that the rule of law is the only way forward in Northern Ireland. We welcome that. Belated conversion though it may be, it is nevertheless progress and we must keep building on it. That is why we feel the time now is right to proceed with the devolution of those important powers.

Like the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon), I was disappointed that the Ulster Unionist party was not able to support the devolution of policing and justice powers at this time, and in reality its stance had more to do with what it perceived to be a party political advantage, given that an election is coming, than with a principled position. Indeed, the party said that in principle it supported the devolution of those powers; it just felt that the time was not right.

The Secretary of State referred to the words of Kate Carroll, the widow of Constable Stephen Carroll, the last police officer to be murdered by dissident republicans

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in Northern Ireland. When we listened to what she had to say on the anniversary of her husband's murder, I wished that all parties had, because she said that we have to move forward and take responsibility for our own affairs. How right she is, because that is the basis for providing the stability on which Northern Ireland can become strong, its people can become strong, and trust and confidence can be firmly established.

At the time of Constable Carroll's death, and indeed at the time of the murder of the two soldiers at Massereene barracks in Antrim, the Assembly stood united against those outrages—against those atrocities. It is a matter of regret that the Assembly could not have stood united when it came to taking the decision on the transfer of policing and justice powers, but I hope that in time the Ulster Unionist party will come to support the devolution of those important powers.

Mr. Cash: But, with a general election coming, does the right hon. Gentleman believe that a substantial body of the electorate will support the views that he has expressed?

Mr. Donaldson: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. I believe—certainly, it is my experience—that a clear majority of people support the devolution of those powers and a clear majority of people in Northern Ireland want to see political progress being made. They recognise that there are difficulties, as we have heard rehearsed in the Chamber this afternoon, particularly in relation to the working of the Executive. However, I share the Secretary of State's view that now that we are getting over this perhaps most challenging of hurdles, things will settle down and we will be able to concentrate on the bread-and-butter issues that matter to the people we represent. I hope that we will have the four parties working together more cohesively within that Executive, because that is what people want to happen: they want to see devolution delivering for them on those bread-and-butter issues.

It is my expectation that there is majority support for this process. I can certainly say that those who will stand in the forthcoming election on a manifesto of dragging us back to the past and tearing down the Assembly have nothing to offer the people of Northern Ireland. They offer no alternative, and they have no viable solution to the problems that beset us. They are the nay-sayers: their approach is entirely negative. What hope do they offer to the young people of Northern Ireland today? I hope that people will not listen to that negativity but will recognise that whatever the difficulties we face, the way forward is through supporting the devolution of these powers and supporting the Assembly and the political stability that it can bring to Northern Ireland. We welcome the range of powers that are being devolved to the Assembly, while recognising that some powers will be reserved to this Parliament.

As regards the comments by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) about the appointment of a Minister of Justice, we are very clear that this is about public confidence, and in our view there would not be public confidence in the appointment of a Sinn Féin Minister of Justice in Northern Ireland. We have to reflect that reality, and that is why we have introduced

the arrangements that we have to ensure that whoever is appointed Minister of Justice has cross-community support in the Assembly.

We want to move Northern Ireland towards a more normal form of Government. At a British-Irish Association conference that I attended last year, the hon. Member for Foyle talked about removing the ugly scaffolding of the Belfast agreement. I think that that is important. We will certainly go all the way with him on that objective, because we believe that normalising the politics of Northern Ireland is an integral part of the peace process. In future, we want to move towards what we hope will be a more voluntary form of coalition where parties come together to negotiate a programme for Government on a voluntary basis, and then establish that Government, together with an effective Opposition, because that is how democracy operates and should operate.

That is the way forward as we see it, and we want to move towards that more normalised situation. The cross-community vote mechanism is part of normalising our politics and part of moving towards that kind of system.

Dr. Alasdair McDonnell (Belfast, South) (SDLP): The right hon. Gentleman said that there would not be public confidence in a Sinn Féin Minister of Justice. Is he implying, along the same lines, that there would not be public confidence in a Social Democratic and Labour party Minister of Justice?

Mr. Donaldson: I am not implying that there would not be public confidence, but it is a matter for the SDLP to put its candidate forward to see whether it can get sufficient support within the Assembly to become Minister of Justice. We will look at the candidates who come before us, and the party will vote accordingly in the Assembly when the time comes.

The Secretary of State mentioned parading. I had the privilege of co-chairing the working group that was established to consider parades in the aftermath of the Hillsborough agreement. We were set a very tight deadline by the First Minister, who has now joined us in the Chamber, yet we were able to get to a point where we agreed a report that is now being worked on by the parliamentary draftsmen. We hope to have the draft Bill ready for consultation by the end of this month. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East said earlier today, it will probably be the most consulted on piece of legislation that the Assembly will have brought forward in its existence. That is good, because parading is an important issue and we want the legislation to be put in place so that there are new mechanisms and a new system for dealing with parades that will create a level playing field and be based on people's rights, not on prejudice, as has been the case in the past. We want a shared future in Northern Ireland.

Mark Durkan: On the right hon. Gentleman's point about the report that has emerged from the working group on parades, was it not the case that the Hillsborough agreement promised us that there would be consultation on that report, and then legislation would be prepared? In fact, the report is going straight into legislation and only then will there be consultation.

Mr. Donaldson: I am very clear about what the Hillsborough agreement said, and it most certainly did not say that there would be consultation after the report

was prepared. What it did say was that there would be consultation during the preparation of the report, which was what we undertook to do and carried out. Indeed, we met representatives of the hon. Gentleman's party on at least one occasion and received written representations from them on a number of occasions, which were taken into account in finalising our report. We made it clear in the timetable, as Hillsborough set out distinctly, that as soon as the report was agreed, it would be presented to the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, and that the task of drafting legislation would get under way. That task is now moving towards completion. The Bill will be published and there will be a full consultation period before it is enacted by the Assembly.

We welcome the proposed changes to parading and believe that they will provide a basis for dealing with the issue that is fairer and based on respect for the rights of those who want to engage in a parade or public assembly.

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East) (DUP): Is it not the case that the work of the working group that was set up to deal with parades has not been completed, because the draftsmen are raising a series of detailed and technical issues that need to be determined before the final document is available for consultation? It would be wrong to consult on an uncompleted document.

Mr. Donaldson: I thank my right hon. Friend for that comment, and he is right. The working group's representatives are meeting the draftsmen several times each week in various formats to deal with those technical issues, which is why we are not yet in a position to publish the final work. We anticipate that that will happen at the end of this month.

Reference has been made to the retention by Parliament of the power to provide for what is called 50:50 recruitment to the PSNI. As the Secretary of State will know, my party has consistently opposed that measure, because we believe that state discrimination is wrong in any circumstance. Although we share the Government's objective to increase the level of representation within the PSNI of the Roman Catholic side of the community, we believe that the provision is a very blunt instrument. It leaves a lot of young people who would otherwise qualify to become police officers, and who pass all the tests and enter the merit pool, unable to do so simply because of the church they attend on a Sunday. We certainly cannot agree to that.

Lady Hermon: I should like to put it on record that, although earlier in the debate I expressed support for the Conservative position on the devolution of policing and justice, I was hideously disappointed that the Conservative party voted in support of 50:50 recruitment. The Ulster Unionist party differs once again from the Conservative party and we are firmly opposed to 50:50 recruitment.

Mr. Donaldson: I thank the hon. Lady for her intervention, which raises a curious question. If members of the UUP had been elected to this House and taken the Conservative Whip, would they have voted in favour of extending a power that they say they have consistently opposed in principle throughout its enactment? It will be interesting to see how that works out in future. I wish

to put it on the record that although the power is reserved to Parliament, we will continue to oppose its exercise in principle.

The hon. Lady mentioned the potential conflict between the Northern Ireland Policing Board and the scrutiny committee that the Assembly will establish. I understand her concern, which others outside the House have echoed. However, the scrutiny committee will have a much broader remit than the Policing Board in that it will cover all aspects of the Justice Department, not only policing. Its role is different from that of the board in that it will, among other things, play a part in scrutinising proposed legislation from the Justice Department. Its scope in respect of the Chief Constable's operational responsibility will probably be limited. Although it will take time for those things to be worked out, there may be a basis for establishing some sort of protocol between the board, the committee and the Assembly about the way in which they pursue their respective functions.

Mark Durkan: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for giving way again—he has been generous. Does he recognise that the concerns relate not only to the position of the Policing Board but to the role of the Chief Constable? There was concern that some previous drafts of the protocols spoke of the Chief Constable becoming the chief adviser to the Minister on policing and security matters, and that that would qualify or regulate the Chief Constable's clear independent role and its integrity, making the Chief Constable somehow subsidiary to a Minister. The Patten dispensation certainly did not envisage that.

Mr. Donaldson: We are clear that the Chief Constable's operational independence will not be open to interference by the Minister. The lines on that are clear and have been firmly established. Of course, the Chief Constable will be there to advise the Minister about matters that fall within the Minister's remit, but that does not give the Minister the right to interfere in operational matters.

We support the orders. We believe that accepting them is the right move to make at an important time in the development of Northern Ireland politics.

A few weeks ago, I attended a memorial in Newry, which is now a city. It experienced some horrible things; terrible atrocities were committed there during the troubles. For example, we remember the three police officers who were murdered by an IRA gang while they conducted community duties in the town centre. Ironically, the IRA gang wore butchers' uniforms as they carried out those assassinations—the execution of the three officers. We have just passed the 25th anniversary of the mortar attack on Newry police station, when nine Royal Ulster Constabulary officers lost their lives—the highest loss of life sustained by the RUC in one incident during the troubles. One of those officers was Chief Inspector Alexander Donaldson, my cousin, who had lost his brother, Constable Samuel Donaldson, who was murdered by the IRA in Crossmaglen in August 1970—the first RUC officer to be murdered by the Provisional IRA.

I therefore recognise the difficulties and challenges that such decisions present to people in Northern Ireland. However, as I stood in that service in Newry and listened to the long list of names of those brave men and women who had given their lives in defence of our community so that we might have the hope of peace

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some day in Northern Ireland, I was reminded of why we do what we do. I was reminded that the task that has been given to us as political leaders and politicians is to help to secure that better future and build on the work of those brave men and women who held the line when politics was not working and there was no agreement on how we would settle our differences. Thankfully, we now have a broad measure of agreement and it is our duty and responsibility to ensure that what we have done succeeds, that the progress we have made is built on, and that those who sacrificed their lives did not do so in vain.

That does not make right the terrible wrongs that terrorist organisations did in Northern Ireland over the years. It does not justify the terrible actions that they carried out against members of the security forces and civilians and the countless lives that were lost during that period. That is to be condemned; such actions and the terrorists' motivation is not the way to settle our differences. This is the way to do it: by creating political stability and a Government who enable local people to take responsibility for their own affairs, firmly in the context of the United Kingdom. This Parliament will always be sovereign, but I believe that, in giving away some of its power again to the Assembly, this elected Chamber recognises the progress that has been made and that, after many difficult, dark years in Northern Ireland, people are stepping forward who are prepared to take tough decisions and give leadership—no one more so than my right hon. Friend the Member for Belfast, East, who, as First Minister, has shown that leadership. We do these things in the hope of a better future.

5.55 pm

Sir Patrick Cormack (South Staffordshire) (Con): The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) made a powerful, statesmanlike speech and I very much agree with what he said.

In what will probably be my last speech on Northern Ireland in the House, I am delighted that the First Minister and his predecessor are here. The House, Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom owe a great deal to their leadership. Without the remarkable work of the right hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley), we would not be here today. Without the courageous persistence, at a time of great personal difficulty, of the current First Minister, we would not be debating the orders this afternoon. We owe them both a great deal for what they have done and the leadership they have given, just as we owe much to many others in all political parties in Northern Ireland.

I share the disappointment that the Ulster Unionists did not feel able at the very least to abstain on 9 March. It was a great pity that they ignored the advice of my hon. Friend the shadow Secretary of State and that of the Leader of the Opposition, and that they persisted in voting against. That was a short-sighted and mistaken decision, and I hope that, even now, they are realising that the only future for Northern Ireland is for them to accept, as true democrats, the will of the overwhelming majority in the Assembly and give every possible support to implementing practical devolution of justice and policing after 12 April. I know that their one representative

here, the hon. and courageous Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) will hold to that view, and I hope that they will come to follow her example.

It is also a pleasure to be here with the Secretary of State and his admirable, estimable colleague, the Minister of State. I pray tribute to their actions in building on their predecessors' work and ensuring that we have the debate this afternoon. Many people have contributed a great deal, including successive Prime Ministers. We must not forget the work of Tony Blair—I think that events in Northern Ireland will be reckoned his greatest achievement as Prime Minister—that of the current Prime Minister, and also that of John Major. The accord that John Major formed with Albert Reynolds, and the way in which the chemistry between them worked, was fundamental to what has been built afterwards. I am confident that, in a spirit of true party accord, we will pass, without Division, the orders that we are considering.

When the Select Committee was in Northern Ireland in January, we took evidence from the Chief Constable, the Probation Board for Northern Ireland, the Policing Board, the director of prisons and many others on devolution. At that point, things hung in the balance. Indeed, our meetings coincided with the first two days of the Hillsborough talks, and we did not quite know what was going to happen. We all hoped that the talks would result in success, but we did not know. On that first evening, when I talked to the Secretary of State, the Minister and the Prime Minister, there were real obstacles to overcome, but they were overcome.

In taking evidence from the people whom I cited, we found that the people on the ground were ready for change. Every one of them said, "Yes, we are ready." Some went further and said, "We were ready two years ago and we are sorry it has taken so long," but they were ready and they relished the challenge. I believe that Northern Ireland is exceptionally well served by some truly remarkable people who head its various public services. It is sometimes easy to forget that Northern Ireland has a small population. I do not think that any other part of the UK with such a small population—Northern Ireland's is about the same as that of Greater Birmingham—has such talent to draw upon for its judiciary, Prison Service, probation service and Chief Constables.

A succession of Chief Constables have been true leaders, none more so than the late husband of the hon. Member for North Down. I believe that the present Chief Constable, with his great experience of community policing, which is terribly important, will make his mark—as did Sir Hugh Orde—as a fine Chief Constable. It is very important indeed—the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) made this plain in his remarks—that the Chief Constable has true and complete operational independence. There must never be any doubt about that, and I do not think that there will be, because it seems to me that the First Minister, the Deputy First Minister and everyone else accept how important that is.

The hon. Gentleman spoke about 2012. I can understand why he feels apprehensive that everything might go into the melting pot again in 2012, which will be just a year or so after the probable date of the next Assembly elections. It behoves all of us—in Northern Ireland and the rest of the UK—to try to ensure that there is no real problem or crisis at that point. Of course, if the devolution

of policing and justice works as well as I believe it can, and as well as I hope and think it will, confidence will be built up over the next two years, and there should be no great hiatus, as we all hope. The hon. Gentleman made a valid point when he talked about not expecting perfection as a precondition of anything. What has struck me over the last two or three years in particular has been the way in which there has been a truly sensible and pragmatic approach from those who have led the political parties in Northern Ireland. They have recognised, as all human beings should, that perfection is a fairly elusive quality.

I often think of the first Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, whom I knew well, who was the Leader of the House when I was first elected in 1970—the late, great Willie Whitelaw. He is remembered for many things, including his saying that he was not going to go around stirring up apathy. He also made that immortal remark, which I frequently quote, that things are never as good or as bad as they seem. We all need to recognise that and what was implicit in the closing remarks of the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley, who reminded us of the dark and terrible days of the troubles. He reminded us of the bereavements in his family—other Northern Ireland Members could echo those stories from their family histories—but he also said that we must now go on. One of the most difficult things, after such a time of trouble, when so many have lost their lives, is that drawing of a line. Some who came before the Committee during its investigations were able to say, “Yes, I could see my wife’s name on the same memorial as the man responsible for her death”. That was an extraordinary and deeply moving remark to make. However, others said, “No, I can never rest until I have complete satisfaction and justice.”

Justice can be a very hard word. I often remember a story told to me by a friend of mine who was a great artist, John Ward, whom some Members of the House might remember—he died at the age of 90 two or three years ago. A captain of industry commissioned John to do a portrait of his wife. They discussed where the portrait would be painted and how she would pose. As John left, the captain of industry turned to him and said, “And you must do her justice.” John turned round and said, “It’s not justice she needs; it’s mercy.” We must remember the moral of that story in respect of Northern Ireland. To forget is impossible, and to forgive—however strong one’s Christian beliefs—is terribly difficult. However, if one does have Christian beliefs, as most Northern Ireland political leaders do, one believes in the power of forgiveness and redemption, which is so necessary if we are to move forward to the normality that every Northern Ireland Member of this House wants, and which one is conscious that people want whenever one goes to Northern Ireland.

I shall end with some remarks about this place, if I may. When one looks at the progress that has been made over the last two years in particular and at that remarkable achievement of 2007, when the right hon. Member for North Antrim gave that extraordinary and exemplary leadership, one realises that the influence of this House has quite clearly and properly been marginalised—that is a necessary and proper consequence of devolution. The role of the Committee that I have had the honour to chair for almost the last five years has also clearly been marginalised to a degree, as its remit has shrunk. If, as I devoutly hope and pray, we move to this final stage of devolution on 12 April, some

may ask, “Is there a point and purpose in having a Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs?” My answer to that would be yes, because if ever a constituent Assembly within the United Kingdom needed firm, foul-weather friends, it is going to be in the years ahead. We need within this Parliament those who passionately care about Northern Ireland even if they do not come from Northern Ireland. I know how my Committee’s work has been welcomed in Northern Ireland, as it was last week, when we published a significant report. I know that people in that most beautiful, fascinating and historical part of our country look to this House, whatever their ultimate views might be about the constitutional position of Northern Ireland. Whether they look at it from a Unionist or a nationalist point of view, they recognise the responsibility vested here. I hope that although the Committee’s remit will be significantly reduced, Members will be willing to serve on it in the next Parliament to provide those firm, foul-weather friends whom I mentioned.

It has been a great honour to be involved with the history of Northern Ireland during one of the most exciting and challenging times in its recent history. I hope that we have been able to make a minor contribution to the progress that has been made. It is highly appropriate that the last significant debate on Northern Ireland in this Parliament should be on these orders. I hope and believe that we will pass them without Division, but with inward acclamation, wishing them total success.

6.11 pm

Rev. Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): This will be my last contribution to debates in this Chamber. My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) has just spoken about making his last speech on Northern Ireland, but I wish to remind myself that the reason that these Benches are not packed to capacity today is that things are moving in the right direction. If they were going in the wrong direction, many of these vacant places would be filled.

I made my maiden speech in this House sitting as near the door as I could, because I thought that I might be kicked out. I made some terrible mistakes, according to many people. For example, I spoke for too long and I was called to account by the Speaker for making attacks on certain elements in the IRA. But I learned as I went on so that I could come here and carry the flag that I believed I had to carry. I was grateful that people started to think that we must have an end to this matter and that we could not go on with part of the United Kingdom torn by such violence.

South Down has been mentioned, and I spent all my holidays as a boy in that area. But then the IRA burned down my father’s house and I no longer had the privilege of spending my holidays there. I have been back many times since, however, and at the first meeting I attended there I mentioned that incident. I said to the people, “I’m sorry you burned down my home, otherwise you’d have seen more of me.” A little old lady at the back shouted out, “It’s a terrible shame.” I thanked her and agreed with her.

The day has come when Northern Ireland must boldly face the simple facts. There are people in Northern Ireland who have diverse religious and political convictions, but they can live together as neighbours. When I was a

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boy, there was more neighbourliness than we have seen for many years. Something entered the hearts of the people that destroyed the reverence for neighbourliness and kindness. The Ulster people are not a hard people: they are a loving and caring people. I am glad that there is no disturbance in the House today. We are meeting here in calm and peace, because that calm and peace is slowly but surely being established in Northern Ireland. We are making progress in the right direction.

Of course, there will be times when both sides of the political spectrum might feel that they are being pushed, but they need to keep their hands in their pockets and remember that it is our hearts that should drive us in trying to win the best outcome for our people. I am confident that, with the good friendship in this House towards Northern Ireland, we will come to a day—although I may not live to see it—when these troubles will be forgotten. We will not forget, of course, the price that was paid or the loyalty of those who stood against assassins, but we will forget the awfulness of the days that we have come through. As we move forward, we shall see prosperity in our land. A working people live at peace. When there is no work, Satan finds plenty for idle hands to do. I want to see more and more employment coming to Northern Ireland. I want to see the young people having every chance educationally to prepare themselves for the future. I want to see a real dedication from all our people, no matter what their politics or religion, as hard-working people and parents to make their family life a thing of blessing and sunshine, not a thing of tears and regret. I hope that that is what will happen.

On the matters of policing and marching, we need level heads. We need a calm appreciation of the facts and we need to do our best to ensure that our contribution will be one that will assist the people of Northern Ireland in making progress. I would like to see in Northern Ireland the same situation as in other parts of the United Kingdom, so that when there is a march those who are legally entitled to walk—and who do not want to cause trouble but only to declare their principles—will be able to walk in peace. I refer to both sides when I say that.

I mentioned the holidays I spent in South Down. I played with the boys in Killowen, who were strong republicans and strong Roman Catholics, and I was just as strong a Unionist and a Protestant. However, they came with me to the 12 July demonstration, and I went with them to the Warrenpoint Hibernian demonstration. In fact, the Hibernian people got into trouble just before their demonstration. On the night before, one of their drums gave way. They had no drum, so they came down to the Orange hall and got an Orange drum on loan. They also got a sheet, which they covered up and on which they roughly painted their Hibernian slogan. However, as they were going through Warrenpoint the next day, the sheet came off, and all that could be seen was “To the immortal memory of King William III” and “No surrender!” Everybody laughed; nobody got up and said, “This can’t be.” There was a general mood of good will.

That good will is going to be hard to build, because there are people with very deep wounds—I think of my right hon. Friend the Member for Lagan Valley

(Mr. Donaldson) sitting here, whose family I have known for years. I know what they suffered, and many others have suffered, and it is the same on the other side, but this I can say to the House. Northern Ireland is moving in the right direction, and this House needs to see that it encourages it to go forward at this time. We welcome the help of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland, chaired by the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack). We also welcome the good work of the various Secretaries of State. Some of them we disagreed with and some of them we would have liked to punch at times, but we neither punched them nor disagreed with them in a muscular fashion, and today we are here in the quiet of this House.

I do not think that there will be a Division in the House tonight; I think that we will all feel that we are moving the right way. That does not mean that we have reached the end of the journey—far from it—but we are moving the right way. For those from this House who continue to take up their duties in Northern Ireland, I trust that these will become happier and happier as the days go by. Thank you very much.

6.22 pm

Mr. William Cash (Stone) (Con): It is a great privilege to follow the right hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) on what is an historic occasion. The tributes that have been paid, with the appropriate degree of caution about the future, bring to mind the history not only of the troubles, but of the role that the UK Parliament has played in such matters, going back to the earliest times of our Parliament.

The degree of co-operation and good will that we have heard today is truly important, whichever side of the political or religious divide one has come from. However, those looking back through the annals of our history will want to consider the role played by this House and the battles conducted here. They include those involving Daniel O’Connell and John Bright, as well as the episodes during the 1880s involving Parnell, followed by the obstructionism and the violence that took place in this very Chamber. That led not merely to the suspension of Standing Orders, but to their being taken away from the Speaker and handed over to the Executive, an issue that we are yet to resolve. In addition, we then had the later period, with Carson, the Black and Tans, and the problems from 1918 through to the 1920s, and then again in more recent times, with the tremendous tensions that were built up.

I follow the right hon. Member for North Antrim in his awareness of what has changed in this House, given the relative calm of this Chamber—in fact, the complete calm—compared with the ructions that were once stimulated by the great passions that reigned over the questions of Northern Ireland and home rule. They included the break-up leading to the creation of Liberal Unionism by Joe Chamberlain and John Bright on the question of home rule, which sometimes gets forgotten. I mentioned home rule in an intervention on the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan), but these are momentous historic questions and huge constitutional issues. As the right hon. Member for North Antrim has said, we are here in this Chamber discussing the devolution of policing and justice, with the reservations that have been made and the acknowledgement that there is a

sunset clause, although I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) modestly underestimated the role played by the Select Committee on Northern Ireland and the degree to which those policies were developed under the aegis of the UK Parliament.

All I say by way of conclusion is that the Chamber may be relatively empty, but despite the ghosts of those who have taken part in these momentous occasions, with all the passions and the tumult in this House on the issues of Northern Ireland and Ireland as a whole, we have now moved so far that the right hon. Member for North Antrim was able to touch on his origins in this House and the passions that he induced, which he explained so clearly in his speech today. The transformation of the politics of Northern Ireland is not yet complete, but the bottom line is this: great progress has been made, and the one thing that one can say is that the beneficiaries are the people of Northern Ireland and our democratic system.

6.27 pm

Mr. Peter Robinson (Belfast, East) (DUP): Let me first pay tribute to my two colleagues who are leaving the House at the end of this Parliament. The Chairman of the Select Committee, the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack), has always been a friend of Northern Ireland. He has always assisted Northern Ireland, not only as Chairman of the Committee, but as a Member of Parliament. We were concerned about him at one stage—he took a bit of time before he managed to reach the House after the last election—but he got here none the less, and he managed to change the legislation to ensure that nobody else would fall into the same difficulties. He has been a good friend, and we very much thank him for his role.

My long-time friend and colleague, the right hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) has had a colourful career. We have described him as a colossus in Unionist politics. His name will be remembered in the history of Northern Ireland as one of the most influential figures in Unionism. His leadership in the most difficult times that we have gone through has been a major factor in bringing Northern Ireland through to the peaceful and stable society that we are now enjoying. On behalf not only of my party, but of the Unionist community as a whole, I rejoice in the fact that Ian Paisley was there, that he was able to say no when the question demanded that answer, and that he was there to say yes when the opportunity was there to make progress.

I apologise for my late arrival in the House, although I think that I have broken my record of speaking in the Northern Ireland Assembly at 3 o'clock and managing to speak here just after 6 o'clock. I flew over with one of our friends from the other place, Lord Kilclooney. He likes to ensure that my feet are firmly on the ground, and he handed me a copy of the *Lurgan Mail*, so that I could see what was happening at the grass roots, as I think he put it. I enjoyed reading about various events around Lurgan, but I was a bit shocked to see a statement from the Ulster Unionist Assembly Member Sam Gardiner, who gave his reasons for opposing the devolution of policing and justice. They can be paraphrased in one sentence: Sinn Fein wants it, so Unionists should be against it.

Such zero-sum politics—sectarian politics—drag Northern Ireland down and back. We must recognise that it is possible to find a way forward in Northern Ireland that is a win-win solution, and that it is possible to have agreements on how we move forward in Northern Ireland that attracts the support of both Nationalist and Unionists. The devolution of policing and justice is such an issue. For 100 years, Unionists' policy has been to have devolved powers over policing and justice.

I am not sure about the thinking of Sam Gardiner, who says that we should dispose of the epitome of the Unionist requirement for devolution simply because someone else happens to want it. Carson and Craig would not have accepted devolution in Northern Ireland without powers over policing and justice. Brian Faulkner, a later Unionist leader, was prepared to do away with devolution because power over policing and justice was removed—recognition that properly joined-up Government needs the ability to enforce powers exercised in other areas.

The devolution of policing and justice is not only Unionist policy; it is Democratic Unionist party policy. In our last manifesto in 2007, we expressly told the people of Northern Ireland that we support the devolution of policing and justice. We gave them a commitment to work towards that devolution. However, we had two caveats. First, we required community support for whatever structures were proposed. Secondly, we made it clear that we did not believe that there would be support for the devolution of policing and justice, if there were a Sinn Fein Minister.

I believe that we have met those two conditions. I am not relying simply on opinion polls, although when they are going in the right direction, we all like looking at them. The two most recent opinion polls on this subject show that people overwhelmingly want the devolution of policing and justice. We went around the country, and I addressed public and party meetings throughout Northern Ireland. Not once, at any of those meetings, did anyone say, "Stop. Don't go ahead with this. It is a bad idea." We placed adverts in newspapers, and people had the opportunity to respond. I received one e-mail opposing the devolution of policing and justice, and when I responded to it, I quickly discovered that it came from a supporter of another Unionist political party, who would not agree to anything in any circumstances under our dissident Unionists.

There is support in the community for the devolution of policing and justice. More than that, there is support for that devolution from all the Assembly parties, and all, save one, voted in favour of it during the debate. One party, the Ulster Unionist party, did not. However, it made it clear that in principle it supports the devolution of policing and justice. In addition, in 2003, it reached agreement at Hillsborough with Sinn Fein and others to have policing and justice powers devolved to the Northern Ireland Assembly by the mid-point of the following Assembly, which would have been September or October 2005. It reached that agreement when the IRA was still killing people on the streets, and continuing its gangsterism, and when the IRA and Sinn Fein were still attacking the police, would not recognise the courts and did not accept the rule of law. In all those circumstances, the Ulster Unionist party said in 2003 that there should be devolution of policing and justice. Indeed, one of its Assembly Members, who is happy to go in front of the cameras nowadays, Mr. David McNarry, said that that

[*Mr. Peter Robinson*]

had to happen, and that there had to be a Sinn Féin Minister. In much worse circumstances and with a much worse deal, the Ulster Unionists were prepared to have devolution of policing and justice, but they have now decided that it would not be opportune now.

I believe that the views expressed by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon) accurately reflect the views of the Ulster Unionist party, and certainly the views of its support base. Opinion polling by my office and by the Secretary of State shows that more than three quarters of its supporters wanted the devolution of policing and justice. I do not believe that during the subsequent period there has been a significant or appreciable level of concern about the devolution of those powers. Not only are they devolved in circumstances that command community support, we have—I suppose that this is one of the factors that created that support—a significant financial package to assist us in moving forward. Without that package, we might have to dispose of the services of up to 1,200 police officers. It is a first-class financial deal that supports the overall devolution of policing and justice.

One of the differences since the days of Carson and Craig is that we have a different system of Government, which required more detailed negotiations that continued for a considerable period. We had to devise systems to ensure that we could safely and securely ensure the independence of the Chief Constable in the operation of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, and the independence of the judiciary, which is just as important.

I heard the intervention from the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan). We must be clear that the Chief Constable's role as the Minister's chief adviser relates to the Minister's policy role, and that the Minister has no operational role in the functioning of the PSNI. The Chief Constable has complete independence without political interference in how the PSNI operates. I am sure that the hon. Gentleman will defend the Chief Constable's independence as strongly as other hon. Members on these Benches.

The important factor in the devolution of policing and justice is that it completes the whole devolution package for Northern Ireland. People can now see the jigsaw completed, and the overall context of devolution. That brings me to the reason given by the Ulster Unionist party for not devolving policing and justice. The argument was that to some extent the Executive were not functioning properly, so there was no confidence in devolving powers to it. The reality is that parties that see themselves as opposition parties—we have the strange factor in Northern Ireland that Government parties see themselves as Ministers in opposition, because the smaller parties in the Executive take that role—may say that the Executive are dysfunctional and could do better. I firmly believe that they could do better and reach more decisions, but they have reached significantly more decisions than the previous Executive led by the Ulster Unionist party. By the end of the Assembly's final year, we will have taken twice as many decisions, and reached twice as many agreements as its predecessor. Indeed, it has to be said that the Assembly has taken much more difficult decisions than its predecessors did.

It is also worth noting that one of the difficulties preventing the Executive from moving forward was the fact that the devolution process had not been completed.

It has been interesting that, in the past two Executive meetings, there have been more decisions flushing through the system than at any time previously, now that the logjam has been taken out of the way. Yes, of course we can do better, but we are doing better than our predecessors, and we are doing better month by month.

People in Northern Ireland do not want to go back to the bad old days of the past. They want to move forward and to see progress being made. They are content that we have a devolution system that has securities, vetoes and controls built into it, to ensure that no section of our community can be discriminated against. I therefore believe that we have taken a major step in moving Northern Ireland forward, to ensure that we continue to make progress and build on the peace and stability that we have, and, as we move out of recession, build prosperity for our people.

Lady Hermon: I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson), the First Minister, for giving way. I want to put on record that this Ulster Unionist representative in this House—for whatever time is left to me to speak for the party here—commends the Democratic Unionist party for what was a very courageous decision. Its decision on the devolution of policing and justice was absolutely right, and it cannot have been easy. I commend the party warmly on reaching the right decision. The people of Northern Ireland want to go forward, and that includes the Unionist people. All the Unionist people of Northern Ireland want to go forward with those of different political persuasions. Our common enemy—the dissident republicans, Orange volunteers and the like—would wreak havoc if they could, but they will not, because we will stand together in opposition to all paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland.

Mr. Robinson: I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for those comments. I believe that she has accurately reflected the position of the Unionist community. I know that she very much regrets that the Ulster Unionist party, through its leadership, has placed itself along with the dissident republicans and Unionists.

I also recognise that the hon. Member for Foyle and other members of his party are not completely content with every aspect of the arrangements for policing and justice; they have said so. If either Sinn Féin or the DUP had been left to write the agreement themselves, it would have been a very different document. That is the nature of doing deals and reaching agreements. They are compromises by their very nature, and we need to seek consensus in order to move forward. The hon. Member for Foyle could very well have said, "We didn't have our thumbprint on this document, so we are going to vote against it or abstain." He did not do so, however. Although it was not as they would have wished, he and his party supported it in principle and voted in favour of it. I believe that that is the position that the Ulster Unionist party should have adopted, and I very much regret that it did not do so. I am glad that the Conservative Opposition in this House made their position clear, but I regret that they were not in a better position to persuade their colleagues in Northern Ireland to follow the route that they were taking.

I strongly believe that the people of Northern Ireland support the devolution of these powers, and that they want us to get on with the work of dealing with jobs,

education and health. Those are the matters that come to me when I meet people on the streets. Seldom has anyone come up to me and said, “We need to get policing and justice sorted out,” or “We need to get parading sorted out.” People want the Assembly and the Executive to get on with the day-to-day, bread and butter issues, and that must be our priority over the weeks, months and years ahead.

I should like to say a final word on the issue of the sunset clause. I started off by regarding the sunset clause as a necessary evil. Both parties recognised it as a temporary expedient, but we were unable to reach a permanent agreement on it. I have moved my position, however; I now think that the clause will assist us all. Over the next year or two, it will allow us to use our experience of having the devolved functions to determine whether any changes would be beneficial or necessary. We should not, however, wait until the period of time has passed before we sit down and try to resolve any such matters. As soon as the new Assembly is elected in 2011, it must straight away get down to working out its processes for continuing the role of policing and justice. We should not be nervous about the fact that our experience over those years will enable us to determine whether the same system should be continued, whether it should be tweaked, or whether more significant changes should be made. I am not afraid of looking at that issue in 2011-12, and I believe that the sunset clause will benefit the Assembly.

I think that, before I arrived in the Chamber, the hon. Member for Foyle spoke of not making the perfect the enemy of the good. That is exactly where we stand today. Regrettably, some people believe that we should wait until we have all our ducks in a row and everything is perfect before we move forward. We should never make progress in Northern Ireland if we did that, however, because nothing is ever perfect in politics.

Mark Durkan: The problem with the sunset clause is not simply that it requires political agreement, or that it imposes an obligation on the parties to sort out their positions. The nature of the clause is that, in the absence of an agreement, the Department will be dissolved. It is the implications of that happening that we need to consider, because that is what the House has legislated for. If we have such confidence in the future, why do we need a sunset clause that would require the Department to be dissolved? Do the parties really need that in order to concentrate their minds in the positive way that the right hon. Gentleman has been suggesting?

Mr. Robinson: Every journey is taken a step at a time. It is a fact that no agreement could be reached on a final and completed version of these arrangements. We have therefore taken the first step, and we have done so with confidence and faith that we will be able to resolve these issues. I happen to believe that the arrangements that we have will probably be sufficient in 2012, but the determination that has been shown over the past few years to resolve our difficulties will be sufficient to overcome any problem that we might face at that time.

Mr. Donaldson: I was present in April 1998 during the final days that led up to what became known as the Belfast agreement, and I know that the hon. Member for Foyle and others were involved in reaching compromises

at the last minute. Those compromises were not the finished product; they were work in progress, and they established arrangements to take forward pieces of work that were not in the final agreement. The hon. Gentleman should therefore be no stranger to the idea that, in a peace process, we do not necessarily reach the final destination at every point. We can, however, establish a firm foothold, in order to go on and build other things in the future.

Mr. Robinson: I agree entirely. We have set our direction of travel, and I believe that it is the right one.

Mark Durkan: I should like to refer to what the right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) has just said. Yes, of course there were compromises in the Good Friday agreement, as there have been on other occasions. However, none of the compromises that we were party to involved contemplating, or legislating for, the dissolution and collapse of any arrangements. We did not sell confidence on the basis that we had a device for allowing the arrangements to collapse and disappear before our eyes if we did not like what happened around the corner. Will the right hon. Member for Belfast, East tell us whether, in the 2011 Assembly election, his party will claim to have a mandate to hold out for a continued veto on Sinn Féin occupying the role of Minister of Justice? Or, will the right hon. Gentleman say, “We are relaxed and agnostic about who should be the Minister of Justice, and we will therefore be able to reach agreement with Sinn Féin”? Because that is what he is telling us.

Mr. Robinson: The hon. Gentleman indicates that the collapse of the Northern Ireland Assembly during the period of the Good Friday agreement was not legislated for, but it did collapse—it collapsed four times, even though that was not legislated for. That is hardly a good example to draw to our attention, as they were capable of collapsing the Assembly without legislation. The one thing that can be said about the present Administration is that even though there have been difficult times, the Assembly has not once collapsed. We have continued to operate, to take our decisions, to move forward and to reach agreements. I do not doubt that there will be challenges for us ahead, but I also do not doubt that we are capable of overcoming them.

I strongly support the measures before the House. I want to thank the Secretary of State and his team for their assistance during the talks process, and indeed to thank the Prime Minister for the time that he spent in Northern Ireland. I know that there might have been a bit of impatience on their part that it took a little longer than they had expected. I do not apologise for that at all, as I believe that the agreement we now have is stronger, because we took the additional time to get it right. More than that, unlike previous agreements—whether it be the Belfast agreement, the St. Andrews agreement or many others such as the Weston Park agreement and so forth—this one is different. This one was agreed between parties in Northern Ireland. This was made in Ulster, and I believe that it will be all the stronger for that, all the more likely to stick and make it all the more likely that people will go out and stand by it. I believe that it will be a significant step towards peace, stability and prosperity for Northern Ireland.

6.52 pm

Mr. Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): During the nearly five years in which I have done this Front-Bench job, I have dealt with many statutory instruments. They have usually been dealt with upstairs in Committee; some have been difficult and some have been very easy. This one is, in a sense, the most important, but it is also quite easy in the sense that we have unanimous agreement in the House that these orders should go through. They have been welcomed on all sides and I add my welcome this evening. It has been a rocky road and the last few weeks seemed particularly difficult. In spite of those difficulties, I certainly never lost hope or my faith that we would get to this position. I am very pleased that we have.

Right hon. and hon. Members have made some important and interesting contributions. The hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) certainly welcomed the orders, but raised an important issue about the sunset clause. It is a matter that we discussed when the original legislation went through last year. I wondered what would happen if we reached 1 May 2012 and an agreement had not been reached. My hope is that having reached agreement on this issue—it has been a very difficult issue and has taken longer than all the other devolution issues to resolve—the Assembly can agree again in order to renew the Department or pass legislation to set up an alternative Department that does essentially the same job. I hope that the Assembly can also start to agree on many of the issues that the right hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson) rightly said people are concerned about each and every day of their lives. People do not wake up necessarily wondering about parading or about devolution, but they do wake up worrying about jobs, their families, transport and all the other issues that people in Great Britain worry about. I hope that the example now set—with two parties, although it should have been four, coming together to agree on a difficult issue—will be replicated in the months and years ahead.

The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) raised the issue of the Saville inquiry, as did my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson). We are not here to discuss that matter tonight, but I repeat my hon. Friend's words: in order to do justice to the long and expensive time taken in compiling the report, we really need the calm of the post-election period, not the pre-election period. I hope that the Secretary of State will take that plea into account.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson), in a customarily passionate and forceful speech, rightly condemned paramilitary activity. It has been unfortunate that we have seen an increase in such activity. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire said, the bomb squad has been called out and we hear reports of shootings and what can be described only as paramilitary activity virtually every week. It must be regretted on both sides. I hope that devolving police and justice powers today—and doing so unanimously, in this House, at least—sends out a message that we are not going to put up with it and that we are going to tackle these issues through politics and dialogue. Even if there are disagreements, the important consideration is how we disagree. I hope that today will send out a message to those trying to wreck the process. As has been said, they do not have support in the

communities; they have no support either in Northern Ireland or in the south. I hope that message gets through loud and clear.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack) paid many tributes to various people, including the ordinary people of Northern Ireland, without whose fortitude we could not have reached this stage—with respect to the orders or devolution in general. The problem with naming people for tribute is that not everybody can be mentioned. I would like to add the names of Margaret Thatcher, David Trimble, John Hume and a number of unnamed and perhaps anonymous officials who have worked very hard behind the scenes to bring about devolution in Northern Ireland. I would also like to pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire, who has been an influential and assiduous Chairman of the Select Committee on Northern Ireland Affairs. It has been my pleasure to work with someone who I consider—and I know the whole House considers—to be an outstanding parliamentarian. I wish him well for the future.

The right hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) has, of course, enjoyed an extremely long career. It was wonderful to hear him speaking with such optimism about Northern Ireland moving in the right direction. He rightly said that we cannot forget the struggles and the pain that so many people went through, but it is indeed good that things are moving in the right direction. I also wish him well for the future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) reminded us in a characteristic speech of the long history of Northern Ireland. History is particularly important when it comes to Northern Ireland. As a Lancastrian who has many friends from Yorkshire, I know that history still plays an important role in relations between people. My hon. Friend reminded us how important history is to the present in Northern Ireland, although we want to move on from some parts of it. I certainly hope that today is part of that moving-on process.

The right hon. Member for Belfast, East rightly says that people are in favour of devolution, and the Conservative party is in favour of devolution generally as well as in favour of the devolution of policing and justice. As my hon. Friend the Member for North Shropshire said, the financial package is important, and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition offered immediate support to it when the matter was raised. It is a post-dated cheque; it is going to have to be written after the general election. Who knows, it may well be a member of my own party who has to write it. The package was readily agreed to. We recognised both the importance of the package and the importance of the issue that it was there to support, the devolution of policing and justice.

We have heard many speeches, today and in the past, about how successful we have been and what a long way we have travelled in Northern Ireland. I agree, although we must continue to work at peace and reconciliation and making progress; we cannot simply accept that things will always be like this. We must go on trying to normalise politics and life in Northern Ireland, and we must recognise the challenges presented by the ongoing paramilitary activity, by Saville and, perhaps, by 2012. There remains the question of who would be responsible for the support of civil powers if—very undesirably—that became necessary. Overall, however, we have made a

huge amount of progress. I wish the Assembly Members well for the days ahead, which, while they may prove challenging, have the potential to be very rewarding.

7.1 pm

The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Paul Goggins): This has been an excellent debate—which is highly appropriate, given that this is the last occasion on which we will debate Northern Ireland policing and criminal justice on the Floor of the House.

I am delighted that we were joined today by the hon. Member for North Down (Lady Hermon). She may remember that back in 2003, when I was a Home Office Minister, she and I served together on a Committee that was considering a piece of criminal justice legislation. She kept asking me “Why cannot this provision be extended to Northern Ireland?”, and I kept replying “That is a matter for Northern Ireland Ministers.” Of course, when I became a Northern Ireland Minister, that excuse was no longer possible—and no Minister in this Parliament can use it now, because such matters are to be devolved to a local Justice Minister and to the Northern Ireland Assembly.

The three orders that we have considered represent a milestone in the long journey from conflict to peace, from a divided society to a shared future. My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State rightly paid tribute to those who deserve it most—Northern Ireland’s own politicians—for the leadership that they have shown, and the increasing political maturity that they demonstrate day by day. Now, even when there is disagreement, they can work through it together.

No one exemplifies that better than my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan), who always makes clear his disagreements—when he has them—about such issues as the appointment of the Minister and the interface with national security, but none the less shows his clear and unequivocal support for the progress that we are making. He rightly said that we should not make perfection an obstacle to progress, and I welcome his support for the progress that we are making.

There are many prizes for devolution. First, there is the not inconsiderable prize mentioned by the right hon. Member for Belfast, East (Mr. Robinson): the £800 million of extra resources, which, although hard won, is much needed and deserved. We are confident that it will be invested wisely. Secondly, there is the welcome prospect of an Executive working more effectively for the people whom they are there to serve, fully joined up across Government. Thirdly, there is the restoration of confidence in the political institutions of Northern Ireland after years of fracture and undermining by dissident elements.

Fourthly and crucially, there is the prospect of isolating the dissident element in Northern Ireland—the element that still seeks to attack and murder police officers and still wants to take Northern Ireland backwards, although the vast majority of people there want to move forward. The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley (Mr. Donaldson) reminded us of events that have happened even in recent days, but there is a clear determination in all political parties and all sections of the community, and there is no going back. The completion of devolution is capable of isolating the small number of individuals who persist in such actions.

The hon. Members for North Shropshire (Mr. Paterson) and for Tewkesbury (Mr. Robertson) rightly condemned those dissident elements and their activities. I join the hon. Member for North Shropshire in sending good wishes to Peadar Heffron as he recovers from his dreadful injuries inflicted by dissident attackers. His personal strength and the determination of his family stand in marked contrast to the cowardly conduct of those who attacked him.

The hon. Gentleman asked about the role of the Secretary of State in the future, beyond the devolution of policing and justice powers. The Secretary of State will remain the primary point of contact between the devolved Administration and central Government, and will be responsible for fostering good relations between the devolved institutions and central Government. However, he will have no role in determining the arrangements for the Department of Justice or the appointment of a Minister beyond 2012. That is a matter for the local parties and the Assembly to consider.

The Secretary of State has presented these orders with absolute confidence that the Assembly will be capable of determining the issues for themselves—the right hon. Member for Belfast, East underlined that—and that it will be possible in the coming months to learn lessons that can be deployed in decisions made after 2012. As I have said, these are matters for the Assembly, but we have every confidence that it will resolve them.

My hon. Friend the Member for Foyle predicted that, once again, he and I would disagree about certain issues. He talked of the interface between issues that will remain the responsibility of central Government and those that will be devolved. I do not deny for a minute that that interface needs to be dealt with extremely carefully, but I believe that it can be managed. Let me return my hon. Friend to the scene from the Clouseau film that he mentioned. The importance of the protocols is that we know precisely whose dog we are talking about, and what responsibility that particular dog has.

Mark Durkan *rose*—

Paul Goggins: I am more than happy to give way to my hon. Friend.

Mark Durkan: We published a number of concordats and protocols relating to these measures, including one on the independence of the judiciary and another on the independence of the Public Prosecution Service. Let me remind the Minister of a statement made on 13 December 2006 by the then Secretary of State, the right hon. Member for Neath (Mr. Hain), about the question of the issue of certificates for no-jury trials by the Director of Public Prosecutions. The right hon. Gentleman said:

“if the DPP judges that there is a risk to the safe administration of justice because of information that he has received, the source of which is a matter for national security in terms of intelligence and so on, he is entitled to go to the judge and say, ‘This is a certificate for a juryless trial.’ I am not trying to suggest anything else, anything more or anything less than that.”—[*Official Report*, 13 December 2006; Vol. 454, c. 903.]

Matters that are surely perfectly plain—the independence of the judiciary and the independence of the DPP—are clearly qualified, in that strings can be pulled when there are national security and intelligence considerations.

Paul Goggins: It is rather simpler than that. Three of the four criteria on the basis of which the DPP decides whether to issue a certificate are related to proscribed organisations and therefore to terrorist matters, which are excepted. It is clear that the DPP must consider issuing a certificate in those circumstances. Matters relating to terrorism must remain excepted.

I am sure that my hon. Friend will recognise the progress that we are making in this regard. He will recall that in the 1980s, more than 200 juryless trials took place each year. In 2007-08, 29 certificates were issued, and in 2008-09 only 13 were issued. We are moving in entirely the right direction, and, as my hon. Friend knows, I have promised a comprehensive review of the powers in the Justice and Security (Northern Ireland) Act 2007 before any decision is made about the renewal of those powers to allow trials without juries. I believe that it has been necessary over the course of this year and last year to retain that power, but I hope, like he does, that at some point it will be possible to remove those powers altogether, so that every trial is a trial by jury. When that happens we really will know that we have moved forward into a more peaceful future.

My hon. Friend the Member for Foyle also talked, as he does, about intelligence policing, and I wish to set the record straight about that. The PSNI remains responsible for all policing in Northern Ireland, and it is accountable to the Policing Board and subject to the scrutiny of the police ombudsman. All the intelligence gathered by the Security Service in Northern Ireland is fully transparent before the PSNI, and rightly so. I see, day in, day out, that that relationship works and saves lives, and it will continue to save lives beyond the date of devolution. I believe that everybody in this House should support that effort. If the Chief Constable requires additional military support—this was another issue that was mentioned—he can, of course, request it through the Secretary of State. However, the Chief Constable has made it absolutely clear that his preference is for mutual aid from other police services. Again, I think that that is a normalisation measure and a step in the right direction.

The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley mentioned two matters that are not being devolved. The first one he mentioned was the powers under the 50:50 arrangement, and I acknowledge again his strength of feeling, and that of his colleagues, on that issue. We stand on the threshold of the 30 per cent. target being achieved—we hope that that will happen by March next year—and we have just renewed the powers to facilitate that objective. I just put it to him that, despite all the differences that we have, reaching that 30 per cent. target has been fundamental to building confidence in policing among all sections of the community. That confidence in policing has been crucial to the political progress that we have been able to make.

Mr. Donaldson: The Minister and I both served on the Standing Committee that considered the order to renew the legislation, so he knows that I caused a Division and voted against. Will he again confirm to the House that in the event of the 30 per cent. target being reached within the year the Government will come back to the House at that point and rescind the legislation?

Paul Goggins: I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for reminding me of the commitment I made in Committee, and I am happy to repeat here that if the 30 per cent. target is reached before March next year Ministers will come back to rescind those special provisions. The target was 30 per cent. and as soon as it is reached we shall be happy to disapply those special arrangements, and we would then proceed in the normal way on recruitment.

The right hon. Gentleman also mentioned parading, the responsibility for which we anticipate will be devolved at the appropriate time. I acknowledge all the work that has been done and he has played a huge role in taking that work forward in very short order. I hope that in due course the Assembly will make the request for this matter to be transferred, and it is something that we stand ready to do at the appropriate time—I think that he understands that. He also made a very important point about the role of the Assembly committee, which will of course have a wider remit, examining not only policing, but prisons, the Youth Justice Agency, the probation service and criminal justice policy, and many other things. He is right to make the distinction as to who is accountable to whom. The committee in the Assembly will hold the Minister to account, and the Policing Board holds the Chief Constable to account. That is the appropriate set of arrangements, and I know that the hon. Member for North Down also makes that point clearly and strongly.

The central truth of all this is that devolving policing and criminal justice powers means that we really do have joined-up government in Northern Ireland. The hon. Member for Orkney and Shetland (Mr. Carmichael) made the point that that is the key goal—I believe he said it was the “key prize”—and I can see a number of ways in which this will really move things forward. If the politicians in Northern Ireland are developing a resettlement strategy to reduce reoffending rates, they can do so more effectively when prisons and probation are joined up with health, employment services, housing services and so on. The big prize is that when devolution is completed the whole effort of government can be absolutely focused on young people, particularly those in hard-pressed areas, in order to give them a vision of something different, a way forward and a way out of antisocial behaviour or even worse. These are real prizes of devolution, and I know from listening to the debates of local politicians that they are very eager to grasp and move forward with them.

The hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) demonstrated again his keen and long-standing interest in constitutional issues, and he reminded us of some of the history. We were all rather relieved that the violence and tumult to which he referred were not so evident in the Chamber tonight, despite the comments made by the right hon. Member for North Antrim (Rev. Ian Paisley) about his feelings towards certain previous Secretaries of State—I shall come to those in a moment.

May I thank the right hon. Member for Belfast, East on behalf of the whole House for the efforts he made to get here tonight, having had First Minister's questions in the Assembly this afternoon? I congratulate him, the Deputy First Minister and all his colleagues on what is being achieved. The focus in the right hon. Gentleman's speech was on a Northern Ireland beyond sectarianism, and the whole House supports him in that aim, vision

and objective. I know that he understands—he made this clear in his speech—that when policing and criminal justice is lined up with the rest of government it is more possible to deliver the vision about which he spoke.

I turn now to two stalwarts of this House who made tremendous speeches this evening, the first of whom was the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Sir Patrick Cormack). As is his custom, he paid tribute to a great many people in his speech, but I wish to pay a huge tribute to him for all that he has done. He has remained deeply committed to the Committee that he has chaired so admirably in recent years. I know from my own personal experience that he has wise words of criticism, which are usually gently delivered, but effectively so, as well as huge warm encouragement to offer to Ministers, to other Members and to members of his Committee in order to achieve the big prize of trying to make progress. I thank him personally for the encouragement that he has offered me, and I know that I speak for others here too. He is a truly even-handed Chair of the Select Committee, and I thank him for all that he has done. He will be a great loss to this House, but we all wish him well for the future.

I turn now to the right hon. Member for North Antrim, about whom much has been said over the many years of what the right hon. Member for Belfast, East described as a “colourful” career. I think that we would all join in that opinion. Irrespective of whatever has been written about him, I have always found him in this place to be unfailingly courteous, kind, thoughtful, generous and deeply spiritual. Those things are the hallmark of the right hon. Member for North Antrim, who is right to say that there is no reason why people of strong views cannot live together if they can find common ground and work on the issues that separate them so that they can move forward together. His leadership has been crucial to the progress that is now being made in Northern Ireland. I remember his speech at St. Andrews—that crucial moment in the step forward to peace and progress in Northern Ireland—when he said that it was necessary to take the step for the sake of the children. Every time he speaks, he speaks about the future and the future for those children, and he does so in a heartfelt way. I wish to thank him for his contribution to this House and to political progress in Northern Ireland, and for what he has done to improve the prospects for people in Northern Ireland. He will, in the end, be remembered as the man who ultimately said yes.

I detect consensus in this place this evening, and that consensus has been vital in bringing us to this point, where we are on the eve of devolving policing and justice powers. The consensus has been in place here and outside this place. In particular, it was a consensus that many of us felt last week when we visited the United States. Successive Presidents—Presidents Clinton, Bush and Obama—have all been involved and all been supportive in this process, as has Secretary of State Clinton, and they have all put real effort, time and support into the efforts of Northern Ireland’s politicians. The right hon. Member for Lagan Valley reminded us of the hurt and pain that people still experience and the uncertainty that it has brought with it. The encouragement and the partnership in this place and beyond this place have, I think, been important.

It is very important that that sense of support and solidarity remains in place. Devolution means full empowerment; it does not mean isolation.

Mark Durkan: Will the Minister give way?

Paul Goggins: Devolving policing and justice powers means that Northern Ireland’s politicians can really get on now, delivering peace and prosperity and building a better future for the people of Northern Ireland.

Mark Durkan *rose*—

Paul Goggins: I am sorry; I did not hear my hon. Friend. I am happy to give way.

Mark Durkan: I thank the Minister for giving way. In the context of his reference to people still suffering pain and hurt, will he acknowledge that there is a family in my constituency who are grieving as a result of a recent murder by the Real IRA? They have serious questions about MI5’s involvement in the background to that murder—the interest to which it was subjecting that young man, the surveillance and the attention that it was giving him—and they are left believing that MI5 knows more about his murder than has been disclosed. I know that the family got the opportunity to talk to the Secretary of State, too. This is a very real issue in that context. Does the Minister acknowledge that and how does he see it being addressed? What assurances can he give that family?

Paul Goggins: First, I did not mean any discourtesy to my hon. Friend or to his constituents in not taking his intervention at first—I was not aware that he was seeking to make it. In the end, the devolution of policing and justice is about isolating those who would carry out such a dreadful deed. I bitterly regret the attack that was carried out on his constituent and I understand the distress and hurt that have been caused by that. If he wishes to pursue the issue with me beyond the debate I will be more than happy so to do—he knows that—and if there are things that I can do to support him and his constituents, I will be happy to do them. I can reassure him that the police are investigating that vile murder. If there are views that the family want to bring to my attention, I ask him please to encourage them to do so. I would be happy to meet him and to discuss that further.

I had concluded my speech, but let me say again that I wish all the politicians of Northern Ireland well in building that peaceful, prosperous future for which so many have worked so very hard.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved,

That the draft Northern Ireland Court Service (Abolition and Transfer of Functions) Order (Northern Ireland) 2010, which was laid before this House on 10 March, be approved.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Resolved,

That the draft Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Devolution of Policing and Justice Functions) Order 2010, which was laid before this House on 10 March, be approved.—(*Mr. Blizzard.*)

Resolved,

That the draft Northern Ireland Act 1998 (Amendment of Schedule 3) Order 2010, which was laid before this House on 10 March, be approved.—(*Mr. Blizzard.*)

ADJOURNMENT (EASTER)

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 25),

That this House, at its rising on Tuesday 30 March 2010, do adjourn till Tuesday 6 April 2010.—(*Mr. Blizzard.*)

Question agreed to.

CHILD POVERTY BILL (PROGRAMME) (NO. 2)

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

That the following provisions shall apply to the Child Poverty Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Order of 20 July 2009 in the last Session of Parliament (Child Poverty Bill (Programme)):

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement at this day's sitting.

Subsequent stages

2. Any further Message from the Lords may be considered forthwith without any Question being put.

3. The proceedings on any further Message from the Lords shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion one hour after their commencement.—(*Mr. Blizzard.*)

Question agreed to.

Child Poverty Bill*Consideration of Lords amendments*

7.23 pm

The Financial Secretary to the Treasury (Mr. Stephen Timms): I beg to move, That this House agrees with Lords amendment 1.

Mr. Deputy Speaker (Sir Alan Haselhurst): With this is will be convenient to take Lords amendments 2 to 12, 14, 15 and 19 to 21.

Mr. Timms: Let me take the opportunity to thank hon. Members in this House and noble Lords in another place for their contribution to the passage of this groundbreaking Bill. It aims to drive the lasting eradication of child poverty and establishes a framework for accountability by requiring annual reports to be made to Parliament on action taken on the Government's child poverty strategy.

Members of this House and peers in another place agreed that progress against the 2010 target to halve child poverty should be reported clearly and as part of the Bill. The Government accepted that proposal and Lords amendment 1 therefore requires the Government to make a report to Parliament on the 2010 target. The report must be made as soon as reasonably practicable after the end of the 2010 target year and in any event not later than 30 June 2012.

Lords amendments 2, 3 and 4 add to or clarify the policy areas that must be considered by the Secretary of State when preparing a child poverty strategy. There was wide agreement that the strategy should include a measure on support for parents, to increase their capacity to support their children's development. That is reflected in Lords amendment 2. Lords amendment 3 recognises the importance of addressing mental health in tackling child poverty. Lords amendment 4 ensures that the Secretary of State, in preparing a UK strategy, will not only focus on those children who are easy to lift above the poverty line, but consider those children whose disadvantage is greatest.

Hon. Members in this House and peers in another place agreed that there should be a direct requirement to consult children when preparing child poverty strategies. Lords amendments 5, 6 and 7 ensure that there is an explicit requirement for the Secretary of State, the devolved Administrations and local authorities to consult children and organisations working with them, as they see fit, when drawing up strategies.

Members of the other place also argued, rightly in my view, that consultation should be extended to parents, whose views should inform the development of the child poverty strategies, so Lords amendments 8, 11 and 12 place a duty on the Secretary of State, the devolved Administrations and local authorities to consult parents directly and to consult the organisations working with or representing them, as they see fit, when preparing their strategies.

Mr. William Cash (Stone) (Con): In the context of the proposals to introduce these measures on child poverty, does the Minister accept that a child can be in poverty not merely because of the criteria set out in clause 24, which relate to this provision, but because of the fact that there might be degraded circumstances in

which the moral force and moral environment of the family in question induces it? It is not just socio-economic; it is also about the question of how they are brought up and the manner in which the child is treated, as we have found so often with these terrible tragic cases that have led to deaths in many instances.

Mr. Timms: The hon. Gentleman is right, of course, that all kinds of disadvantage can affect children. As the Bill makes clear, the child poverty strategy that the Government will draw up needs a broad base. The partnerships of local organisations that address it also need to be broad. In the end, poverty is about income and that is why the targets in this Bill are set and drawn in the way in which they are. There is a shared determination across the House, which has been reflected in the debates on this measure, to reduce the incidence of child poverty and of low income, which causes it.

John Howell (Henley) (Con): I am very interested in what the Minister has just said. Does he not accept that Lords amendments 1 to 4, in particular, take us back to what we argued for in Committee—that is, to an emphasis on the causes of poverty and not just on the financial amounts that are given?

Mr. Timms: We are all concerned about the causes of poverty. It is certainly true that in some respects—particularly, for example, as regards the amendment on the 2010 target—the Government have accepted what the hon. Gentleman and his hon. Friends were arguing for, and a report will be produced specifically on that target. However, I certainly would not agree with him that it was simply Conservative Members who were concerned about the causes of poverty. That concern was widely shared.

There were concerns in the other place that the Bill did not give enough recognition to the needs of “family and friends carers” who might look after a child full time but who do not have parental responsibilities. Lords amendment 14 extends the definition of parent to cover those who do not have parental responsibility but who are caring for children who live with them. The new definition, in conjunction with the provisions in clause 9, means that the Secretary of State must, when preparing a UK strategy, consider measures aimed at all persons who have parental responsibility for a child or who have a child living with them, including “family and friends carers”.

Lords amendments 9 and 10 remove the definitions of “parent” and “parental responsibility” from clause 17. Lords amendments 14 and 15 move the revised definition of “parent” and the existing definition of “parental responsibility” into part 3, thus ensuring that the widened definition of “parent” applies to the whole Bill and not just to part 1. The requirement for local authorities to consult parents, in Lords amendment 12, will apply the new, wider definition of “parent”.

7.30 pm

Finally, Members of another place argued that the independence and effectiveness of the commission would be strengthened by permitting it, rather than the Secretary of State, to choose a deputy chair from among its members. We were persuaded that Lords amendment 19 would give the commission greater scope to regulate its affairs in the most efficient and effective way.

I hope that I have explained the amendments sufficiently, and I am grateful to those across the House and the other place who have supported the aims of the Bill and worked hard to achieve what is before us. I hope also that the House will be happy to agree to the amendments.

Andrew Selous (South-West Bedfordshire) (Con): It is a pleasure to be back debating this important Bill, which has, as the Minister rightly says, enjoyed cross-party support. We have had useful debates on it, and I believe that the amendments agreed in the other place make what was a good Bill even better. The Conservatives are certainly pleased to welcome the amendments, and I was pleased by the spirit in which the Minister addressed his remarks.

Let me go through the amendments. As my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) has pointed out, we are particularly pleased that the 2010 target has been inserted in the new first clause of the Bill. My hon. Friend the Member for South-West Hertfordshire (Mr. Gauke) proposed the same clause in Committee on 3 November 2009, but it did not find favour at that time, as the two Ministers currently on the Treasury Bench—the Financial Secretary to the Treasury and the Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, the hon. Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman)—were not happy to support it at that stage. That change matters because, sadly, early progress on reversing child poverty has not been maintained since 2004-05. The report that will be produced on the 2010 target will provide an important opportunity to take stock and see what new approaches could be tried to ensure that progress does not continue to slip back and that further progress can be made on reducing the number of children in poverty.

I am particularly pleased that amendment 2 on promoting parenting skills has been made. Again, I tabled a similar amendment in Committee—amendment 2 to clause 8—which was aimed at strengthening family relationships in order to reduce family breakdown, as well as having other aims. I hope that due attention will be paid to the provision of parenting skills. The research of academics such as Cowan and Cowan at the university of Berkeley in California, who gave a very informative presentation in the House not long ago, has shown quite conclusively that parenting work is even more effective if it is combined with work to strengthen the relationship between parents, where that relationship still exists. That is a welcome change.

Mr. Cash: Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to take part in the Committee. May I follow up my earlier intervention by asking my hon. Friend whether some reference to the circumstances in which children find themselves when there is moral deprivation in a household could have been included? Does he regard parenting skills as including trying to teach children the difference between right and wrong? In other words, the fact that they do not have money does not necessarily mean that they do not have happiness.

Andrew Selous: I thank my hon. Friend for that intervention. He touches on an important point regarding the causes of poverty, which are very complex. A central point that my hon. Friends and I have raised throughout the Bill's progress through both Houses has been about

[*Andrew Selous*]

paying due attention to the full range of those causes and particularly to making sure that the cycle of intergenerational poverty does not repeat itself. The elements that my hon. Friend has raised are important, and I am grateful to him for putting them on the record.

Bob Spink (Castle Point) (Ind): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his efforts to improve the Bill, which was always a good Bill. Is he satisfied that there is sufficient focus in the amended Bill on giving more power to the wider family in dealing with related issues? When I talk about the wider family, I include grandparents, aunts and uncles.

Andrew Selous: I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for raising that useful point. I shall speak shortly about the measures in the Bill on kinship care—the friends and family provisions—which go some way towards addressing the issues he raises. His point is also well made because we need to consider the wider context within which children grow up. Family—both nuclear and extended—is very important within that.

Returning to amendment 2, the inclusion of the amendment and the words “parenting skills” in the Bill go some way towards providing recognition for what I call the vanished eighth building block from the “Ending child poverty: making it happen” document that the Government’s child poverty unit produced last year. The building block of family was clearly in the document but seemed to escape clause 8. The inclusion of parenting skills in the Bill is important. That is not all that we need to do in this area, but its inclusion is very welcome, none the less.

I am also delighted that mental health has been included, through amendment 3. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr. Stuart) for having played an important and useful role in Committee. He valiantly attempted to get recognition for mental health in the Bill on 3 November 2009 with his amendment 62, which hon. Members can read in column 292 of the Committee’s proceedings. The amendment was defeated by only one vote, so it nearly succeeded, and we had cross-party support on it. I am pleased that mental health is now included, as it is an important issue, which, for many families, must be addressed before they can move themselves out of poverty.

Lords amendment 4, on recognising the vulnerability of specific groups, is particularly important and welcome. We discussed that issue in Committee on 29 October when we debated amendment 2, which can be seen at column 213 of the Committee’s proceedings. I spoke about the issues that affect families with disabilities, who have particular needs, and I mentioned the needs of certain ethnic minority communities, such as the Bangladeshi community in London, in which there are particular problems. The recognition of vulnerable groups is useful. We need to recognise that we cannot have a one-size-fits-all strategy, and that certain groups will need particular focus, attention and outreach work. There are non-governmental organisations and others with particular expertise in this area.

I was at a seminar on child poverty this morning at which I heard about some work done by Save the Children, again with Bangladeshi women in London. The work had been especially useful and real progress

had been made, and I commend it to the child poverty unit. It is worth the unit looking into that work further when it considers vulnerable groups, which, as I have said, are an important and useful addition on the face of the Bill.

John Howell: Like my hon. Friend, I welcome Lords amendment 4 and its focus on those most at risk. However, does he share my concern that we do not have any criteria for understanding how to decide who are most at risk? Does he agree that that decision can be made only by looking at the causes of poverty, rather than simply using fractions of income between different groups? The change is welcome, but we need to understand how Ministers will make the decision.

Andrew Selous: As always, my hon. Friend makes a good and important point. He will know that I have continually raised the issue of how we deal with the causes of poverty, and with the strict income requirements that the Minister quite rightly raised. My hon. Friend is right that progress has been made, and that there has been some recognition at least that vulnerable groups should be addressed on the face of the Bill, but he is also right to say that the Bill does not specify which groups are vulnerable. Further work will need to be done in that regard, and it will be up to the Secretary of State and the child poverty commission to start answering the questions that my hon. Friend has quote properly raised.

Lords amendment 5 deals with how we can ensure that parents of children living in poverty, and the children themselves, are consulted as part of the work of the Secretary of State and the CPC. That is a very important amendment, and I was pleased to vote for what was amendment 56 when it was brought before the Committee. I am sorry that it was defeated at that time, but I am very pleased that the Bill has come back to us with this requirement to consult parents and children living in poverty.

What that makes clear is that consultation by expert proxy is not acceptable, in any walk of life. We should welcome consulting directly the people for whom we are trying to provide services and at whom legislation is directed. There is a lot of evidence to show that consulting people who are to be helped by legislation early enough—especially at a commissioning level—brings many advantages. For example, I learned last week that better social care for disabled children can be achieved at a lower cost if the consultation is done properly and carried out early enough, particularly at the commissioning level. There are advantages all round when that approach is taken, so the amendment is a very welcome addition.

The amendments on care provided by family and friends, or kinship care, are tremendously important, and I am very pleased indeed to see them added to face of the Bill as it comes back from the other place. We debated those issues in Committee, and to their credit Ministers committed to go away and look at this area. I am very pleased that the Government have agreed to the amendments.

These amendments recognise the vital work done by really important groups of people in looking after vulnerable children in poverty. The work often requires significant personal commitment, and it is absolutely right that there is recognition on the face of the Bill of what these people do. That is particularly important, as

there is evidence that the results for children who are looked after by carers who are family and friends are often superior to those placed in other categories.

There are questions about local authorities' policies when it comes to placing children with friends and family carers, given that the evidence seems to suggest that that approach secures better outcomes. It is important that those people are recognised. The role of grandparents was raised earlier, and is particularly important in that regard. As I said, the amendments are very welcome for all those reasons.

7.45 pm

Finally, Lords amendment 19 gives the CPC the ability to appoint its own deputy chair. I think that this is a welcome change, as it gives the commission a degree of independence in regulating its affairs. It is therefore a useful addition to the Bill.

Steve Webb (Northavon) (LD): Like both speakers so far in this debate, I welcome this group of amendments that their Lordships have put before us today. I am also pleased that the Government have accepted them and are not opposing them.

Many of the points that I want to make have been made already, including the importance of consulting the children directly. I am grateful to the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) for highlighting my amendment to that effect, which he was kind enough to support. However, I do wonder slightly why what was a bad idea in November is now a good one in March and April. It would be terribly churlish of me to complain when an idea that we supported is accepted by the Government, but it raises an issue in my mind about the point of the Committee stage.

The Minister has accepted that these are fairly good ideas, but it is a little frustrating when ideas that are put forward in a moderate way and with a broad degree of consensus are rejected almost for the sake of it. I hope that the Minister will reflect on that in the next term of Government that he serves, and that he will perhaps be a bit more responsive to future amendments.

I welcome the recognition of the role of grandparents and other carers, and Grandparents Plus and other organisations have done a great job in raising our awareness of these issues. I know that they will look forward to ongoing discussion with the Government and local authorities about how the amendments are implemented in future.

I reflected on why the Conservatives were so enthusiastic about the 2010 target and the associated report. I assumed that they hope that some putative future Conservative Administration will be able to use the report to use as something to beat what they hope will then be the Opposition with. The Conservatives are unlikely to be doing so well on child poverty themselves by that point, so they will at least want to be able to say that the other lot were worse—

Andrew Selous: That is churlish.

Steve Webb: The hon. Gentleman says that that is churlish, but it would be nice to think that the 2010 report will not be entirely backward looking. However, I fear that that 2010 target will be missed. Although it would be nice to think that there will be announcements on Wednesday to put us back on track, I fear that there will not be and that it may be too late for that.

The report must not say merely that the target was missed because not enough money was spent, or whatever. It must give us lessons to learn over the following decade, so that we can get back on track. I hope that whoever is in government after the election will not see the report simply as an opportunity to score points about the record of the previous Administration. The interim target looks likely to have been missed, and the next Government must see the report as something from which we can learn, so that future targets are not missed.

I very much welcome the wide range of issues touched on in the amendments, especially the direct consultation with children and not just their representatives, and the involvement of wider care networks. Therefore, I shall encourage my colleagues to support the amendments.

John Howell: It was a great pleasure to serve on the Bill Committee, and it would be a little churlish to attack the amendments before us today, or to point out the negative elements of some of them. They are very welcome, but I echo the point made by the hon. Member for Northavon (Steve Webb), to the effect that it needs the other place to introduce the same amendments that we tabled in Committee to get them through. That goes to the heart of the purpose of the Committee stage in this place.

This is a better Bill as a result of the changes that have been made, and I want to pick up on a couple of points to do with the first four amendments in this group. I am very pleased that the 2010 target has been included in the Bill, and it is worth reflecting on a couple of points that my noble Friend Lord Freud made in the other place. He pointed out that the 2004 turndown was still not fully explicable, and said that there was therefore a need for the report to put the various economic factors involved into context. He was of the opinion that that would inevitably highlight the differences between those that occurred, positively or negatively, simply because of income transfers and those that occurred because issues that were at the root of tackling child poverty had been dealt with. I hope that that report will do justice to distinguishing between them. Without that, it will not be possible to learn the lessons that ought to be learned from the report. It is a shame that the Government continually confused the need for that report with the report set out in clause 8. They are very different, and I am glad that that has been recognised.

In amendment 2, I welcome the addition of improving parenting skills and promoting parental support. However, that leaves the Bill slightly unbalanced. We wanted to include a number of other factors that would indicate the causes of poverty that need to be tackled. I am glad that parental support and skills have been added, but that does not take away from the need to look at other factors. It would have been more useful to adopt the broader approach for which my hon. Friends and I argued in Committee.

Like others, I am extremely grateful to my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr. Stuart) for pursuing the important issue of mental health. In the other place Baroness Butler-Sloss summed it up well by saying:

“The mental health of children, especially children in socio-economically disadvantaged households . . . requires careful attention.”—[*Official Report, House of Lords*, 9 March 2010; Vol. 718, c. 200.]

[John Howell]

There are two disadvantages there, neither of which is necessarily immediately recognisable, and they may take some effort to identify.

Finally, with the focus of amendment 4 on those at most risk, it would be useful to hear from the Minister how those groups that are considered to be most at risk are to be decided. I appreciate that at this stage there may not be detailed plans for taking that forward, but we need an indication of how the most vulnerable are to be assessed.

All in all, I welcome the amendments. There is a sense of déjà vu about many of them, but they are no worse for that, as they came from a good stable, if I may mix my metaphors horribly. I am pleased that the emphasis has been put back on tackling the causes of poverty, rather than looking simply at income.

Mr. Cash: I shall follow what my hon. Friend the Member for Henley (John Howell) said about causes, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr. Stuart) on insisting upon mental health being included in the provisions. Although I support the Bill and its objectives and do not doubt that it was discussed with enormous diligence in Committee, it seems to me as one entering the discussion at this stage that there is a problem in imposing duties to produce consequences that are driven by socio-economic statistical arguments.

For example, the Secretary of State is required to consider the needs of the most vulnerable groups of children when preparing a UK strategy. Under amendment 4, the Secretary of State

“must consider which groups of children in the United Kingdom appear to be disproportionately affected by socio-economic disadvantage”.

I get slightly worried when I hear such language. It attempts to achieve a worthy objective, which we would all strongly support, but it could produce an enormous amount of time-consuming additional form-filling, regulations and analysis.

The heart of the child poverty issue is not necessarily, though it could be, a lack of money or any of the criteria set out in the Bill. There is also the problem of children being exposed, for example, to social networking facilities—[*Interruption.*] I can see some discussion going on, which is a little distracting. It is important to make sure that children are brought up in an environment in which they can tell the difference between right and wrong. That is a spiritual and moral objective, which is not included in the Bill.

John Mason (Glasgow, East) (SNP): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that he is rather over-stressing the point? To most people, the words “poverty” and “lack of income” are closely linked. That is the main issue, although there may be other issues as well.

Mr. Cash: I do not disagree with that at all. I am merely saying that in the Bill there seems to be a lack of awareness of the moral dimension, which I believe is necessary. Furthermore, the language of the Bill is largely based on statistics and socio-economic analysis, rather than on the kind of objectives from which we all

assume that children and young people in poverty would benefit as a result of being brought up properly. It is quite simple.

Mr. Timms: With the leave of the House, I welcome the support for the amendments that has been expressed across the House. Let me respond to some of the points that have been raised.

The hon. Member for Henley (John Howell), who made a valuable contribution in Committee, asked how we would define the groups referred to in amendment 4. It is envisaged that those groups would be identified through careful analysis of the data on households below average income. On that basis, an assessment would be made about which groups should be examined most closely.

The hon. Gentleman and the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) made fair points about what might appear to be a Government concession on the report about the 2010 target. The amendment that we considered in Committee required that a report on the 2010 target be produced within three months of Royal Assent. That would not be possible because the data would not be available till some time after that. The amendment before us is different and it works. Nevertheless, I would not wish—to pick up one of the words frequently used so far in the debate—to be churlish about the change that has been made.

May I say to the hon. Member for Stone (Mr. Cash) that there is a variety of forms of disadvantage? That is right, and one could talk about many different kinds of disadvantage that children can suffer. The Bill, however, is about child poverty, and poverty is about a lack of money. I remember times when Conservative Members would have been reluctant to talk about poverty in those terms. I welcome the progress that has been made, and the fact that across the House we are able to talk seriously about poverty and recognise that lack of money is a problem. That is what the Bill is about, and it is right that we should legislate for that in this way. I am grateful to all those who spoke.

Mr. Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): I welcome the change of heart on mental health. Will the Minister share with the House the rationale for the Government’s change of position on that?

Mr. Timms: I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman for the move that he made in Committee, which we did, indeed, resist. There was a good debate on the topic in the other place and, for reasons that I entirely support, my noble Friend Lord McKenzie of Luton was persuaded that it would be right to make that factor explicit in the Bill. This was one instance in which the hon. Gentleman did not overstate his case, and I am glad that we have been able to accept it.

Lords amendment 1 agreed to.

Lords amendments 2 to 12 agreed to.

8 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Helen Goodman): I beg to move, That this House agrees with Lords amendment 13.

Mr. Deputy Speaker: With this it will be convenient to discuss Lords amendments 16 to 18.

Helen Goodman: Lords amendments 13 and 16 to 18 would make the legislative changes necessary to implement the announcement that the Chancellor of the Exchequer made in his December pre-Budget report to extend eligibility for free school meals to primary school pupils in England in working families with an income of up to £16,190 from September 2010. The extension will be phased in for up to 50 per cent. of pupils from September, with the remaining 50 per cent. of entitled pupils receiving free school meals in September 2011. Extending free school meal entitlement in that way would assist in the reduction of child poverty by supporting low-income families and improving incentives to work. Once fully implemented, it would benefit about 600,000 children and lift more than 50,000 children out of poverty.

Steve Webb: Will the Minister clarify the roll-out process? Will half of local authorities be covered? If not, which 50 per cent. of children will come first? I had not realised that the process would be undertaken in two stages, so will she clarify the phasing?

Helen Goodman: If I could return to that point, I should be able to give the hon. Gentleman a fuller response.

Hon. Members will have noticed that the proposed new clause is headed “Free school lunches and milk”, and they may like to know that this year is the 39th anniversary of Mrs. Thatcher snatching the milk, so I feel particularly privileged to be here tonight moving an amendment that would put that strategy into reverse.

The hon. Gentleman asked why we are rolling out the process only to 50 per cent. of primary pupils in September. The reason is that some schools may need to increase their kitchen and catering capacity, and it also reflects the funding that is available: £85 million has been made available to support the roll-out from September, and further resources will be available from 2011. I accept that I have not fully responded to the hon. Gentleman, and I shall endeavour to return to that point.

Bob Spink: I support the Bill, even though I do not support what the Minister said about Mrs. Thatcher. Does the Minister agree, however, that it is even more important to provide milk and nourishment to children in nursery education? It is probably more important than providing milk to children in primary education, and it would be easy to do. Will she consider that idea at some stage?

Helen Goodman: The hon. Gentleman is right: the earlier we start on such programmes, the better. That is why, for example, we have introduced the health in pregnancy grant, and why milk vouchers are still available for very low-income families. However, I am anxious not to stray beyond the terms of the amendment. The proposals and the PBR announcement were welcomed in the other place, and I urge the House to agree to these Lords amendments.

Andrew Selous: We welcome this group of amendments in relation to free school lunches—and milk, as the Minister has quite rightly pointed out.

The Minister might consider my first question rather underhand and technical, but I ask it at the start of my remarks just to give her time to find inspiration for the

answer. What is the position for children in middle school years 5 and 6 in relation to the proposed provisions? I am not just being technical or awkward, because the whole of Bedfordshire has the middle school system, so it is a relevant question for the county and the area that I represent, as indeed it is for children in the three-tier system, where it exists, throughout the country. I ask that question at the beginning of my remarks to give the Minister time to find an answer to it.

I am grateful to the Minister for her comments in response to the intervention by the hon. Member for Northavon (Steve Webb) about funding, but will she confirm that the funding for those free school lunches and milk would come entirely from local government? I spent some time in the Library earlier today trying to get to the bottom of exactly how the proposal would be funded, because in years gone there has been a tendency for central Government to place requests on local authorities, and a cheque has not always been attached to the second page of the letter. I am not saying that that has happened in this case, but I would be grateful if the Minister were to elaborate on that point.

It is worth putting on the record our recognition of the work of Rev. Paul Nicolson, who gave evidence to the Public Bill Committee on diet and nutrition as regards families in poverty. As Ministers will agree, he has been extremely persistent on that issue, and to good effect, too, so I am very pleased to pay tribute to him.

Has any thought been given to a possible perverse incentive of the measure, welcomed and supported as it is by the Opposition? It relates to the withdrawal of passported benefits when the incomes of parents increase. To illustrate my point, I think in particular of the single mother who came to my surgery a month or so ago, telling me that she was in work but on a fairly low income. I think that she earned about £900 a month, a very low income by any standards. When I discussed the ways in which she could try to earn a bit more, she expressed a very clear reluctance to do so, because she was worried about the withdrawal of her passported benefits.

On the basis of my constituent’s own research and experience of being paid a bit more at previous times in her life, she had clearly identified, and frankly felt, that she would be worse off, so she was happier to stay on a lower income and have the free dental care and other passported benefits, of which free school meals would be a part. Although the measure is welcome, it touches on withdrawal rates in respect of such matters, so I should be grateful to know whether Ministers have given any thought to that. I repeat, however, that the Opposition welcome the measure.

Mr. Graham Stuart: Does my hon. Friend agree that one of the most exciting prospects for an incoming Conservative Government is to tackle the position of so many people who are stuck in poverty? They might be at a higher level than they were when this Government came to power, but none the less the poverty traps remain, and we need fundamental reform, looking very much at the way in which benefit and tax work together to disincentivise people who want to get on and improve their lives and that of their families.

Andrew Selous: As ever, my hon. Friend gets to the heart of the issue, and he makes a very important point. An urgent task for whoever forms the next Government

[Andrew Selous]

will be to ensure that the benefits system incentivises work smoothly at every level of low income—in a way that it does not at the moment. My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise that issue, and he has been absolutely right on so many issues throughout our consideration of the Bill.

Steve Webb: Hitherto we have debated the Schleswig-Holstein question, and tonight we have the Bedfordshire question. I hope, in anticipation of a note from the Official Reporters, that they know how to spell the former, because I certainly do not. The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) rightly asked how middle school pupils will fare. I assume that the cut-off point will be as per that for primary school pupils, but we will wait to see what the answer is.

The intervention by the hon. Member for Beverley and Holderness (Mr. Stuart) was interesting because, in a sense, this is about a contrast between our saying, “Wouldn’t it be nice if this happened?”, and his being about to support, I assume, with the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire, something that makes the problem that he describes worse. That is the paradox, is it not? We all want to do more for low-waged working families, but the distinction that I would make is that between what is known in the jargon as the unemployment trap and the poverty trap. The unemployment trap says, “Is it worth working at all?” and the poverty trap says, “Once you’re working, is it worth working harder?” We are improving the unemployment trap by saying “If you take a low-paid job you keep your free school meals, which you didn’t get previously, so we are helping with that,” but then we say, “Having got into a low-paid job we haven’t incentivised you to do overtime, or to train up, or whatever.” Even under a Conservative Government, those trade-offs would exist.

Mr. Timms: Does the hon. Gentleman recall, as I do, that the number of people facing a 70 per cent. withdrawal rate was a great deal higher under the Conservative Government than it is at the moment?

Steve Webb: I well recall the statistics during the 1980s, when there were rather more people who simply did not find it worth their while to work at all. A lot more has been done as regards in-work support. The unemployment trap is a lot less severe than it used to be, but the in-work poverty trap is more severe, because more help is being given to low-paid families. We are at a different point in the trade-off. The support for free school meals is therefore welcome.

I have a question about take-up. The Minister used a figure of £16,100, which I assume is the cut-off point for working tax credit, or whatever, because there is no figure in the amendments, just a concept. Of course, punters will not have the faintest idea that at £16,000 they get this thing and at £17,000 they do not; and the number will presumably change every year if the thresholds are indexed, and so on. People will say, “How do I, as a low-waged family member on working tax credit, get to know about this? If I’ve been in the system for a long time, I’ll probably find out, but if I move from unemployment into low-paid work and come into the working tax credit system, how do I know that my child

can get free school meals under the provisions of these amendments?” With a lot of these benefits, the theory is great but the reality is that many people do not claim them. I hope that the Minister can give a flavour of the strategy that will be in place to ensure that these entirely welcome rights are actually taken up by those who will benefit from them.

Helen Goodman: With the leave of the House, Mr. Deputy Speaker, I would like to respond to the points that have been made.

The hon. Member for Northavon (Steve Webb) asked about how we were phasing in these measures, and the hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous) asked about the position of children in middle schools. The answer is the same to both of them. Let me explain how the amendment works. We have to make this change to primary legislation, because although it is currently possible to vary entitlement, it is not possible to do so according to the age of the child, so the amendment enables us to vary it in that way. We will introduce this for children in key stage 1 in September 2010 and for those in key stages 1 and 2 in September 2011. I hope that that satisfies both hon. Gentlemen.

The hon. Member for South-West Bedfordshire asked whether the money is coming from local authorities. It is new money that was announced by the Chancellor before Christmas, and the funding goes via the schools budget. I agree with what he said about Rev. Paul Nicolson, who has indeed been assiduous. He was assiduous in lobbying me before I was a member of the Government, and he is still assiduous in telling me his views, day by day, instant by instant, on the development of policy as we go forward.

What we are doing significantly improves incentives for parents. It was precisely because of constituency cases that we were experiencing, with parents coming to us and saying that they were not clear about whether they would be better off by moving into work given the loss of passported benefits when they moved from income support or income-related jobseeker’s allowance, that we wanted to extend the entitlement to free school meals to parents on working tax credits. This involves quite a significant sum of money. I do not know about other hon. Members, but I find that I am giving my children £3 a day for school meals. For someone with two children, that amounts to £30 a week. These are quite chunky sums coming out of people’s budgets.

8.15 pm

Andrew Selous: I take the Minister’s point—she is right that these are significant amounts of money. To use the helpful distinction made by the hon. Member for Northavon, my question was not about the employment trap but the poverty trap. Has any research been done about that within the Department or elsewhere?

Helen Goodman: The calculations that officials have done using the models that we have suggests, as I think that I have said, that this measure will reduce the number of children in child poverty by more than 50,000, so the possibility that the hon. Gentleman raises would not be the case.

The hon. Member for Northavon asked whether we had any measures in the pipeline to encourage take-up, because obviously these things are only worth while if people avail themselves of them. The Department for

Children, Schools and Families has been working with other Government Departments to develop a free school meals eligibility checking system known as “the Hub”, which enables local authorities simultaneously to check data from the Department for Work and Pensions, the Home Office and Her Majesty’s Revenue and Customs to ascertain whether a parent qualifies for free school meals. That system has significantly reduced bureaucracy. It is currently being extended to all parents to allow them to check their own eligibility and to apply online for free school meals. However, I will take away the hon. Gentleman’s point to see whether there is anything further that we can do in that respect.

With those few brief remarks, I ask the House to agree to the amendment.

Lords amendment 13 agreed to.

Lords amendments 14 to 21 agreed to.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Child Benefit Up-rating Order 2010, which was laid before this House on 10 February, be approved.—(*Mr. Blizzard.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Guardian’s Allowance Up-rating (Northern Ireland) Order 2010, which was laid before this House on 10 February, be approved.—(*Mr. Blizzard.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Guardian’s Allowance Up-rating Order 2010, which was laid before this House on 10 February, be approved.—(*Mr. Blizzard.*)

Question agreed to.

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 118(6)),

TAX CREDITS

That the draft Tax Credits Up-rating Regulations 2010, which were laid before this House on 10 February, be approved.—(*Mr. Blizzard.*)

Question agreed to.

FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE TO INDUSTRY

Ordered,

That the Motion in the name of Mr Pat McFadden relating to Financial Assistance to Industry shall be treated as if it related to an instrument subject to the provisions of Standing Order No. 118 (Delegated Legislation Committees) in respect of which notice has been given that the instrument be approved.—(*Mr. Blizzard.*)

Wi-fi (Swindon)

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

8.19 pm

Anne Snelgrove (South Swindon) (Lab): I am pleased to be able to bring this debate to the House, as it covers serious questions about Swindon borough council and its wi-fi scheme. In November 2009, the council announced an initiative with two newly formed Swindon-based businesses, Digital City (UK) and a London-based and Isle of Man-registered company, aQovia. It was an ambitious project that would deliver a limited free internet link to all who signed up, alongside three paid packages aimed at businesses, homes and roving users. A third company, Avidity Consulting, is also involved in the initiative.

I want to ensure that it is understood that the issue under debate today is not wi-fi itself but probity. The debate is about the behaviour of ruling Conservative councillors and, as a consequence of that, the behaviour of officers. It is also about accountability to the public and the lack of effective scrutiny procedures at Swindon borough council.

I am grateful to my constituents, and those of my right hon. Friend the Member for North Swindon (Mr. Wills), who have spent many hours investigating Digital City and its connections with the council. They have provided a good deal of the factual information that I will be putting forward today. I thank Geoff Reid and members of the Talkswindon website, particularly the blogger known as Komadori, and Chris Watts, a local businessman whose involvement came about through his anger at the restrictive practices adopted by the council.

I wish to state clearly at the outset that I support universal internet access, innovation and local councils working with local businesses. However, neither I nor the Government support excessive secrecy, and I believe that Swindon borough council should have been open, transparent and prepared to engage with everyone on these issues. Sadly it has been exactly the opposite.

As the Prime Minister said this morning:

“Super-fast broadband is the electricity of the digital age...it must be for all—not just for some...We have already decided to commit public funding to ensure existing broadband reaches nearly every household in Britain by 2012”.

In his speech, he gave details of how Labour will ensure that super-fast broadband reaches every home in the UK, creating thousands of new jobs in the process. Labour’s plans will see universal access to broadband by 2012, with 90 per cent. of UK households having access to next-generation broadband by 2017.

Labour’s support, and mine, for universal access to high-speed broadband, rather than a two-speed scheme as envisaged by Digital City, should not be doubted. Although that is the major issue, my constituents raise many other issues about the wi-fi project that damage that aspiration in their eyes, such as whether the best technology has been employed, the effect of the council’s secretive deal with a newly established company on other, well established small and medium-sized enterprises in Swindon, and the health implications of a wireless network.

[Anne Snelgrove]

Swindon borough council has provided a loan of £450,000 on commercial terms to Digital City to enable it to create the wi-fi network across Swindon. In return for that loan, the council has received a 40 per cent. equity stake in the company. If the loan is repaid within two years, Avidity Consulting has an option to purchase 5 per cent. of the company's shares from the council for £1. Avidity already has a 25 per cent. stake in the company. The other shareholder is aQovia, which holds the remaining 35 per cent. of the company. Digital City intends to install wireless internet across the entire borough of Swindon. Both Digital City and Avidity Consulting were incorporated on 14 August 2009 as off-the-shelf companies. They became active on 21 and 22 September respectively and thus have a negligible track record. On 13 March 2009, aQovia was incorporated and it appears to have become active on 16 September, and thus it also has a limited track record.

According to a timeline produced for me on 19 March 2010 by the chief executive of the council, for which I am grateful, discussions commenced at officer level at the council on 19 January 2009 involving the instigator of the initiative, Rikki Hunt, and members of aQovia. According to the timeline:

"On 25th June 2009 Rikki Hunt presented an outline proposal to the Leader and various members of the Cabinet; this consisted of the business idea, the level of investment that was being sought and the potential level of return if the Council chose to invest. Subsequently, officers were asked to do some more detailed work in order for a funding proposition to be considered.

3rd - 10th July 2009 a financial plan and written outline business case was received from Rikki Hunt."

Following that, a decision was taken by Rod Bluh, the Conservative leader of the council, to deal with the proposal using a lead member briefing note. Crucially, that confined the formal consultation and decision making to two councillors only—the leader, Councillor Bluh, and the lead member for finance and benefits, Councillor Mark Edwards. Both those councillors subsequently signed a cabinet member briefing note in mid-October, following which officers were able to exercise substantial delegated powers. That meant that the proposals did not have to be discussed in committee at an early stage or voted on by a larger group of councillors.

The immediate consequence was that the councillors could ensure that officers were able to use council powers to the advantage of Digital City and the wi-fi project. For example, an earlier resolution made at full council specifically for rapid action to be taken on town centre regeneration was used to enable the loan of £450,000 to be made, which meant that the loan did not have to go through the normal council processes. The requirement for a credit rating of the companies concerned under treasury management rules was set aside, presumably because the companies were less than a year old and had no substantive credit history. Given the lack of a corporate track record, the decision by Swindon borough council was made

"primarily on the track record of the key individuals concerned and on the basis that risks and rewards would be fairly apportioned", according to the minutes of the council scrutiny meeting on 14 December.

In a letter to me dated 4 March 2010, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Regional Economic Development and Co-ordination detailed the background of EU

procurement directives that set out the legal framework, detailed procedures and criteria for the specification, selection and awarding of contracts above certain thresholds. She stated that

"even below these thresholds, the EU treaty-based principles of nondiscrimination, equal treatment, transparency, mutual recognition and proportionality apply."

She went on to comment that

"in most cases there should be a competitive procurement advertised".

Swindon borough council asserts that because the £450,000 was a loan, it is not subject to the normal procurement rules, despite its own shareholdings in Digital City and place on its board. However, the council is using EU competition rules to prevent our local dial-a-ride from competing for council contracts to carry the disabled, and other councils, including Norfolk county council, have published a tendering process for their wi-fi networks.

The cosiness of the relationships of those involved, and the lack of external scrutiny while they were being set up, should alarm all who are interested in local government probity. At the very least, it calls into question the judgment of those concerned, who should have been well aware that they would be called to account, and that they therefore needed to put extra safeguards in place to protect themselves from suspicion as their roles cross over so many times. At worst, it obfuscates actions which gamble public money in untried companies with inexperienced and naive directors, who had no sustainable business plan and were unprepared to answer serious and searching legitimate questions from other elected members as well as local people.

I shall quote at length from the important timeline that the chief executive of Swindon borough council provided for me—I remind the Minister that the document from which it is taken is dated 19 March 2010. It states, under "conflict of interest":

"It came to light that an officer involved with this project had been registered as a Director of Digital City (UK) Limited since September 2009. He was unaware of this. He had pre-signed but not dated a registration document during the preparatory phase of this project and this was highlighted to colleagues at the time. The signed form was held by Digital City (UK) Limited, on the understanding that this was a contingency measure to be invoked if required and if agreed by the Council. The registration was sent off in error by Digital City (UK) Limited and they have apologised to the officer for this. The officer asked to resign from the Board of the company as soon as this came to light and this was effected on the 11th March 2010. He is no longer a Director of Digital City (UK) Limited. At no time did the officer receive any communication from Digital City (UK) Limited stating that he was a Director of the company nor did he receive any remuneration or any other consideration from Digital City (UK) Limited. There have been no Board Meetings of Digital City (UK) limited. This officer has, however, participated, with other Swindon Borough Council colleagues, in regular project and progress meetings."

I have quoted that at length because it contradicts two other sources of information sent directly to me. The first is a letter to me dated 28 January 2010, again from the chief executive. In response to my question in a letter about the council's involvement in the day-to-day running of Digital City, it states:

"This is an arm's length arrangement; we hold shares in Digital City and there is governance in place that allows us to protect the Council's interests; we have a Director on the Board".

That contradicts the 19 March briefing note to me, which implies no knowledge of the officer's appointment to Digital City's board on 26 September 2009. Despite

the chief executive's reassurances, the officer concerned was one of the authors of the briefing note to Councillors Bluh and Edwards written two weeks after he had become a director on 12 October 2010. The briefing note recommended providing the loan of £450,000 to Digital City and I am sorry to say that his directorship was not disclosed.

The second source of information is a letter from Rikki Hunt dated 2 March 2010. In response to my question about who sits on the board of Digital City, he replied:

"As well as myself, the two other board members are Hitesh Patel, a Director of Swindon Borough Council and Mustafa Arif, a Director of aQovia",

although there is no record at Companies House of Mr Arif being a director. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that officers and councillors referred to the officer's appointment to Digital City's board on several occasions. In addition, the officer himself was clearly aware that he was a director of Digital City, as he apparently self-publicised the fact for five months via his LinkedIn profile. I can conclude only that when it was advantageous for the council to have an officer on the board of Digital City, it publicly claimed that that was so, but as soon as the matter became too hot to handle, it found a way of disposing of the board membership.

Several questions arise about the robustness of Swindon borough council's contract with Digital City.

Bob Spink (Castle Point) (Ind): The hon. Lady is a caring and assiduous constituency Member of Parliament, who works hard for her people in Swindon. Does she feel that the cabinet system that she describes allows a small number of councillors to become cosy and close to senior officers in a council, and that that enables such circumstances to develop, when a more traditional cabinet system would give more councillors more information and prevent such things from happening?

Anne Snelgrove: I understand the hon. Gentleman's concerns. The problem has been the process. I think that sufficient safeguards exist, but the cabinet member brief brought about all the secrecy. That is my concern—it is a very unusual process. The hon. Gentleman gives me an opportunity to say that I have a high regard for the officers and particularly the chief executive of Swindon borough council. I believe that the ruling Conservative group has placed pressure on those officers. Even if all seats are won by opposition parties at the local elections in May, that group will still be in power in Swindon. That is a difficult situation for officers to combat.

As I was saying, a number of questions arise about the robustness of Swindon borough council's contract with Digital City. Does it reflect the council taking on what appears to be 100 per cent. of the risk? That question is relevant if wi-fi does not succeed in attracting sufficient customers in a crowded market, because £450,000 of taxpayers' money will be lost. If wi-fi succeeds, will the contract bring the council sufficient rewards, or does the larger proportion go to the individuals behind the recently set up companies Digital City and aQovia? That should be subject to the council's scrutiny process, but it is impossible for me, my constituents or councillors of any party not involved in that enterprise, including the ruling Tory party, to find out, because the council determines that such questions are for Digital City—not

the council—to answer. Digital City has provided basic information, but it cannot be tested through the normal democratic process, thus disfranchising councillors, MPs and their constituents.

No opposition councillor has had sight of the contract or the business plan, but at the beginning of this month the company had sold only five packages, rather than the 100 private-use packages and 25 business packages in the original loan conditions, and it had not managed to attract any private sector investment. It is clear from the cabinet briefing paper of 10 March 2010 that there had to be a significant downgrading of the original progress measures to allow the council to agree to the release of the second phase of the loan—£150,000.

Although that was agreed by the cabinet, in an unprecedented move last week's scrutiny committee meeting at the council referred the decision back to the next cabinet meeting on 31 March. I sincerely hope that the cabinet does the right thing and delays any further allocation of taxpayers' money until a full cross-party investigation can be carried out into the actions of councillors and officers—I mean an internal investigation, with councillors from the Tories, Labour and Liberal Democrats, and independents, who I am sure would be welcome. The robustness of the business plan and the loan agreement terms also need investigating, as does the lack of a tendering process, which gave an advantage to one company over others.

The technology used by Digital City is a wireless network with signals sent from boxes attached to council-owned lamp posts throughout Swindon. For that, Digital City needs planning permission and an electricity supply for the planned total of 1,400 boxes, which one of my constituents estimates will cost approximately £35,000 per annum. It is not clear whether Digital City or Swindon borough council will bear the cost. That is old technology, and whether it will produce the speeds quoted by Digital City remains to be seen, but there is scepticism that it will consistently provide speeds of 20 megabytes, which are crucial for wide take-up. Those who sign up for free wi-fi will not have access to the fastest speeds, creating the kind of two-tier network that was criticised by the Prime Minister in his speech today.

Digital City relies on Swindon borough council's connections, which I understand must be upgraded to take that into account at a cost of approximately £45,000. Although there is nothing wrong—in fact, it is good—with councils increasing their internet capacity, the issue is one of openness and transparency, because of the cost to taxpayers and the potential commercial gain by Digital City, which is not required to provide expensive infrastructure.

There are many opportunities for IT companies to provide digital access for Swindon homes, and we already have one of the highest take-ups in the country. It is a very crowded marketplace, with some of the largest companies in the country competing with small local businesses: our newest housing estate, Wichelstowe, provides fibre optic connections to all homes for both television and internet access; the Toothill estate in west Swindon is one of BT's pilot areas for comprehensive and very fast fibre optic connection; and an international company with headquarters in Swindon is upgrading its internet signal and considering making free wi-fi available after office hours within a 20-mile radius of its building.

[Anne Snelgrove]

I welcome those initiatives, because they promote social inclusion and ensure a marketplace for my constituents that will keep prices competitive and offer a wide choice.

However, the entry into the marketplace of a council-backed company—effectively, it is publicly subsidised—will have a detrimental effect on small and medium-sized IT companies in Swindon. Several local companies have raised considerable concerns with me, particularly about the lack of opportunity to tender for the business and the loan given to Digital City during the worst recession for many years, when most SMEs were finding it impossible to get loans at a decent rate of interest, especially brand-new companies without a track record. Had Digital City gone instead to a high street bank for a £450,000 loan on the evidence of its business plan and rosey marketing strategy, I imagine it would have been laughed off the premises. The rate of interest on the loan has not been disclosed. As I said, it has been described as a loan on commercial terms.

In addition to the loan, Digital City has been given council premises for its headquarters at no cost to the business, and free access to council officers' time and advice. Councillors and officers claim that the council premises have no value and Digital City would enhance the offices, but that is at odds with the cabinet member briefing note of 12 October 2009, which states:

“The space will be made fit for office occupation and this cost will be met through the existing corporate repair and maintenance budget.”

This is a massive subsidy, as all small businesses will know that start-up office costs are a big initial outlay for new ventures. In addition, the briefing note acknowledges that Digital City will need to install wireless boxes on council-owned lamp posts and states, in advance of any discussion at planning committee:

“The Council will also grant Digital City licences to install equipment at a number of its facilities across the Borough. Discussions are continuing around the possible need for Planning permissions to be granted.”

Again, any business that has had dealings with council planning departments will know what a massive commercial advantage the automatic granting of licences gives, alongside officer help through the planning process if needed.

Swindon borough council, unlike Essex county council, does not have a small loans scheme for local businesses, so there are no opportunities for other SMEs in Swindon to take advantage of a council loan in the way that Digital City has. While Swindon borough council states that the loan is at “commercial rates”, there is no evidence as to what these rates are and how they compare to what was being offered to similar SMEs last year, when interest rates averaging 15 per cent. and secured against their own homes were being quoted to my constituents. Was this a condition the council set for the directors of Digital City? I very much doubt it.

There is no question that all this provides Digital City with an unfair advantage in a crowded market. To state in a response to my constituent Chris Watts, a local businessman, that

“the council hasn't spent any cash on this, only officer time”,

is economical with the truth and insulting to small businesses in Swindon. Until this venture was announced in November last year, Swindon borough council's interest

in providing free internet access across the borough was not apparent from its published strategies and appeared, at most, a long-term aspiration. Other providers of this service have thus been excluded from bidding to offer a similar service.

A number of constituents have raised their concerns about the protection of communities from radiation hazards, including those associated with wi-fi communications systems. I am assured by the Department of Health that there is to date no consistent evidence that exposure to radio waves adversely affects the health of the general population, although the Independent Advisory Group on Non-Ionising Radiation is currently reviewing radio frequency exposures, including those from wireless networks. The Health Protection Agency considers it sensible to adopt a precautionary approach to the use of any new technology.

Had the borough council been better prepared, it could have prepared information in advance for residents. In fact, the lack of information available for residents on any issue relating to wi-fi is quite breathtaking. A question asked by an opposition councillor about the provision for a family to object to a transmitter being located level with and 6 feet away from their child's bedroom window has not been answered by the council. Because of the secrecy surrounding the project, a mature debate on this subject has been impossible and it was left to me to provide information to residents.

On the relationship between Swindon borough council officers, councillors from the leading Conservative group and the directors or owners of Digital City, aQovia and Avidity Consulting, underlying concerns about the lack of competition is the possibility that the individual behind this venture, Rikki Hunt, may have had access to privileged information that gave him an unfair advantage when putting his proposition to the council. Mr. Hunt is the chair of Swindon Strategic Economic Partnership. Until the end of 2009, he was also a non-executive director of Swindon Commercial Services Ltd, which is Swindon borough council's direct services company and the main contractor to Digital City for installation and maintenance of its wireless network. That would have given him access to senior councillors and council officers and, potentially, access to commercially valuable information not available to competitors.

It has been too easy for those concerned to hide behind various companies and to deny the public access to the full facts, yet the public are paying for those companies' activities and the directors are, as far as I can ascertain, accepting no liability. By virtue of his close association with Swindon borough council, Mr. Hunt may have been in receipt of privileged information in relation to the council's plans for widening access to the internet, as well as those of the economic partnership. As a consequence, it is possible that a conflict of interest could arise in his company's approach to the council, as covered by section 175 of the Companies Act 2006, under which a director has a duty to ensure that they avoid a situation where they have, or can have, a direct or indirect interest that conflicts, or may conflict, with the interests of the company. The information made available to the public by Swindon borough council provides insufficient evidence that no such conflict has arisen or that the council made efforts to assure itself that such a conflict had not arisen.

There has been considerable interest in the scheme from councils across the country—and, indeed, some councils from abroad—which is why we should look carefully at the business plan and the public service model offered. As I have said, rolling out internet access to the whole population is a good idea. The Government have stated so on numerous occasions and in various publications, and today the Prime Minister took that support further, giving Martha Lane Fox a role in co-ordinating the Government's digital activities. It is right that councils should be involved, but plenty of other good ideas have gone bad when people seek a commercial advantage through councils. We know what happened in the past when over-close relationships developed between councillors, council officers and property developers.

It has been suggested by Conservative councillors, including the leader of the council, that anybody who asks questions or raises concerns—or, indeed, anybody who even reports these in the local press—is working against an excellent initiative and against the interests of our town. That attitude worries me considerably. Asking pertinent questions is a legitimate activity in a healthy democracy. Probing questions should be welcomed, not pushed to one side or deflected by smokescreens. The job of elected members is to explain and promote their policies. They should not be secretive or defensive about that, nor should they abuse their position with officers. What has happened is a failure of the political process, and whatever errors of judgment have been made, officers must not be made convenient scapegoats. The scheme arose from discussions among councillors.

It is an irony that the internet has provided access to much of the information that I have detailed in this debate. Talkswindon members have sifted through council documents and company documents that are available online, and although it still took dedication and time to find the relevant information, that was a matter of days and weeks, rather than the months and years that it used to take.

Although I do not believe that there has been corruption on the part of officers, the process put in place at the behest of Conservative leaders of the council lays open the possibility of future corruption. I repeat my plea to the cabinet to delay any further allocation of taxpayers' money until a full cross-party investigation can be carried out into the actions of councillors and officers. The hon. Member for Meriden (Mrs. Spelman) is quoted on Digital City's website as saying:

“We want to see a flowering of this all over the country”.

My message to her is that she and her party's councillors need to have much more probity before they rush headlong into schemes that have the potential to waste hundreds of thousands of pounds of taxpayers' money, disadvantage small businesses and threaten the reputations of local councils.

There are still serious questions to be answered. Did this sorry mess come about because leading Conservatives wanted to keep the initiative secret, not just from opposition councillors, but from members of their own group, in case it was scuppered at an early stage owing to the flimsy business plan, or because they were scared that credit could be claimed by others? Although the blame lies squarely at the door of leading Conservative councillors who insisted on secrecy, were council officers unable or unwilling to challenge the Conservative group, which

will still be in power on 6 May? Did officers insist on one of their own number sitting on the Digital City board because they were concerned about the closeness of Mr. Hunt to councillors and the council processes, and did they recently realise that this decision would instead compromise them and therefore decide to run a mile from it? What safeguards are now in place to protect taxpayers' money and ensure a level playing field for the small businesses in Swindon? I hope and trust that my hon. Friend the Minister will help me get some serious responses to those pertinent questions.

8.50 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Barbara Follett):

It is a pleasure to respond to this debate, introduced by my hon. Friend the Member for South Swindon (Anne Snelgrove). I congratulate her on securing this opportunity to discuss her concerns about the way in which Swindon borough council introduced borough-wide wi-fi. As she knows, local authorities act independently of central Government, and Ministers such as me have no remit to intervene in their day-to-day affairs, except when specific provision has been made by Act of Parliament. However, local authorities are accountable to their electorate for their actions. If a member of the public suspects fraud, corruption, or misuse of public money, they should contact the appointed auditor for that authority. If a member of the public believes that the council has acted illegally or not in accordance with its constitution, they should contact the authority's monitoring officer. Despite the limitations on central Government intervention, measures are in place to secure local intervention.

The fact that Swindon is working with the private sector to make the town the first in the UK to provide free wi-fi internet access for all its residents has been widely reported in the press. That is a good aim, and may have replaced Swindon's magic roundabout as an identifying feature of the town. The challenges of the current recession make it even more important that successful partnership works to make effective use of public money, and that available resources are deployed as efficiently and transparently as possible to pursue local priorities.

The concerns expressed by my hon. Friend are primarily about the procurement process and the decision-making aspects of the project. They include the way in which the council handled the wi-fi zone roll-out in Swindon; the pilot scheme that was set up with Digital City UK, a company that started with a £450,000 loan from the borough council; the transparency of the decision-making process as only three councillors were involved in the agreement; the fact that a council employee is a member of the company's board; the fact that taxpayers' money seems to be at risk because the business risk does not seem to have been underwritten; and the lack of information on wi-fi, especially its effects on health, which are, hon. Members know, a cause of great concern.

Finally, my hon. Friend said that wi-fi is not necessarily the best solution for delivering broadband to any community, let alone excluded ones. In a city area, it may be difficult for wi-fi to penetrate housing, especially if the walls are thick and were built in Victorian times. Wi-fi is unlikely to support next-generation access speeds, so it may be quickly superseded by cable and fibre-optics, and wi-fi speed suffers as more people use it—the

[Barbara Follett]

contention ratio. All in all, there are many concerns about the way in which Swindon borough council went about the provision of that laudable item, and about the research it carried out.

I shall now outline the Government's established policy on procurement to clarify the matter for my hon. Friend. Our policy is that public procurement should be based on value for money, having due regard to propriety and regularity. The European Union's procurement directives set out the legal framework, detailed procedures and criteria for the specification, selection and award of contracts above certain thresholds. Even below those thresholds, the EU treaty-based principles of non-discrimination, equal treatment, transparency, mutual recognition and proportionality must apply. The EU procurement directives and implementing regulations enforce EU rules on transparency, free movement of goods and non-discrimination. They require that, in most cases, there should be a competitive procurement advertised across Europe.

Subject to their legal duties—including the duty of best value—and to public procurement law, local authorities are responsible for taking their own procurement decisions. The duty of best value, as laid down in legislation, requires authorities to make arrangements to secure continuous improvement in the way in which they exercise their functions, having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. Any specific complaints that best value is not being met in a particular set of circumstances would need to be addressed in the first instance to the authority's external auditor. I stress again that Ministers have no ability to intervene in individual procurement decisions made by local authorities. Local authorities need to satisfy themselves that any aid provided by them does not contravene the European Commission's prohibition on the granting of state aid and that it meets the requirements of competition law.

I shall turn now to the audit and inspection of local authorities. Systems are in place to assess and audit decisions made by local authorities. Auditors perform an annual audit of financial statements. However, they also have wider responsibilities to review and report on whether an audited body has made proper arrangements for securing value for money, economy, efficiency and effectiveness in its use of resources. The auditors are obliged by the code of audit practice, which is approved by Parliament, to consider whether any representation or information that they receive needs investigation or action under their specific powers. They must consider whether to make a public interest report under section 8 of the Audit Commission Act 1998 on any matter that they judge should be considered by the audited body or brought to public attention. I am dwelling on these specific matters because some of the issues that my hon. Friend has raised could possibly be addressed through these means, if members of the public felt that they should be.

Those external auditor assessments of value for money in the use of resources feed into the performance framework for local services for all outcomes secured by local authorities working alone or in partnership. Such a partnership is known as the comprehensive area assessment. The CAA use of resources assessment considers how well individual public bodies manage and use their

resources to deliver value for money and better sustainable outcomes for local people. The assessment focuses on the importance of sound, strategic financial management, strategic commissioning, good governance and the effective management of natural resources, assets and people.

My hon. Friend has raised several points about governance in the council, particularly in regard to the transparency of the process for decision making and to the fact that an employee of the council was and is a member of the company board. My understanding is that Swindon borough council operates a leader and cabinet model, made up of the leader of the council and a cabinet of up to nine councillors to whom the leader allocates portfolios. The cabinet makes decisions in line with the council's overall policies. If it wishes to make a decision that is outside the budget or policy framework, this must be referred to the council as a whole to decide. To speed up decision making and to allow the cabinet to concentrate on major matters, members have the delegated power to make day-to-day decisions in relation to areas within their portfolio. However, specific questions about an individual decision would have to be addressed to the council.

One issue raised by my hon. Friend was how just three councillors can make a decision that affects the whole authority. Sadly, once again, it would be inappropriate for me to comment on an individual case. However, in terms of governance, there are times when it could be appropriate for decisions to be made without the participation of the full council. However, the council's particular decision-making process will be outlined in its constitution.

A further issue was whether there is a conflict of interest when a council employee is a member of the board of a company—in this case, the wi-fi company. Again, it is not appropriate for me to comment on an individual case. However, it is reasonable to expect councils to have in place mechanisms to deal with conflicts of interest such as that one, because employees may live in the authority and use its services, so they may have to come to decisions on matters that have a material effect on them and their lives.

Anne Snelgrove: Does my hon. Friend mean that councils should have a policy on this—a published policy on issues, such as council employees being directors and conflicts of interest, to which members of the public could have access?

Barbara Follett: I think authorities should have in place robust mechanisms for dealing with conflicts of interest and for advising staff on how to behave when they arise. In an ideal world—I do not know whether this is a duty, but I can write to my hon. Friend about it—councils should have the rules made accessible to members of the public either in a printed form or on their websites.

In summary, complaints about value-for-money decisions should be addressed to the authority's external auditor and concerns about the propriety of decisions and decision-making processes should be addressed to the local authority's monitoring officer.

It is unfortunate that the circumstances of the setting up of this project have caused comment, since the Government strongly support increased access to internet services and are committed to ensuring that virtually

everyone in this country, including those living in rural areas, has access to a good level of broadband. It is important not to lose sight of that in the specific concerns raised about the Swindon project. I am glad that my hon. Friend emphasised that the Prime Minister said today that broadband is the electricity of today. Indeed, it is; it will make a huge difference to our country's economy and the lives of the people who live here.

As I have explained, central Government have no ability to intervene in the decisions that have been made by Swindon council or in respect of the manner in which those decisions were taken. These are matters that need pursuing locally and I hope my hon. Friend is able to secure answers to the questions she has posed.

The Swindon project should present an exciting opportunity to boost the local economy and regenerate

parts of the borough by giving people, especially those in disadvantaged communities, a chance to access and use technology and share the benefits that it can bring. However, the questions that my hon. Friend has posed about the project and the process that has been followed are very important. It is in the council's interest to provide satisfactory answers to those questions, and to make transparent the way in which decisions have been made. Then, and only then, will residents' concerns be laid to rest. I sincerely hope that Swindon council will provide those answers, and that the project can then proceed to bring the benefits that my hon. Friend and the Government wish it to bring.

Question put and agreed to.

9.6 pm

House adjourned.

Written Ministerial Statements

Monday 22 March 2010

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Public Libraries (Modernisation)

The Minister of State, Department for Culture, Media and Sport (Margaret Hodge): In December 2009 we published our consultation document on the future of public libraries in England and committed to publishing the Government's vision for libraries in the spring. I have today laid before Parliament "The Modernisation Review of Public Libraries: A Policy Statement" setting out our policies for public libraries in England.

The policy statement builds on the 10-year strategy for libraries published in 2003 "Framework for the Future". Specifically it sets out:

A Library Offer to the Public: The Government recommend a Library Offer to the public for all public libraries in England. The Library Offer will be made up of a "core offer" of services which all library services should deliver and a "local offer" of services, shaped and delivered at local level. The Government recommend all library authorities make their Library Offer to the public clear and visible to all the citizens in the area—on their website, in library buildings and through any other local marketing opportunities. The Government will review the Library Offer after two years and consider whether to legislate to make it a statutory obligation.

Free internet access: The Government expect that from April 2011 all library services will provide free internet access to users as part of their Library Offer to the public. Government will, under section 8(2)(b) of the 1964 Public Libraries Act, make an affirmative order preventing libraries from charging for internet access.

Support to get online: The Government recommend that all library services provide support and advice for users wanting to get online as part of their Library Offer to the public.

Library Membership from Birth: Research shows that children benefit in many ways from library visits and early access to books and reading. The Government expect that from April 2011 all library services offer library membership as an entitlement from birth. This might be achieved in a number of ways:

Offering library membership at the registration of a birth.

Offering library membership along with child benefits.

Offering library membership with bookstart packs.

E-Books: There are new and exciting opportunities around digital lending. With the launch of a number of different e-reading devices, digital reading is growing in the public consciousness where downloadable audio books are already fully established. Currently 14 library services offer e-book services in England with more planning to launch shortly. All lend for free. The Government believe that e-book lending is likely to form a key 24/7 public service in the future with public

library services being accessed from home and on the move as well as in library buildings, and will therefore initiate changes to secondary legislation to guarantee free e-book loans. The Government will under section 8(2)(b) of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 make an affirmative order preventing libraries from charging for e-books lending of any sort including remotely.

The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964: The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 (the 1964 Act) sets out the statutory duty for all local authorities to provide a "comprehensive and efficient" library service set in the context of local need—specifically of those who live, work and study in the local area. The 1964 Act imposes a duty on the Secretary of State to oversee and promote the public library service and to secure discharge of the statutory duties of local authorities as well as providing certain powers to take action where a local authority is in breach of its own duty. The Government judge that the 1964 Act's imposition of this duty on local authorities is appropriate and that the Secretary of State's overview role should be maintained.

We have no plans, therefore, to review the primary legislation but recognise that the process of intervention needs modernisation.

Public Libraries (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1992: Although the Government do not expect to activate the inquiry rules often, the Government will amend the Public Libraries (Inquiries Procedure) Rules 1992 to modernise the processes by which the Secretary of State intervenes in a library service.

Guidance on processes of engagement and consultation: Best practice guidance is issued in the policy statement on the processes which the Government recommend library authorities consider under their statutory duty. The Government will review this best practice guidance after two years and consider whether to legislate to make the guidance statutory.

Strategic Body for the Sector: The Government are minded to establish a strategic body for the sector as a means of providing a stronger national voice for libraries and improving leadership and development of the sector. As part of the wider review of arm's length bodies, the Government will consider bringing together the functions of three different organisations—the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), the Advisory Council on Libraries and the Registrar of Public Lending Right. The Government propose the libraries body has a statutory advisory function, with the formal power to advise the Secretary of State on his role under the 1964 Act. The Government will undertake a business case in consultation with stakeholders and will publish more detail as part of the broader review of arm's length bodies.

New Delivery Models: As local authorities face a tough spending round with hard choices to be made on front-line services, the Government encourage councils to look at new delivery models for their public library service. The Government believe that the current model of 151 library authorities is unsustainable. If the public are to be offered a comprehensive public library service at the local level, library services will either need to work closely together, merge with other authorities or establish trust models of private/public partnerships. There may also be opportunities to share services with university libraries and collaborate on opening times, access and management of stock.

DEFENCE

Armed Forces Equipment

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): During the defence in the world debate on 15 March I set out my intention to announce a number of important equipment procurement decisions over the coming days that will deliver vital capabilities for the Royal Navy, the Army, and the Royal Air Force, ensuring they are well equipped to undertake future missions.

My approach continues that which I set out in the House on 15 December, and on 3 February with the defence Green Paper that paves the way for a strategic defence review after the general election. Many of the decisions we face in the future of defence will be left for the review but there is also a clear need to maintain momentum on projects that are integral to any future defence programme, and to continue to work to ensure the long-term affordability of the overall programme.

Today, I am pleased to announce the successful outcome of the specialist vehicle competition. This represents a very important milestone towards replacing the ageing combat vehicle reconnaissance (tracked), and is one of the highest equipment priorities for the Army.

Preferred bidder status has been awarded to General Dynamics UK for the demonstration phase of the specialist vehicle programme, subject to successful completion of contractual negotiations. This decision was made following a robust assessment of the tenders received, ensuring value for money throughout the life of these vehicles.

The solution offered by General Dynamics UK is based on an upgrade to the ASCOD vehicle that is already in service with a number of European nations. The British variants of this design will employ the 40 mm cased telescoped ammunition and cannon, and provide protection against a wide range of threats. Once in service, this new capability will bring significant benefit to the Army including improved protection, greater firepower, longer-range sensors and sighting systems, and a higher level of reliability.

General Dynamics UK's proposed solution contains 73 per cent. UK content within the supply chain and the assembly, integration and test facilities at the Defence Support Group Donnington. This ensures the sustainment of UK jobs, UK skills and UK capabilities within the armoured vehicle sector.

We are determined to provide the armed forces with the capabilities they require, and the SV decision follows the announcement of our commitment to order an initial batch of 200 light protected patrol vehicles (LPPV), which we will get to Afghanistan as quickly as possible. The initial batch of 200 vehicles will be funded from the Treasury reserve as an urgent operational requirement. The LPPVs we are assessing through competition are at the cutting edge of technology, providing the optimum balance between protection, weight and manoeuvrability required by our armed forces on operations in Afghanistan.

This is in addition to the announcements I made on 15 December, of further reserve funding of £280 million for equipment for Afghanistan including additional vehicles, and £900 million of enhancements from the core defence programme, including 22 Chinook helicopters, an additional C-17, a doubling of our Reaper capability,

and strengthening our counter-IED capability—funded by savings in lower priority areas, and based on our determination to support the current campaign and our belief that we expect such capabilities to feature in future conflicts.

We are not able to announce the outcome of the Warrior Capability Sustainment Programme competition today. Following an assessment of the tenders from BAE Systems Global Combat Systems and Lockheed Martin UK Amptill, we intend to invite the competitors to revise and confirm their bids. Further announcements will be made in due course.

I am, however, pleased to announce that on 19 March we reached agreement with the US Government to purchase three Rivet Joint aircraft and associated ground systems delivering vital capability for the Royal Air Force to replace the Nimrod R1 capability that will be retired from service in March 2011.

The Rivet Joint system was selected following an extensive assessment phase that considered a number of possible solutions. Rivet Joint was selected as it is the only viable option that meets the requirements of our armed forces.

I intend to make further announcements in the coming days about new and additional capability for our armed forces and defence contracts for UK industry.

Departmental Expenditure Limits (Replacement)

The Secretary of State for Defence (Mr. Bob Ainsworth): The following statement replaces information given in the Ministry of Defence previous departmental expenditure limits (DEL) written ministerial statement on 23 February 2010, *Official Report*, columns 29-30WS.

Subject to parliamentary approval of the necessary supplementary estimate, the DEL will be increased by £284,565,000, voted and non-voted, from £39,596,111,000 to £39,880,676,000. Within the DEL change, the impact on resources and capital are as set out in the following table:

| | Change | | New DEL | | Total |
|-----------------------|----------|-----------|------------|-----------|------------|
| | Voted | Non-Voted | Voted | Non-voted | |
| Resource | -33,261 | 222,396 | 38,660,976 | 439,112 | 39,100,088 |
| Of which: | 211 | - | 2,237,948 | - | 2,237,948 |
| Administration Budget | | | | | |
| Near-cash in RDEL | -100,650 | 250,355 | 26,277,470 | 668,551 | 26,946,021 |
| Capital | 178,695 | - | 9,227,484 | 851 | 9,228,335 |
| Depreciation* | -83,265 | | -8,438,227 | -9,520 | -8,447,747 |
| Total | 62,169 | 222,396 | 39,450,233 | 430,443 | 39,880,676 |

*Depreciation, which forms part of Resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The changes to the resource and capital elements of the DEL arise from:

Voted Resource DEL decrease £33,261,000:

RfRI:

(1) An increase of £100,000,000 Direct Resource near cash relief in *RfRI*, as agreed with Treasury from the Reserve.

(2) Resource transfers into RfR1 from the Cabinet Office being their contribution to MOD security costs of £6,000,000 transfers from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office of £6,695,000 and £1,965,000 for the Counter Narcotics Ground Force, and a transfer of £1,002,000 from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office being their contribution to the Information Assurance Technical Programme.

(3) A transfer of £211,000 from the Cabinet Office being their contribution to the Parliamentary Counsel cost (an increase in Administration Voted DEL).

(4) A net decrease in the cash release of provisions of £17,324,000 charged to RDEL (with a corresponding increase in the provision charge scored in AME) to reflect the latest forecast of outturn.

(5) To re-allocate the net resource impact of £35,000,000 for employee benefits under IFRS trigger point 3 from AME to Resource DEL, reflecting the revised control framework for this item.

(6) To reflect the revised, and reduced, resource impact assessment of disclosing three PFI contracts as finance leases under IAS 17, being a credit of £21,000,000.

(7) To reflect the revised resource impact resulting from a reduced service charge credit relating to Annington Homes of £18,000,000.

(8) To reflect the non cash resource impact, in the amount of £26,000,000, of implementing IFRS 17 on three PFI off balance sheet contracts now re-assessed as finance leases.

(9) To reflect the IFRS reduced near cash service charge of £178,000,000 impact of disclosing IFRIC 12 PFI assets on MOD's balance sheet.

(10) To increase Non-Budget Grants in Aid (Non Voted) for the Council of Reserve Forces and Cadets Association (RFCA) of £4,199,000 in the Central Top Level Budget (TLB) and £4,943,000 in Land TLB; £210,000 for the Marine and Sea Cadets Society by reducing Resource DEL current costs and increasing Non-Budget Grants in Aid with no overall impact on resource.

(11) To increase non budget funding by £10,991,000 from within Resource DEL to reflect the latest forecast of outturn for the Navy Command, Land Forces, and Central TLBs.

(12) To revise sub-head provisions to reflect Resource and Capital revisions in allocations between TLB Holders to match required defence outputs, with no overall impact on DEL.

RfR2:

(1) A net resource increase of £13,430,000 in non cash depreciation and cost of capital costs to reflect the latest forecast cost of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

(2) A transfer in of £1,832,000 from the Department for International Development (DfID) being their contribution to the Global Pool (RfR2).

(3) To reflect a technical disclosure change by moving £6,729,000 from Voted to Non-Voted expenditure, relating to a transfer made to DfID in Winter Supplementary Estimates (WSE), with no overall impact on DEL.

Non-Voted Resource DEL increase £222,396,000:

RfR1:

(1) A net increase in the cash release of provisions of £17,324,000 charged to Non Voted RDEL (with a corresponding increase in the provision charge scored in AME) to reflect the latest forecast of outturn.

(2) To reflect the IFRS reduced near cash service charge of £178,000,000 impact of disclosing IFRIC 12 PFI assets on MOD's balance sheet being a charge to Non Voted resource.

(3) To reflect the Non-Voted impact of an increase in Non-Budget Grants in Aid (Non Voted) for the Council of RFC A of £4,199,000 in the Central TLB and £4,943,000 in Land TLB; £210,000 for the Marine and Sea Cadets Society by reducing Resource DEL current costs and increasing Non Budget Grants in Aid with no overall impact on resource.

(4) To reflect the Non-Voted impact of an increase in Non-Budget funding by £10,991,000 from within Resource DEL to reflect the latest forecast of outturn for the Navy Command, Land Forces and Central TLBs.

RfR2:

(1) To reflect a technical disclosure change by moving £6,729,000 from Voted to Non-Voted expenditure, relating to a transfer made to DfID in WSE, with no overall impact on DEL.

Voted Capital DEL Increase: £178,695,000:

RfR1:

(1) A further increase in Fiscal Capital Resource of £5,000,000 to reflect Treasury reserve relief for lower capital receipts in Northern Ireland than originally forecasted.

(2) To reflect the capital impact of implementing IFRS 17 on three PFI off balance sheet contracts now re-assessed as Finance Leases of £13,000,000.

RfR2:

(1) To request a net increase in Capital DEL of £160,695,000 to reflect the latest forecast cost of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan funded from the reserve.

The changes to Resource DEL and Capital DEL will lead to an increased net cash requirement of £935,052,000.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

EU Energy Council (12 March)

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change (Mr. David Kidney): My noble Friend the Minister of State for Energy and Climate Change today made the following statement:

Andy Lebrecht, Deputy Permanent Representative to the EU, represented the UK at the Energy Council in Brussels on 12 March.

The first item on the agenda was the draft regulation concerning the notification to the Commission of investment projects in energy infrastructure, on which the Council reached political agreement. Most issues, including the UK's previous areas of concerns (principally in relation to the extra burden on industry

and on member state administrations) were resolved during negotiations and agreement was reached with little discussion by member states.

The Council then agreed conclusions on the Commission Communication “Investing in the development of low carbon technologies”, which sets out the strategic approach to energy research in the EU over the next 10 years. The UK is content with the text of the conclusions and pleased that the previous expectation of large increases in member state national spending has now been qualified.

The last substantive item was an exchange of views on the energy aspects of the Commission’s proposed Europe 2020 strategy for jobs and growth initiative, based on a presentation by the Commission of its Communication published on 3 March. The Commission noted that energy was central to the Europe 2020 strategy, given its relevance to the economy, employment and climate change. In the discussion that followed, member states agreed on the value of the strategy, and on the importance of developing an energy action plan for 2010-14. There was general agreement that the energy action plans should cover energy efficiency, diversification of energy sources and research and development. The UK noted that the EU budget should reflect the 2020 priorities.

The presidency briefly updated the Council on the outcome of the informal Energy Council in Seville in January; on Russia-Ukraine energy relations; and on the latest report on the status of the EU electricity and gas markets. The Hungarian delegation reported on the energy security summit attended by representatives from Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe in Budapest on 24 February.

The Council ended with a working lunch where Commissioner Oettinger outlined his views on the Commission Work Programme on energy, focusing on policies to meet the 20/20/20 objectives, the need for proper implementation of the internal market package, and energy efficiency. He also emphasised his intention that the energy action plan should look beyond the short-term and set out a route map towards 2020 and 2050.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Marine Management Organisation

The Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Hilary Benn): I am pleased to announce that the Marine Management Organisation (MMO) will vest on 1 April 2010 as an executive non-departmental public body.

The MMO has been established by the Marine and Coastal Access Act, and will act as the UK Government’s principal delivery body in the marine area in the waters around England and in the UK offshore area for matters that are not devolved and its centre of marine management expertise. The MMO will bring together a number of marine management activities from across Government, as well as delivering new marine planning, licensing and nature conservation functions created by the Act. This represents a real opportunity to provide an identifiable focus on marine matters and will make a contribution to achieving sustainable development by bringing together delivery of a number of marine functions within a single independent body, enabling integrated implementation of Government policy for the marine area.

The MMO will contribute to the Government’s Public Service Agreement (PSA28)

“to secure a healthy environment in which we and future generations can prosper”.

Its main areas of responsibility will encompass:

- delivering an integrated system of marine planning;
- delivering a streamlined, transparent and consistent system for licensing marine activities and developments;
- contributing to conserving natural resources, eco-systems and species, including the development of marine protected areas;
- modernisation and streamlining of the management and regulation of England’s marine fisheries; and
- contributing to responses, relationships and returns to the EU and international bodies.

In delivering the functions above, the MMO will work closely with a wide range of UK Government Departments with a policy interest in the marine area—the Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC), the Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (DEFRA), Communities and Local Government (CLG), the Department for Culture Media and Sport (DCMS), the Department for Transport (DfT) and the Ministry of Defence (MOD). The MMO will also deliver specific operational functions on behalf of DEFRA, DfT and DECC.

The MMO also has a requirement to manage its functions with the overarching objective of making a real contribution to the achievement of sustainable development in the marine area and in the wider context. I will issue the MMO guidance on how it should discharge its functions with regard to this objective, and a draft of this guidance will be laid in Parliament.

The organisation will be directed by an independent chair (Christopher Parry) and board, and led by a chief executive (Steven Gant). The MMO will have net operating costs in 2010-11 of £32.3 million. It consists of a headquarters office located in Newcastle, and a network of 18 coastal offices.

I announced on 12 February 2009 that the Marine and Fisheries Agency (MFA) would be subsumed into the new body and that it would cease to be a separate Executive Agency. The remit and functions of the MFA will continue to be delivered within the wider remit of the MMO.

Stakeholders will receive the same professional services they currently receive from the MFA. As the MMO develops I expect to see stakeholders gain further benefit because the MMO will deliver:

- a coherent, transparent delivery body for independently reconciling conflicting demands and pressures in the marine area including through the introduction of a new, integrated system of marine planning;
- a modernised, accessible and streamlined licensing system, leading to structural efficiencies and savings;
- a comprehensive approach to the formulation and implementation of policy in the marine area across Government;
- an authoritative hub for information exchange and research in the marine area, providing access to its own data and an expert on what other sources are available;
- a contribution to the achievement of sustainable development and partnership in the marine area providing a single focus for marine management issues; and
- the positioning of the UK as the internationally recognised leader in marine management.

Since the Marine and Coastal Access Act received Royal Assent on 12 November 2009, my officials have been working to put in place the necessary legislation to commence and transfer appropriate powers and duties to the MMO to ensure that it is operational from

1 April. This began with the first Commencement Order which came into force on 12 January 2010, establishing the MMO as a body corporate, and is being followed by further Commencement Orders and mechanisms to transfer functions to the MMO. These will come into effect on 1 April.

The new marine planning function and streamlined licensing regime are currently either under consultation or in development and will come on stream after vesting. Current timetabling anticipates the new licensing regime to be operational from spring 2011, and marine plan areas to be agreed in that timeframe also which will enable the MMO to prioritise and begin work on this first marine plan.

Further details of the MMO's role and responsibilities are given in its corporate documents: the Framework Document, the Corporate Plan 2010-11 to 2012-13, and the Business Plan 2010-11. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and will be published on the MMO's website: www.marinemanagement.org.uk

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

General Affairs Council and Foreign Affairs Council (22 March)

The Minister for Europe (Chris Bryant): The General Affairs Council and Foreign Affairs Council will be held on 22 March in Brussels. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary will represent the UK.

The agenda items are as follows:

FOREIGN AFFAIRS COUNCIL (FAC)

Haiti

Ministers will discuss the EU's response to Haiti and seek to agree a common position for the global donors' conference in New York on 31 March. This is likely to include: a common aggregated figure for EU commitment for reconstruction; a long-term plan for economic growth and development; and a commitment to joint programming to enhance aid effectiveness. Ministers will also discuss the creation of an "EU House" in Haiti to enhance co-ordination and represent EU donors not present on the ground. They may also discuss plans for further work on the EU's emergency response capability.

Chile

We expect Ministers to be updated on the latest developments following the tragic earthquake on Saturday 27 February. The UK has responded to specific requests made by the Chilean Government and provided £250,000 to the Red Cross and delivered 600 tents to World Vision through DFID and the MOD. With EU partners, the UK has provided €3 million for the relief effort through European Commission Humanitarian Aid.

Afghanistan/Pakistan

Ministers will discuss the work of the new EU Representative for Afghanistan, Vygaudas Ušackas, focusing on his immediate priorities. These include implementation of the EU action plan, follow-up to the London conference and preparations for the Kabul conference. The upcoming EU-Pakistan summit on 21 April may also be discussed.

Follow-up to Gymnich

Ministers will continue their discussions on how the EU's post-Lisbon structures can deliver more coherent, co-ordinated and effective EU acts, including in its relations with emerging powers. Ongoing planning for the European External Action Service may also be discussed under this item.

Any Other Business: Belarus/Ukraine/Moldova

Under AOB, Ministers are likely to discuss Belarus's treatment of its Polish minority, internal developments in Moldova and visa issues in relation to Ukraine and Moldova.

Middle East

Over lunch, Ministers will review recent developments on the MEPP with Quartet Representative, Tony Blair. Baroness Ashton is expected to brief on her visit to the region this week, and the Quartet meeting in Moscow on 19 March. Ministers are likely to agree an EU declaration for the EU/Israel Association Council, which will take place in Brussels on 23 March.

GENERAL AFFAIRS COUNCIL (GAC)

The GAC will present and discuss the draft Council conclusions for the spring European Council on the 25 and 26 March including points on EU2020 and climate change. On EU2020, we will seek to make progress on the agreement of a comprehensive European economic strategy that delivers strong, sustainable and balanced growth. On climate change, we will seek to ensure continued international focus on the goal of a legally binding treaty.

HEALTH

Departmental Expenditure Limits and Administration Cost Limits (2009-10)

The Minister of State, Department of Health (Mr. Mike O'Brien): The Department of Health's overall departmental expenditure limit (DEL) is unchanged from the written statement made on 23 February 2010, *Official Report*, column 40WS, at £105,564,260,000, the administration cost limit is unchanged at £218,191,000. The impact on resource and capital is set out in the following table:

| | Change | | New DEL | | Total £m |
|---------------------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|
| | Voted £m | Non-voted £m | Voted £m | Non-voted £m | |
| Department of Health | | | | | |
| Resource DEL, of which | | -100.000 | 101,795.986 | -1,607.778 | 100,188.208 |
| Administration Budget * | | | 218.191 | - | 218.191 |
| Near-cash in Resource DEL | | -100.000 | 96,935.132 | -308.409 | 96,626.723 |
| Capital DEL | | 100.000 | 2,650.151 | 2,725.901 | 5,376.052 |

| | Change | | New DEL | | Total £m |
|--|-------------|-----------------|-------------|-----------------|-------------|
| | Voted £m | Non-voted £m | Voted £m | Non-voted £m | |
| Total Department of Health DEL | | | 104,446.137 | 1,118.123 | 105,564.260 |
| Depreciation ** | | | -902.961 | -177.166 | -1,080.127 |
| Total Department of Health spending (after adjustment) | | | 103,543.176 | 940.957 | 104,484.133 |

*The total of "administration budget" and "Near cash in Resource DEL" figures may well be greater than the total resource DEL, due to definitions overlapping.

**Depreciation, which forms part of resource DEL, is excluded from the total DEL since the capital DEL includes capital spending and to include depreciation of those assets would lead to double counting.

The change results from a transfer from the revenue budget to the capital budget of £100,000,000 to meet existing commitments on pandemic flu.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Countering International Terrorism

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Alan Johnson): Protecting the safety of the UK and our interests overseas is the primary duty of Government. International terrorism remains the pre-eminent threat to the security of the United Kingdom.

I have today published the first annual report of the Government's strategy for countering international terrorism, Contest (Cm 7833). This report provides a written account of our progress against the objectives set out in our strategy over the last year. The report has been developed to be read alongside the 2009 publication of Contest (Cm 7547) which remains one of the most comprehensive and wide-ranging approaches to tackling this threat in the world. Copies of the annual report will be made available in the Vote Office.

The greatest security threat we face continues to come from al-Qaeda and related groups and individuals. The nature of this threat has changed over the last 12 months. Al-Qaeda's leadership has come under severe pressure in Pakistan and NATO's presence across the border continues to deny them a safe haven in Afghanistan. However, an increase in the capability of some al-Qaeda affiliates and associated groups, highlighted by the attempted Detroit airline attack, demonstrates the evolving and diffuse threat we continue to face.

Contest explains how contemporary terrorist organisations aspire to use chemical, biological, radiological and even nuclear (CBRN) weapons. The availability of information on the internet, changing technology and the theft and smuggling of CBRN materials make this aspiration more realistic than it may have been in the past. To support delivering our response, I have also published today the United Kingdom's Strategy for Countering Chemical, Biological, Radiological and Nuclear (CBRN) Terrorism which addresses the specific threat posed by terrorist use of CBRN materials. A copy of the strategy will be placed in the House Library.

During 2009 thousands of people, including British citizens, have been killed or injured in terrorist attacks around the world. There have been no attacks, successful or unsuccessful, by international terrorist groups or

individuals associated with them in the UK over the past 12 months. This reflects the resources and capabilities that we have put in place to deal with the threat. The Joint Terrorism Analysis Centre, responsible for setting the UK threat level, currently assess that the UK threat level is severe meaning an attack is highly likely and could happen without warning at any time.

Our response continues to be based at all times on principles that reflect the core values of the UK including human rights, the rule of law, legitimate and accountable government, justice, freedom, tolerance and opportunity for all.

We recognise that our response must continue to be founded on partnerships across the spectrum from local, national to international. Communities, local authorities, Departments, agencies, devolved Administrations, and overseas partners all play vital roles in the successful delivery of Contest.

We judge that to date Contest has achieved its aim—to reduce the risk to the UK and to its interests overseas from international terrorism, so that people can go about their lives freely and with confidence.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Joining up Africa: Regional Integration Conference

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr. Gareth Thomas): In partnership with the African Union Commission, the African Development Bank, the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa, the World Bank, the Infrastructure Consortium for Africa, the European Commission and UK Trade and Investment, we organised a conference on African Regional Integration on 4 March 2010 in London. Around 200 representatives of African regional economic communities (RECs), African and development partner Governments, multilateral organisations, business and commercial bodies and civil society attended.

Regional integration is an important political and economic priority for Africa increasingly supported by its development partners. For example, last year the UK supported the North-South Corridor Conference in Lusaka where several African leaders announced plans to improve cross-border trade, reduce transport delays and costs, and promote investment. At that event donors agreed to provide over \$2.5 billion of funding to upgrade road, rail, port and energy infrastructure.

The Joining up Africa event aimed to help maintain momentum and support for regional integration, and looked at how African institutions, donors, business and other investors can work better together.

I opened the conference and the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs also addressed conference guests. Some 30 eminent speakers from a range of backgrounds spoke during discussions on how we can collectively overcome the political, economic and bureaucratic obstacles to greater regional integration. The major organisations represented at the conference agreed to sign an “Outcomes Statement”, which can be found at: <http://www.dfid.gov.uk/Documents/publications/Joining%20Africa%20-%20Final%20Outcomes%20Statement.pdf>. Other development partners are being invited to sign this statement as well.

The statement highlights how essential greater regional integration is for Africa’s growth and development. It recognises the urgent need to strengthen and increase support for regional integration as well as the need for more co-operation by all the relevant African stakeholders. The statement calls for action to:

- speed up progress with transport, trade, energy and other infrastructure programmes at a regional level and to resolve the obstacles and non-tariff barriers to trade;

- involve the private sector more effectively in support of regional integration;

- make support for regional integration more effective by applying the key principles of the Paris Declaration and Accra Agenda for Action regionally for the first time; and

- give more support to the COMESA, EAC and SADC tripartite process and to encourage similar arrangements by the African Union and other RECs as steps to establishing an African Economic Community.

JUSTICE

Criminal Legal Aid

The Secretary of State for Justice and Lord Chancellor (Mr. Jack Straw): The Ministry of Justice is publishing today outline proposals for restructuring of the delivery of publicly funded criminal defence services. This follows the announcement in December 2009 that the Ministry would work closely with the Legal Services Commission (LSC), the Law Society and individual practitioners to develop such proposals by the end of March 2010, and that these would replace the LSC’s planned pilots for best value tendering. Even with the necessary savings and reforms, our system of legal aid—civil and criminal—will still be far and away the best funded in the world.

The Government strongly believe that there must be a significant restructuring of the provision of criminal defence services in order to achieve greater value for money from legal aid, while still ensuring fair access to justice and enabling legal aid providers to remain profitable and sustainable. The Ministry of Justice policy statement proposes that this would be achieved by creating a more consolidated market, in which larger contracts are let to a smaller number of more efficient providers, enabling them to take advantage of economies of scale.

Other features of the proposals include:

- contracts tendered across a whole criminal justice system area, and for the full range of services including higher value Crown court work;

- opportunities for a range of providers to win contracts, including barristers chambers;

- retaining the ability for individuals to choose a solicitor from among those firms that hold contracts; and

- fostering innovation and efficiency on the part of providers by minimising contractual burdens, but balanced with strong financial audit controls.

The Ministry of Justice intends to undertake a consultation later this year on more detailed proposals, including a tendering model capable of delivering this restructured market. The Government will wish to consider the views expressed by respondents, including on any alternative options that would ensure the sustainability of criminal legal aid at reduced overall expenditure, before making final decisions.

Copies of the policy statement, “Restructuring the delivery of criminal defence services”, will be placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The document will also be available from the publications section of the Ministry of Justice website at: www.justice.gov.uk.

JUSTICE

Capital and Income in Trusts

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Bridget Prentice): In May 2009, the Law Commission of England and Wales published its report: Capital and Income in Trusts: Classification and Apportionment (Law Com no 315). The report makes three legislative recommendations to reform aspects of the law on the classification and apportionment of income and capital in trusts.

The purpose of these reforms is to simplify and modernise trust law rules that create unnecessary expense, litigation and difficulty to trustees of both private and charitable trusts; to decrease the regulatory burden on the Charity Commission; and to facilitate total return investment by charities.

The Government have carefully considered the report and are pleased to announce that they accept the Law Commission’s recommendations. It is now intended to consult on these reforms and the proposed draft legislation.

Electronic Conveyancing

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Mr. Michael Wills): Today, Land Registry is launching a formal consultation exercise to seek views on proposals to allow for electronic transfers and to extend the possible use of electronic legal charges (a form of mortgage).

The overarching aim of Land Registry’s e-conveyancing programme is to make conveyancing easier for everyone, with an electronic system that makes buying and selling property less stressful for the public, conveyancing professionals and the other parties involved.

Proposed new land registration rules would prescribe an electronic transfer as an additional kind of electronic disposition of registered land in England and Wales. Existing rules made in 2008 provide for the creation of “standalone” electronic legal charges: the proposed new

rules would revoke the 2008 rules and allow for both standalone electronic legal charges and electronic charges accompanying a transfer. There is already provision for electronic discharges. The proposed new rules would, therefore, make it possible, for the first time, to carry out electronically each of the principal conveyancing steps in the typical sale and purchase of a house.

Subject to the outcome of the proposals and the advice and assistance of the Rule Committee, it is anticipated that the new rules would come into force during 2011.

Land Registry has today published a consultation paper “E-Conveyancing Secondary Legislation-part 3”, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and are available in the Vote Office and the Printed Paper Office.

Election Day (Weekend Voting Consultation)

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Mr. Michael Wills): I have laid today before Parliament the Government’s response to the “Election Day: Weekend Voting” consultation.

The right to vote is the basis of our political system. Strengthening our democracy requires the removal of barriers to the exercise of that right, so the system for delivering elections must be accessible and responsive to the needs of voters. To this end, the Government committed to consult on whether moving elections to the weekend might help to make voting more accessible and so potentially raise levels of turnout at elections. The consultation provided a further opportunity for debate about how the democratic process might better be shaped to the needs and preferences of citizens.

The “Election Day: Weekend Voting” consultation paper, published in June 2008, invited views on the merits of moving the voting day from the traditional Thursday to one or both days of the weekend for parliamentary and European parliamentary elections, and local elections in England and Wales; and on the best way to do this. The paper set out a range of issues that would need to be taken into account and invited views and evidence. These included the importance of ensuring that religious groups would continue to have opportunities to vote in a manner consistent with their beliefs, and the practical and resource considerations.

The Government launched the weekend voting consultation with an open mind on whether moving polling day could be expected to support greater participation. I am grateful that many people and organisations responded to the consultation. We have considered carefully the views expressed. It is clear that there is no simple or single solution to raising participation and addressing the issues of low or falling turnout, and the responses reveal that there is a wide range of views on the proposals that were put forward.

An overall majority of respondents favoured retaining election day on a weekday. Evidence provided by local authorities and electoral administrators suggested that a weekend poll, particularly one held over two days, would add considerably to the logistical complexity of running elections, particularly in terms of finding appropriate staff and premises. While a small majority of those members of the public who responded to the

consultation supported proposals for weekend voting, there was no evidence that its introduction would have a significant positive impact on participation rates.

Overall, given the lack of consensus in favour of a moving election day, the Government do not propose to move forward with weekend voting at this time. However, recognising that there is some evidence of support among electors—albeit not conclusive here—we believe the issue should be further considered if additional evidence or a stronger view in favour of weekend voting were to become apparent in the future.

The results from the consultation suggest there is continued popular support for remote voting—whether by postal means as now, or potential electronic means in the future. But it is clear from the responses that people wish to be reassured that such methods are secure, transparent and cost-effective. This is an issue that will be kept under review.

The Government are committed to approaching change to the administration of elections in a balanced way to support accessibility and increased engagement but also to ensure that the security and integrity of the ballot is protected. Maintaining public confidence in elections is paramount and it is right that any proposal for change is taken forward only where there is broad support.

Parliamentary Candidates (Guidance on Declaration of Interests)

The Minister of State, Ministry of Justice (Mr. Michael Wills): The Ministry of Justice is publishing today guidance for all candidates at the forthcoming general election to assist them in issuing a declaration of their employment and other interests. The guidance has been produced in response to one of the recommendations contained in the twelfth report of the Committee on Standards in Public Life (CSPL) on MPs’ expenses and allowances. The report said:

Recommendation 37

All candidates at parliamentary elections should publish, at nomination, a register of interests including the existence of other paid jobs and whether they intend to continue to hold them, if elected. The Ministry of Justice should issue guidance on this in time for the next general election. Following the election, consideration should be given as to whether the process should become a statutory part of the nominations process.¹

All parties accepted the report’s recommendations.

The guidance recommends that candidates issue a declaration of their interests against a number of categories. These are largely based on the categories of interest that sitting MPs are required to declare in the Register of Members’ Financial Interests, with appropriate modifications and additions. These reflect the broader purpose of the candidate declaration of interests, as envisaged by the CSPL report, which is to enable the public to find out more about the background of candidates.

In line with the report’s recommendation, the guidance is advisory only. It makes recommendations of best practice which candidates are encouraged to follow in making a declaration. However, candidates are under no obligation to issue a declaration or to follow the guidance in doing so. Candidates will face no legal

sanction should they choose not to publish a declaration, or as a result of the information that they do or do not declare.

Copies of the guidance have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses, the Vote Office and the Printed Paper Office. The guidance has been published on the Ministry of Justice website. The Electoral Commission has also agreed to make a copy of the guidance available through its website. I will be writing to the leaders of all major parties to alert them to publication of the guidance. Separately, officials within the Ministry of Justice will contact directly those prospective parliamentary candidates for whom details are known at the point of publication of the guidance. However, it will ultimately be for candidates to make themselves aware of this guidance.

¹ MPs' Expenses and Allowances, November 2009, p89.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Bloody Sunday Inquiry Report

The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr. Shaun Woodward): Publication of the report of the Bloody Sunday inquiry has been long-awaited and it promises to be a hugely significant event in Northern Ireland's history. But this is also an occasion that will have an enormous impact on the private lives of ordinary people. I am determined to ensure that arrangements for publication are fair and reasonable, and at all times, I intend to act reasonably in recognition of the interests of the families, soldiers and others involved in the inquiry, and of my obligations to Parliament.

I am responsible for publication of the tribunal's report, once it is delivered to me. I am advised that I have a duty, as a public authority under the Human Rights Act, to act in a way that is compatible with the European convention on human rights (ECHR). To fulfil this duty, I need to take steps to satisfy myself that publication of the report will not breach article 2 of the convention by putting the lives or safety of individuals at risk. I am advised that these obligations must be met by me personally, in my capacity as Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. Although the inquiry is also a public authority under the Human Rights Act, I am not entitled to rely on the inquiry to satisfy my article 2 obligations and I have a duty to assess this myself. I also have a duty to satisfy myself that publication will not put national security at risk, for example by disclosing details of sources of confidential information.

During the course of the inquiry, the Government submitted to the tribunal some material that was relevant to its work but which was too sensitive to be disclosed publicly, usually because it contained information which had been provided to the security forces by individuals. If these individuals could be identified from the details they provided it would endanger their lives. This was explained to the tribunal in public interest immunity certificates signed by Ministers, which the tribunal accepted. I understand that the tribunal does not intend to refer to any material covered by public interest immunity certificates, but I have a duty to satisfy myself before

publication that none of this material has inadvertently been revealed in the report. The tribunal also agreed that the identities of a small number of individuals who were engaged on highly sensitive duties should not be disclosed and I need to be assured that these individuals have not been identified.

I intend to establish a very small team of officials and legal advisers to assist me in carrying out this necessary exercise. The team will need to include members drawn from the Ministry of Defence and the Security Service, who are familiar with the material covered by the public interest immunity certificates, but they will be granted access to the report under strict terms of confidentiality and for the sole purpose of carrying out the necessary checks, and they will report directly to me alone. For the avoidance of doubt, and contrary to some press reports, I want to make absolutely clear that this team will not include any legal representatives of the soldiers who were interested parties at the inquiry. In response to a proposal made by some of the families of those killed and wounded on Bloody Sunday, Lord Saville has agreed that this team can carry out the necessary checks on the inquiry's premises while the report remains in his custody, before it is submitted to me. I have confirmed to Lord Saville that I am content with this proposal. I understand that the report will be made available for checking some time this week.

I believe that these checks are absolutely necessary in order to meet the legal obligations on me. I have listened to the concerns raised with me by representatives of the families of those killed or injured on Bloody Sunday and I have sought to find ways to address those concerns. With this in mind, in addition to supporting the proposal made by the families that the checks take place while the report remains in the custody of Lord Saville, I have also sought Lord Saville's permission to allow counsel to the inquiry to be present during the checking process. He has agreed to this in principle, making it clear that they will be acting as representatives of the inquiry and not as advisers to me, or those who are reporting to me.

I want to publish the report in its entirety. Should any concerns about the safety of any individual arise, my first course of action would be to consider whether these can be addressed through alternative means. Were I to reach the conclusion, on advice, that a redaction to the text might be necessary, I would consult Lord Saville. In the very unlikely event that any redaction were deemed necessary, my intention would be to make this clear on the face of the report.

Once the checking process is complete, a publication date can be set and the report can be printed. The report will be published for this House, in response to an Order for a Return which I will invite the House to make. It is, of course, possible that a general election might be called in the meantime. Lord Saville has informed me that if it becomes clear that it will not be possible for the report to be published in advance of the Dissolution of Parliament, the tribunal will agree to retain custody of the report until after the general election.

The report must be published first for this House, but I acknowledge the importance of this inquiry's findings in the lives of a large number of individuals and I have received the consent of the Speaker to facilitate a period of advance sight on the day of publication to those most directly affected by the report's contents. I will

seek to offer advance sight on the day of publication to one representative of each of the families designated as full interested parties to the inquiry and to their legal representatives, without distinction between the families of those killed and of those wounded. Equal arrangements for advance sight will be offered to those soldiers most centrally involved in the subject matter of the inquiry. In keeping with practice for other public inquiries, some Members of this House will also be granted a period of advance sight on the day of publication to enable them to respond to the oral statement which I propose to make to this House on the day the report is published.

I am grateful to the Speaker for his acceptance of the proposals which I have made in relation to advance sight. I will write to Lord Saville, legal representatives of interested parties, the leaders of political parties and others as necessary to confirm arrangements as soon as possible.

PRIME MINISTER

National Security Strategy

The Prime Minister (Mr. Gordon Brown): The safety and security of our citizens is the most important duty of Government. In March 2008, I announced the publication of the UK's first ever national security strategy (NSS) and today, two years on, I am pleased to deliver a progress report, copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House. This report outlines the range of work that has been done since March 2008 to ensure that we are best placed to respond to the broad range of national security risks identified in the first NSS, from terrorism, nuclear proliferation, conflict and stabilisation, organised crime, domestic emergencies, to new challenges including piracy and cyber security.

The report explains how the comprehensive framework provided by the NSS, and the first annual update in 2009, has mobilised Government to work together to strengthen our response across a range of fast-moving and interconnected security issues, and to meet rising public expectations about what Government should be doing to protect citizens, while also increasing transparency and accountability on security issues. The new framework ensures that our response is co-ordinated and flexible and that we are able not only to tackle threats as they arise, but also to act early to deal with the drivers of threats and the environments in which they arise.

This work is overseen by the new Cabinet Committee on National Security which was established in 2007, which includes all the relevant Ministers, police chiefs, as well as the heads of the agencies, the Chief of Defence Staff, and others. It has met very frequently on Afghanistan and Pakistan, as well as a wide range of other issues. It is supported by the new national security secretariat in the Cabinet Office. The secretariat also co-ordinates national security policy work across Government, including contributing to the Defence Green Paper published in February, and the International Development White Paper "Building our Common Future", published in 2009. The national security forum established in 2009 ensures that Government work on national security is informed by independent expertise,

and the new Joint Committee on the National Security Strategy, which will take evidence from Ministers later today, has improved parliamentary oversight.

As a result of this comprehensive whole-of-Government approach, we are better equipped to respond effectively to the immediate threats we face, including terrorism, conflict, serious organised crime and civil emergencies. Today, the Government have published the "CONTEST annual report" (Cm 7833) which sets out progress against our counter-terrorism strategy, updated a year ago and recognised as one of the most sophisticated in the world. We have continued to increase investment—from £1 billion a year on domestic counter-terrorism in 2001 to over £3 billion now, doubling the size of the Security Service and recruiting thousands more counter-terrorism police. We have set up a single border agency with police-level powers, and the new electronic border controls will be covering 95 per cent. of travel by the end of 2010. Watch list arrangements and aviation security more widely are subject to continuous review. But we are committed to combining strong defences at home with decisive action abroad with allies to tackle terrorism and extremism, including building up other countries' capacity to deal with terrorism themselves. Our priority remains the Afghan-Pakistan border areas—still the largest source of terrorist threat to the UK—but we have also had to respond to the diversifying threat from other countries such as Yemen and Somalia, which are covered in the progress report.

We have developed a comprehensive approach to stabilisation and development in failed and fragile states. In Afghanistan we were the first country to set up in 2008 a joint military-civilian headquarters to integrate the security and stabilisation aspects of our strategy—this team is now leading the stabilisation efforts following on from Operation Moshtarak in Helmand. In February this year we launched the new group of 1,150 skilled and experienced civilians constituting the civilian stabilisation group from which up to 200 can be deployed at any one time. After the recent tragedy in Haiti, a team from the stabilisation group was in the air just 12 hours after receiving a request from the UN.

Building on the successful work of the Serious Organised Crime Agency, established in 2006, we published an updated strategy for tackling organised crime in July 2009, strengthening the shared assessment of harm and risk across SOCA, the police and other agencies, and set up a new strategic centre for organised crime in the Home Office to drive activity across Government. A new Ministerial Committee devoted specifically to organised crime will meet for the first time this month.

In relation to work to improve our resilience against domestic emergencies, the preparations put in place by the Government, National Health Service and local responders allowed the UK to respond quickly and minimise the disruption caused by the H1N1 pandemic, and the World Health Organisation has described the UK as

"in the vanguard of countries worldwide in preparing for a pandemic".

Work continues on our critical infrastructure resilience programme as a response to Sir Michael Pitt's review of the floods in the summer of 2007. We publish today the first products of that work: "A Strategic Framework and Policy Statement"; "The Sector Resilience Plan for Critical Infrastructure 2010"; and "Interim Guidance

to the Economic Regulated Sectors". This work forms part of our wider efforts to reduce the vulnerability of national infrastructure and essential services to disruption from natural hazards. Copies of these documents have been placed in the Libraries of the House.

One of the fundamental principles underlying the NSS is the commitment to tackling long-term challenges early by paying attention to the drivers of insecurity, such as poverty, inequality and poor governance, climate change, and competition for energy and other natural resources. The 2009 International Development White Paper identified the need to focus more of our development efforts in conflict-affected and fragile states, and on state-building and peace-building objectives in these countries. The Department for Energy and Climate Change, established in October 2008, plays a critical role in leading our response to climate change and in developing a strategic approach to energy security. The Government's response to Malcolm Wicks' review of international energy security will be published shortly.

The NSS also covers work to secure the UK's interests in a range of environments where security challenges may arise, including the cyber, maritime and space domains. Last summer, we published the first ever cyber security strategy and, in September, established the office for cyber security and the cyber security operations centre. These new structures co-ordinate efforts across Government to ensure both that public sector systems are fully protected, and that citizens and businesses can take full advantage of the huge opportunities presented by cyberspace while reducing the risks that it poses to the UK, including from foreign actors or criminal, negligent or reckless activity. We are also developing a new national partnership to inspire talented young people to take up careers in information security to meet the need for highly skilled cyber security specialists.

As announced in the 2009 NSS update, we have been reviewing the security of the maritime domain, including piracy and counter-terrorism. A key area where we can strengthen our response to potential maritime incidents is through the integration and central co-ordination of maritime surveillance systems. I can announce today that work is beginning to establish a new multi-agency National Maritime Information Centre (NMIC) based at the Ministry of Defence's joint headquarters in Northwood. The Cabinet Office is also currently leading a review of the security of the UK's strategic interests in space.

In relation to nuclear security, the "Road to 2010" White Paper, published in July 2009, set out our response to the full range of nuclear challenges the UK faces, in preparation for President Obama's nuclear security summit in April, and the nuclear non-proliferation treaty (NPT) review conference in May. The Government are putting in place a package of enhanced nuclear security measures to demonstrate the UK's commitment to tackling the threat of nuclear terrorism, and to encourage other nations to follow suit. These include confirming our commitment to renew the G8 global partnership beyond 2012, with a renewed focus on nuclear and biological security; inviting an IAEA International Physical Protection Advisory Service (IPPAS) mission to Sellafield; providing further funding to the IAEA nuclear security fund, to address the most urgent nuclear security needs overseas; and ratifying the two key international instruments for nuclear security (the International Convention on the

Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism; the Amendment to the Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material). We have also just launched the UK's National Nuclear Centre of Excellence.

As the first NSS explained, the global security context is dynamic, interconnected, and unpredictable, and we are committed to strengthening our capacity to monitor risks, anticipate future threats, and respond accordingly. We have increased our horizon scanning capacity and better co-ordinated its use across Government to help us anticipate and prepare for future threats. We are publishing today the 2010 edition of the National Risk Register (first published in 2008), copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House. It reflects our latest assessment of the risks of terrorism, natural hazards, and man-made accidents which may significantly affect human welfare in the UK. Alongside this, we are publishing updated Crisis Response Arrangements (copies of which have been placed in the Libraries of the House) and beginning a public consultation on community resilience.

In the two years since the publication of the first NSS, we have made important progress, working together across Government and backed up by the hard work and dedication of the armed forces, security services, police and others. The nature of the threats we face, from piracy and cyber crime to terrorism and nuclear proliferation, is varied and ever changing, but we will continue in our endeavours to secure the UK, its values, its interests and its people.

TRANSPORT

Blue Badge Reform Programme

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mr. Sadiq Khan): The Department for Transport has today published a consultation document containing proposals to ensure that the Blue Badge Scheme is more consistently administered, to clamp down on badge abuse and to help more people with severe mobility problems to access services more easily.

The proposals form part of the implementation of the Comprehensive Blue Badge Reform Strategy, published in October 2008.

Key proposals include:

- Improving scheme enforcement through amendments to primary and secondary legislation.

- Widening eligibility criteria through secondary legislation.

- Improving funding to local authorities to help them deliver improved eligibility assessments.

We have been working closely with stakeholders in the development of these proposals and will consult on other aspects of the reform programme later in 2010 and 2011.

A copy of the consultation document and associated impact assessment has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

WORK AND PENSIONS**Employment Programmes**

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (Jonathan Shaw): I am setting out today how my Department can play a key role in the Government's plan to halve the budget deficit within four years. Through our employment programmes the Government have invested £5 billion to ensure that we can help people back into work as quickly as possible and this investment has helped to keep unemployment much lower than was previously expected. This, in turn, has helped to reduce the cost of out-of-work benefits: the claimant count planning assumption, published in the 2009 pre-Budget report would lead to a reduction

in benefit expenditure of some £10 billion over five years, when compared with the assumptions used in Budget 2009.

My Department has a key role in helping to reduce Government borrowing. By helping more people back into work, DWP can help individuals as well as reduce expenditure on out-of-work benefits. It is important that this can be done as efficiently as possible, and I have today published a document—"Delivering more for less: the efficiency programme of the DWP"—showing how my Department has consistently delivered value for money by reducing back-office costs, sharing costs across Government and increasing the productivity of its staff. Due to these efficiency programmes, it has been possible to increase the quality of the services that we offer to customers, at the same time as reducing the cost to the taxpayer.

Petitions

Monday 22 March 2010

OBSERVATIONS

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Sheltered Housing (Sidcup)

The Petition of persons resident in the Old Bexley and Sidcup parliamentary constituency,

Declares that they are concerned for the future of Heron Court, a sheltered housing scheme in Sidcup, with provision for elderly residents and operated by London and Quadrant Housing Trust to which nominations are made by the London Borough of Bexley.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Secretary of State responsible for Local Government to ensure that their local authority considers the 600 persons upon their sheltered accommodation waiting list while empty places are retained in appropriate schemes within the Borough.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented on 12 January 2010, *Official Report*,; Vol. 503, c. 14P.]

[P000705]

Observations from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government:

The Secretary of State acknowledges the concerns of the petitioners about the future of the Heron Court sheltered housing scheme. As autonomous bodies, the management of available social housing stock, and nominations for accommodation, are operational matters for the London and Quadrant Housing Trust and the London Borough of Bexley. Ministers have no remit to intervene in their day to day activities.

I understand, however, that the Housing Trust has met with residents of Heron Court and their families on a number of occasions to discuss their plans to modernise and refurbish the accommodation at Heron Court, so that it better meets the needs of its residents, for instance by improving accessibility.

I also understand the Trust has written to every signatory of this petition, explaining the programme of modernisation underway at Heron Court and reassuring them that no resident will be forced to move from their home. I am assured that the Trust will continue to consult with residents on each phase of the modernisation programme to ensure that their specific needs and requirements for both their homes and the communal areas of the scheme are satisfied.

More generally, my Department sponsors the Tenant Services Authority to regulate Registered Social Landlords (RSLs), such as London and Quadrant Housing Trust, to ensure they provide decent homes and services for tenants and that they are properly managed. RSLs must meet existing eligibility and registration criteria, and they must then demonstrate ongoing compliance with the Regulatory Code and guidance in respect of their financial viability, governance and management.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Anti-Social Behaviour

The Petition of Mr and Mrs Martin, the residents of St. George's Walk and others,

Declares that the constant playing of football on the green adjacent to St George's Walk is causing a nuisance to local residents by damaging the green, surrounding properties and area; that the participating youths behave anti-socially which causes distress and creates unnecessary work for residents who must clean up the mess left at the end of the day; further declares that the Council has a statutory responsibility, under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, to take reasonable steps to investigate any complaint of a nuisance in their area; that for these and other valid reasons, Castle Point Borough Council should prohibit the playing of football on this area of the green and plants trees around the green to increase the safety of properties and the visual amenities for the community.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to press Castle Point Borough Council and local Councillors to immediately investigate this nuisance, ban football on the green and begin planting trees for community wellbeing.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Bob Spink, *Official Report*, 2 March 2010; Vol. 506, c. 916.]

[P000745]

Observations from the Secretary of State for the Home Department:

The Government are committed to tackling anti-social behaviour in all its forms and have made it a key priority for action at all levels. No one should be expected to suffer from antisocial behaviour—which is why our approach is tackling not tolerating antisocial behaviour.

We have made it clear to local areas that we expect local agencies to use all the powers available to tackle anti-social behaviour; and to take swift and effective action when dealing with complaints of anti-social behaviour.

The Government have introduced a set of robust powers for local partners, including the police and local authorities, to tackle anti-social behaviour and have issued new guidance on how to make full and effective use of them. Warnings, acceptable behaviour contracts (ABCs), fixed penalty notices, enforcement of tenancy agreements, anti-social behaviour orders (ASBOs), premises closure orders, and injunctions are all tools that could be used to stop anti-social behaviour. There should be no situation in which anti-social behaviour cannot be tackled or victims not supported.

I understand from Castle Point borough council that action is being taken to address the problem. Ward members and residents have met with the police and the police were to increase patrols to respond to any problems.

The request for tree planting on the green has also been referred for consideration at the next Canvey West neighbourhood meeting which is to take place on 24 March 2010.

Written Answers to Questions

Monday 22 March 2010

ELECTORAL COMMISSION COMMITTEE

Bearwood Corporate Services

Mr. Gordon Prentice: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission (1) if the Electoral Commission will place in the Library a copy of the report of its investigation into Bearwood Corporate Services; [322794]

(2) if the Electoral Commission will place in the Library a list of the officials and staff of the Conservative Party who did not accept the invitation for interview with representatives of the Electoral Commission as part of its investigations into Bearwood Corporate Services; [322795]

(3) if the Electoral Commission will place in the Library a copy of the report by forensic accountants commissioned as part of the Electoral Commission's investigations into Bearwood Corporate Services. [322796]

Mr. Streeter: I will give the hon. Member a substantive reply as soon as possible.

Substantive answer from Gary Streeter to Gordon Prentice:

The Electoral Commission informs me that, consistent with its disclosure policy, it has published on its website a case summary setting out the issues considered by the Commission during the course of the investigation, the information obtained in relation to those issues, and the legal basis for the conclusions the Commission reached.

The Commission further informs me that, in the interests of effective regulation and having regard to the confidentiality and sensitivity of information provided, and the privacy and confidentiality of those involved, it is not the Commission's practice to release further information obtained during an investigation.

Trade Unions

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission which trade unions have registered with the Electoral Commission as a registered third party in respect of the forthcoming general election to date; and how much Unite has spent as a registered third party to date. [323831]

Mr. Streeter: The Electoral Commission informs me that as of 19 March 2010 seven trade unions have registered with the Commission as recognised third parties. These are Community, the National Union of Teachers, the Public and Commercial Services Union, the Educational Institute of Scotland, Unison, Unite and Usdaw. The Commission further informs me that recognised third parties must report their regulated spending to the Commission after the general election.

WALES

Departmental Food

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if he will take steps to ensure that the meat and dairy products procured by his Department are free range or produced to standards equivalent to those of the RSPCA Freedom Food scheme. [323079]

Mr. Hain: My Department does not procure any meat or dairy products.

Departmental Publications

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether the dates of publication of any regular statistics or reports by his Department have been affected by planning for the forthcoming general election. [323454]

Mr. Hain: No.

SCOTLAND

Departmental Food

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Scotland if he will take steps to ensure that the meat and dairy products procured by his Department are free range or produced to standards equivalent to those of the RSPCA Freedom Food scheme. [323076]

Ann McKechnin: The Scotland Office does not procure any meat or dairy products, with the exception of small quantities of milk on which we have not logged any particular certification.

PRIME MINISTER

Community Relations

Mr. Jenkin: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to the answer of 4 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 1304W, on building resilience, whether the paper from the Civil Contingencies Secretariat entitled *Building Resilience: a new approach to crisis* by M. S. D. Granatt, Head of GICS, Cabinet Office and J. P. Macintosh DSTL, Ministry of Defence, published in July 2001 and revised in February 2002 is classified. [323330]

The Prime Minister: Yes. The paper 'Building Resilience: a new approach to crisis' is classified.

Departmental Internet

Mr. Heald: To ask the Prime Minister how many designs for its (a) internal website and (b) intranet his Office has commissioned since 2005; and what the cost was of each such design. [321981]

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by my right hon. Friend the Minister for the Cabinet Office (Tessa Jowell) on 17 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 866W.

Intelligence and Security Committee

David Davis: To ask the Prime Minister pursuant to the answer of 1 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 861W, when he expects the views of the Intelligence and Security Committee to be published. [322313]

The Prime Minister: The Government remain committed to publishing both the guidance and the views of the Intelligence and Security Committee as soon as possible.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Departmental Surveys

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland if he will place in the Library a copy of the benchmark results of the Civil Service People Survey for his Department and its agencies. [322573]

Mr. Woodward: The Civil Service People Survey was not carried out within the Northern Ireland Office (NIO). However, a separate NIO staff attitude survey was carried out within the Department in May and June 2009. A copy of the overall results of this survey has been placed in the Library.

Fines: Non-payment

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are in prison in Northern Ireland as a result of non-payment of fines. [323324]

Paul Goggins: On 18 March 2010 there were 28 persons in prison in Northern Ireland as a result of non-payment of fines.

Magilligan Prison

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many people are expected to be employed in the (a) construction and (b) running of the new prison at HM Prison Magilligan. [323323]

Paul Goggins: It is too early to provide specific answers, however it is estimated that between 150 and 300 people could be working on site, depending on procurement method and stage of construction.

The new design would entail more cost effective staffing when the prison is operational.

Youth Custody

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland how many (a) young adults and (b) women were serving a custodial sentence in prison in Northern Ireland in (i) January 2010, (ii) January 2009 and (iii) January 2008. [323325]

Paul Goggins: The information for the last Monday in each month is provided in the following table.

| | Young offenders serving a sentence | Women serving a sentence |
|-----------------|---------------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 25 January 2008 | 77 | 21 |
| 26 January 2009 | 85 | 18 |
| 28 January 2010 | 83 | 16 |

Young Offenders are defined as being aged 18 to 21 years. Upon attaining 21 years they are deemed to be adults and can be sent to an adult prison.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Council Tax

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the (a) maximum and (b) minimum number of years of over-paid council tax is that should be refunded to local taxpayers when a council tax banding error has been identified by the Valuation Office Agency; and what guidance has been issued to local authorities on this matter. [323104]

Barbara Follett: I refer the hon. Member to the answers I gave to the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr. Jackson) on 1 March 2010, *Official Report*, columns 952-53W. No guidance has been issued to local authorities on this matter.

Council Tax: Empty Property

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Peterborough of 14 December 2009, *Official Report*, column 896W, on council tax: empty property, whether the additional revenue raised under the recalculation of the council tax base for the 2011-12 settlement will be retained by local authorities. [323039]

Barbara Follett: All council tax revenue is retained by local authorities. Each local authority's council tax base is calculated for the purposes of formula grant distribution, and is the number of Band D equivalent properties in their authority.

Departmental Records

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when his Department's headquarters was last reviewed for compliance with the Public Records Acts; and what the results were of that review. [322839]

Barbara Follett: The Department's headquarters was reviewed by the National Archives for compliance with both the Public Records Acts and Lord Chancellor's Section 46 Code of Practice for Records Management under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 in 2007. The outcome of the review was published on the National Archives website. This can be found at:

<http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/documents/dclg-summary-report.doc>

The outcome includes evidence of good practice; the challenges faced and recommendations. The Department also has put in place arrangements to ensure that records

are managed on a day to day basis to comply with the requirements of the Public Records Acts and officials meet regularly with the National Archives to review record keeping arrangements.

Departmental Temporary Employment

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether his Department undertakes equality and diversity monitoring of agency staff recruited to work at its headquarters. [322841]

Barbara Follett: Our contracted supplier for temporary staff is Reed and, as part of their contract, they are required to monitor the diversity of the staff they provide to the Department. The data include staff provided to the Government Offices and the Government Equalities Office (GEO). They report to us on a monthly basis, with the report covering nationality, ethnicity, gender, age and disability.

Fire Services

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether his Department has provided guidance to fire and rescue authorities on the use of socio-demographic profiling to inform decisions on the provision of fire and rescue services. [308427]

Mr. Malik: A range of IRMP related guidance has been issued to FRAs and is available on the Communities and Local Government website at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/fire/developingfuture/integratedriskmanagement/>

The guidance, which is non-prescriptive, is designed to provide advice and assistance on IRMP and its associated processes, allowing local authorities and local communities to make appropriate decisions at the local level.

The Department has also provided each fire and rescue service with a suite of software called the fire service emergency cover (FSEC) toolkit. This toolkit allows each fire and rescue service to undertake a risk-based assessment of their area. FSEC is based upon a geographical information system, which takes account of a range of factors including socio-economic and geo-demographic data, and uses bespoke software to calculate the probable losses based on a particular set of response strategies in terms of lives lost and property costs. That then enables the FRA to determine its optimum prevention, protection and response strategies appropriate to its own area.

The Department has also recently published research on socio-demographics and fire risk, which can be found at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/fire/frsperformancanalysis>

Fire Services: Standards

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what the average response time was for a fire appliance to attend (a) a dwelling fire with persons involved, (b) a dwelling fire with no persons involved, (c) a fire in a non-dwelling building, (d) a road vehicle fire and (e) an outdoor fire broken down by (i) region, (ii) fire service family group and (iii) local authority in each of the last three years. [320846]

Mr. Malik: The information requested has been placed in the Library.

Housing: Conferences

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (1) which (a) Ministers and (b) officials in his Department attended the MIPIM international property conference in (i) 2007, (ii) 2008 and (iii) 2009; [323282]

(2) how much his Department expects to spend on (a) travel and (b) accommodation for (i) Ministers and (ii) officials attending the MIPIM international property conference in March 2010; [323283]

(3) how much he expects to be spent by the Homes and Communities Agency on (a) travel and (b) accommodation for officials attending the MIPIM international property conference in March 2010. [323285]

Barbara Follett: In 2007, 2008 and 2009, the MEPIM conference was attended by the following officials from Communities and Local Government:

2007

Director General, Policy Programmes and Innovation

2008

Director General, Housing and Planning

Director General, Tackling Disadvantage

Director General, Finance and Corporate Services

2009

Director General, Housing and Planning

Director General, Regions and Communities

No departmental Ministers or officials have attended the MIPIM conference in 2010, either at the expense of the Department or at the invitation of the Homes and Communities Agency. Therefore, no costs were incurred by HCA for this purpose.

Local Government Act 1976

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will amend section 11 of the Local Government Act 1976 to permit local authorities to sell electricity other than that produced in association with heat. [323160]

Mr. Kidney: I have been asked to reply.

The Government published a consultation document on proposals to allow local authorities to sell electricity they generate themselves from renewable sources on 2 March.

We believe that local authorities should play a full part in the development of renewable heat and electricity. Allowing local authorities to sell electricity generated by them from renewable sources is expected to encourage the development of local renewable electricity projects by those local authorities that are well-placed to undertake such projects either on their own or in partnerships.

The consultation document can be found at:

http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/content/cms/consultations/loc_auth_elec/loc_auth_elec.aspx

and has a closing date for responses of 2 June 2010.

Non-Domestic Rates

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his latest estimate is of the take-up rate of small business rate relief in each local authority area. [323033]

Barbara Follett: The report ‘Small business rate relief—improving evidence on eligibility and take-up: Methodology’, published on 9 December 2009, provides details of the methodology to estimate take-up of small business rate relief. This methodology can only be applied nationally for England as a whole. Therefore it is not possible to calculate an estimate of take-up for each local authority. This report is available at:

[http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/local government/smallbusinessmethod](http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/local%20government/smallbusinessmethod)

However, new experimental statistics on the number of hereditaments claiming small business rate relief (SBRR), published on the Communities and Local

Government website on 25 February 2010, show that 462,000 hereditaments in England were benefiting from SBRR on 31 December 2008.

By applying that figure to the eligibility estimates made for the 2005 rating list it is estimated that around 80 per cent. of eligible hereditaments in England were claiming SBRR in 2008-09—see table 1.

Relief granted to small businesses has been increasing since SBRR was introduced—from £202 million in 2005-06 to £298 million in 2008-09. This represents a real terms increase of 34 per cent. This suggests that 92 per cent. of the maximum amount of relief that could be claimed is being taken up, up from 69 per cent. in the first year of the scheme—see table 2.

This statistical release is available at:

<http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/corporate/statistics/sbrrfeb2010>

The report ‘Small business rate relief—improving evidence on eligibility and take-up: Methodology’ will be updated to take account of these new numbers.

Table 1: Take-up of SBRR—numbers claiming

| | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|
| Number of hereditaments actually claiming SBRR (thousand) | 396 | 433 | 462 |
| Number of hereditaments eligible (thousand) | 575 | 575 | 575 |
| Percentage of estimated eligible actually claiming | 69 | 75% | 80 |

Table 2: Take-up of SBRR 2005-06 to 2008-09—relief

| | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 |
|------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Relief available (£ million) | 295 | 300 | 315 | 325 |
| Relief claimed (£ million) | 202 | 237 | 259 | 298 |
| Take-up (percentage) | 69 | 78 | 83 | 92 |

Schools: Carbon Emissions

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether local education authorities will be liable for the carbon dioxide emissions of maintained schools under the Carbon Reduction Commitment process. [323143]

Joan Ruddock: I have been asked to reply.

Maintained schools will be grouped with their relevant maintaining local authority (LEA) for the purposes of CRC qualification and participation. The exception is PFI schools deemed to be responsible for the energy supply under the CRC, which will participate individually or as part of their PFI corporate structure.

This grouping approach brings schools that would not have otherwise qualified into the scheme, thereby enabling the public sector to demonstrate leadership in carbon reduction and realise the cost-effective energy efficiency opportunities across the schools’ estate.

DEFENCE

Afghanistan

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence which staff from his Department have visited Afghanistan in each month since 2007. [322515]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth: Military and civilian staff from the Ministry of Defence are required to visit Afghanistan on a regular basis in support of current operations. The number and posts of those visiting in each month since 2007 is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Armed Forces: Compensation

Mr. Swire: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has paid to relatives of servicemen killed in action in each of the last five years. [321372]

Mr. Kevan Jones: It is not possible to provide a definitive figure for all aspects of the payments made to bereaved families as benefits are payable under a range of different provisions and as the information is not held centrally it could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

The Armed Forces Pension Scheme provides a death in-service lump sum and the appropriate family forces pensions, including enhanced payments were death is related to service. It is estimated that at least £14 million has been paid in death in-service lump sums over the last five years to the families of those killed in action.

The War Pension Scheme provides for ongoing payments to families of personnel killed, as a result of service, before 6 April 2005, with the Armed Forces Compensation Scheme (AFCS) making that provision for those who

have died since that date. In addition to a Guaranteed Income Payment, a Bereavement Grant of up to £20,000 is payable under AFCS. Payments amounting to some £8.8 million have been made to bereaved families under AFCS since 2005 including those killed in a non-operational environment where death was attributable to service.

Funeral grants are also payable where a service funeral is held or the cost of a private funeral (up to a current maximum of £2,786) will be met. In the region of £112,000 has been paid in funeral costs. In addition costs associated with family attendance at repatriation ceremonies and any pre-inquest and inquest hearings are met by the MOD.

Armed Forces: Drugs

Patrick Mercer: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife of 22 February 2010, *Official Report*, columns 7-8W, on armed forces: discharges, how many compulsory drug tests the Army has carried out in each quarter since January 2008; and how many positive tests for (a) cocaine, (b) ecstasy and (c) cannabis there were in each such quarter. [322535]

Bill Rammell: The number of compulsory drug tests undertaken by the Army in each quarter since January 2008 and the positive results for cocaine, ecstasy and cannabis are shown in the following table:

| <i>Period</i> | <i>Number of tests</i> | <i>Cocaine</i> | <i>Ecstasy</i> | <i>Cannabis</i> |
|-----------------------|------------------------|----------------|----------------|-----------------|
| <i>2008</i> | | | | |
| 1 January-31 March | 19,885 | 92 | 10 | 47 |
| 1 April-30 June | 24,787 | 152 | 10 | 49 |
| 1 July-30 September | 19,978 | 95 | 10 | 31 |
| 1 October-31 December | 25,189 | 88 | 2 | 44 |
| <i>2009</i> | | | | |
| 1 January-31 March | 25,045 | 65 | 3 | 43 |
| 1 April-30 June | 26,932 | 70 | 3 | 65 |
| 1 July-30 September | 26,210 | 55 | 0 | 58 |
| 1 October-31 December | 24,762 | 47 | 0 | 37 |

Armed Forces: Merseyside

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much funding has been allocated to (a) cadet forces and (b) the Territorial Army on Merseyside in 2009-10. [322633]

Mr. Kevan Jones: The information is not held centrally.

Funding for the Cadet forces in any particular area comes from a wide variety of sources including the single services, the use of subsidised accommodation, and local donations and fundraising efforts. To determine how much funding has been allocated to a specific unit would require a manual search of records and incur disproportionate cost.

Territorial Army (TA) funding is not only provided through the Army but also from different sources dependent on how the infrastructure is shared. For example, funding may be generated by allowing another organisation, such as the Air Training Corps or Sea Cadets, to use the

facility when not required for TA activity. This allows for the most efficient use of resources. To determine how much funding has been provided to Merseyside would require the manual search of records ranging from local agreements through to more formal arrangements with the single services, thus incurring disproportionate cost.

The Government remain committed to the TA and the cadet forces. The TA continues to play a vital role in support of the Regular Army, not least on operations in Afghanistan. The Cadet Organisation dates back 150 years. It is one of the oldest and most successful voluntary youth organisations in the world. Today it numbers 131,000 young people, led by 25,000 adult volunteers, in well over 3,000 sites across the country.

Atomic Weapons Establishment

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many abnormal safety events were recorded at the Atomic Weapons Establishment in (a) 2008 and (b) 2009; and how many of those events were classified as having the potential to challenge a nuclear safety system. [319191]

Mr. Quentin Davies: The Atomic Weapons Establishment (AWE) defines an abnormal event (AE) as any action or series of actions that causes a deviation from the planned course of events. An AE need not cause physical harm to persons, property or the environment, and AEs may cover quality and security issues as well as safety.

AEs are classified into seven different categories; five of these are considered to be related to safety. The total number of AEs in these five categories was 4,020 in 2008 and 3,911 in 2009. Of these, three in each year were assessed as having the potential, in the absence of remedial action, to challenge a nuclear safety system. None of these six actually did, and none resulted in any harm.

All reported AEs are investigated as appropriate; in particular, the six events referred to above were subject to detailed investigations, and all necessary remedial action has been completed to the satisfaction of the Nuclear Installations Inspectorate.

The aim of the AWE reporting system is to identify all AEs, however minor, and the number of AEs is considered to be a reflection of the robustness of the system and the vigilance of the AWE work force.

Departmental Food

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will take steps to ensure that the meat and dairy products procured by his Department and its non-departmental bodies are free range or produced to standards equivalent to those of the RSPCA Freedom Food scheme. [323070]

Mr. Quentin Davies: For UK armed forces personnel "in barracks", when personnel are not being fed under the catering retail and leisure contracts, and those serving on operations and overseas exercises, there is a single food supply contractor, Purple Foodservice Solutions (PFS).

PFS increasingly takes into account ethical and sustainable criteria in their procurement, and is required to seek best value for money in the open market consistent with meeting Ministry of Defence food quality standards which are linked to the Office of Government Commerce Food Quality Standards.

PFS procures meat and dairy proteins in the UK that meet the Red Tractor Scheme (a UK farm assured scheme which is the equivalent to the RSPCA Freedom Foods Scheme) and UK animal welfare standards. Any which are purchased outside the UK comply with the EU animal welfare standards.

Dairy products meet the Red Tractor requirements, and eggs meet the Lion Standard, an internationally recognised Quality Code of Practice.

Departmental Internet

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 1 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 849W, on departmental internet, what the cost was of the website redesign. [321932]

Mr. Kevan Jones: The costs of the redesigns were as follows:

| | Website and URL | Cost (£) |
|-------------------|--|----------|
| 2005-06 | MOD corporate website http://www.mod.uk | 400,000 |
| 2007-08 | | 150,000 |
| 2005-06 | Royal Navy http://www.royalnavy.mod.uk | 270,000 |
| 2007 | | 110,000 |
| 2008 ¹ | British Army http://www.army.mod.uk | 266,500 |
| 2006-07 | Royal Air Force http://www.raf.mod.uk | 119,579 |

¹ The British Army website redesign launched on 30 May 2008; the redesign project launched in 2006 and preparatory design work was carried out between 2006 and 2008.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence 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. [321994]

Mr. Kevan Jones: The following designs have been commissioned since 2005.

| Date | Work commissioned | Cost (£) |
|---------------|--|----------------------|
| March 2006 | Enhancements to publishing templates and introduction of a new "Business Processes" area. | ¹ 396,590 |
| December 2007 | Re-branding of the Intranet to encompass military content. | 29,238 |
| July 2009 | Complete site re-design as part of upgrade from Microsoft Content Management System (CMS) 2002 to Microsoft Office SharePoint Server 2007. | ² 200,000 |

¹ Includes design and code development.

² Includes requirements capture and design.

A number of other internal websites are run by different parts of the Ministry of Defence, but these are not managed centrally. Information on these sites could be provided only at disproportionate cost. The Ministry of Defence is progressively reducing the number of internal websites and migrating their content across to the Defence Intranet.

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how much his Department spent on maintaining its Flickr channel in 2009-10; [322526]

(2) how many people his Department employs to maintain its social media and social networking sites; and at what cost in the latest period for which figures are available; [322529]

(3) how much his Department spent on maintaining its Twitter feeds in the latest period for which figures are available; [322530]

(4) how much his Department spent on maintaining its YouTube channel in the latest period for which figures are available. [322607]

Mr. Kevan Jones: There is no one MOD employee whose main role is to maintain social media and social networking sites, Twitter, YouTube or Flickr, although there are some for whom it is a small part of their role alongside their other duties.

My Department has spent \$30 on a single Flickr 'Pro' licence, for the Royal Military College Sandhurst.

The official, sponsored and affiliated social media presences of the Ministry of Defence and the armed forces are listed at

<http://www.blogs.mod.uk/homepage.html>

Departmental Manpower

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many civilian staff are employed principally to operate his Department's White Fleet of vehicles. [322848]

Mr. Kevan Jones: A Contract Management Team comprising 15 civilian posts manages the UK White Fleet contract on behalf of the MOD. Other civilian staff are involved in managing White Fleet activity at a local level across MOD; this information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Departmental Surveys

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will place in the Library a copy of the benchmark results of the Civil Service People Survey for his Department and its agencies. [322576]

Mr. Kevan Jones: Yes. The document—October 2009 MOD Your Say Survey results (part of the Civil Service People Survey)—will be placed in the Library of the House.

These results are also available on the MOD website:

<http://www.mod.uk/DefenceInternet/FreedomOfInformation/PublicationScheme/SearchPublicationScheme/HrStrategyCivilianContinuousAttitudeSurveys.htm>

The document for UK Hydrographic Office results will also be placed in the Library of the House shortly. No other trading funds participated in the 2009 survey.

Departmental Travel

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department spent on travel for its civilian staff between (a) London and Edinburgh, (b) London and Glasgow and (c) London and the rest of Scotland in each of the last five years. [321701]

Mr. Kevan Jones: Travel between London and Scotland may be undertaken by a number of methods of travel (e.g. road, rail, air, coach). This information is not recorded by location and the provision of this information could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Devonport Dockyard

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when his Department will make a decision on the future baseporting of frigates currently baseported in Devonport Naval Base. [323267]

Mr. Quentin Davies: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 27 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 890W, to the hon. Member for Portsmouth, South (Mr. Hancock).

Future Rapid Effect System

Mr. Gerald Howarth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) when he expects to announce his decision on the preferred bidder for the Future Rapid Effects System armoured reconnaissance vehicle contract; [323169]

(2) what advice his Department received from the Treasury in connection with the choice of design for the Future Rapid Effects System armoured reconnaissance vehicle. [323170]

Mr. Quentin Davies: The Future Rapid Effect System programme has been recast from a single programme into a set of constituent projects, namely: the Specialist Vehicles; the Utility Vehicles; and the Manoeuvre Support Vehicles. An announcement on the competition for the Specialist Vehicle project has been made today in a written ministerial statement by the Secretary of State for Defence.

HM Treasury has provided no advice to the Department regarding the choice of design for the Specialist Vehicle capability. The MOD reached its own decision on the choice of design based on the advice of expert assessment panels.

Group 4 Securicor

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what discussions his Department has had with Group 4 Securicor on its proposals to have outsourced to the private security industry those services which are detailed in the unprinted paper reported to the House by the Defence Committee on 10 February 2010; and if he will make a statement. [322507]

Mr. Bob Ainsworth [holding answer 17 March 2010]: The Ministry of Defence has a number of existing agreements with Group 4 Securicor for the provision of Defence services. We are aware of the range of services that the company offers and they are, of course, free to compete for additional Ministry of Defence business through established procedures. My officials engage with Group 4 Securicor on both current business and potential future opportunities as required.

HMS Gannet

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many search and rescue call-outs there were from HMS Gannet between 1 March 2009 and 28 February 2010. [322857]

Bill Rammell [holding answer 18 March 2010]: The number of search and rescue call-outs from HMS Gannet between 1 March 2009 and 31 January 2010 are as follows:

| Month | Callouts |
|-------------|----------|
| <i>2009</i> | |
| March | 33 |
| April | 35 |
| May | 46 |
| June | 35 |
| July | 41 |
| August | 44 |
| September | 36 |
| October | 32 |
| November | 39 |
| December | 42 |
| <i>2010</i> | |
| January | 37 |
| Total | 445 |

Official Statistics guidelines do not allow the release of data prior to its official publication. The Official Statistics for February 2010 are due to be released by Defence Analytical Services and Advice on Monday 29 March. Search and rescue statistics can be found at:

www.dasa.mod.uk

Hotels

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has spent on (a) renting accommodation and (b) hotel costs for its civilian staff attending meetings in Scotland in the last 12 months. [321702]

Mr. Kevan Jones: Civilian employees are unlikely to use or stay in rented accommodation for a business meeting. Employees may rent accommodation temporarily as a result of a transfer but information on this or hotel costs for meetings in Scotland is not held in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Members: Correspondence

Dr. Fox: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with reference to the answer of 4 November 2009, *Official Report*, column 704W, on helicopters, when he plans to write to the hon. Member for Woodspring. [314287]

Bill Rammell: I wrote to the hon. Member on 5 March.

Middle East: Military Attachés

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence to which countries in the Middle East a UK defence attaché is posted. [320967]

Bill Rammell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him by the Minister for Veterans (Mr. Jones) on 20 October 2009, *Official Report*, column 1366W.

Navy: Scotland

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many naval vessels are permanently based in Scotland; and how many have been permanently based in Scotland in each year since 1997. [317783]

Bill Rammell: The Royal Navy currently has five submarines and eight surface vessels based in Scotland. The details for each year since 1997 are shown in the following table.

| <i>Number of RN vessels base port in Scotland</i> | | |
|---|----------------|------------------|
| | <i>Surface</i> | <i>Submarine</i> |
| 1997 | 11 | 8 |
| 1998 | 11 | 9 |
| 1999 | 11 | 9 |
| 2000 | 13 | 9 |
| 2001 | 14 | 9 |
| 2002 | 15 | 9 |
| 2003 | 13 | 8 |
| 2004 | 13 | 8 |
| 2005 | 12 | 8 |
| 2006 | 9 | 6 |
| 2007 | 8 | 6 |
| 2008 | 8 | 5 |
| 2009 | 8 | 5 |
| 2010 | 8 | 5 |

The fluctuations in submarine numbers reflect the gradual drawdown of the Swiftsure class as they reach the end of their in-service life. Over the next few years, as HM Naval Base Clyde becomes the main operating base for all classes of submarines, there will be a gradual transfer of three Trafalgar class submarines from Devonport to Faslane. In the future, the Astute class and the replacement for the Vanguard class, will also be based in Scotland.

The number of surface ships initially increased over this period reflecting the move of the Sandown class mine counter measure vessels to Scotland, then decreased reflecting the subsequent disbandment of the Northern Ireland Squadron following the NI Accord. The numbers are commensurate with the reduction in the surface fleet numbers as a whole throughout this period.

Additionally some 23 small boats allocated to the Royal Marines are currently maintained in Scotland. These are not allocated to a base port in the same way as larger vessels; details of the numbers maintained in Scotland since 1997 are not available.

I refer the hon. Member to the written ministerial statement on 6 May 2009, *Official Report*, column 16WS, which provided clarity to future base porting regarding the three naval bases under the Maritime Change Programme.

Nimrod Aircraft

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what his most recent estimate is of the cost to the public purse of the Nimrod MR2 modification programme announced in March 2009. [322845]

Mr. Quentin Davies: The cost of replacing a number of fuel seals and the engine hot air ducts on the Nimrod aircraft, as announced on 9 March 2009, *Official Report*, columns 1-2WS, together with associated maintenance work, was in the order of £16 million.

RAF Coningsby

Robert Key: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the fast jet test and evaluation advice available at RAF Coningsby is provided in-house. [322787]

Bill Rammell: On 1 April 2010, the Fast Jet Test Squadron, currently based at MOD Boscombe Down, will complete its merger with 17 (Reserve) and 41 (Reserve) Squadrons. Under this new arrangement, most fast jet test flying will be conducted by the two RAF squadrons at RAF Coningsby. Evaluation advice will be provided jointly by QinetiQ and MOD personnel at RAF Coningsby and MOD Boscombe Down. A fast jet experimental flight, and the fast jets owned by QinetiQ, will remain at MOD Boscombe Down.

Rescue Services

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence when he plans to respond to the petition on SAR Chivenor presented to the Prime Minister on 25 February 2010. [322844]

Mr. Quentin Davies: The Ministry of Defence is in receipt of the petition and I will write to the hon. Member, as the petition organiser, shortly.

Rescue Services: Helicopters

Nick Harvey: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what timetable has been set for signing the search and rescue helicopter contract with Soteria Consortium. [322843]

Mr. Quentin Davies: Subject to finalisation, it is expected that the contract will be signed later in 2010. This is anticipated to be in good time to allow the service to commence in 2012.

Royal Hospital Haslar

Sir Peter Viggers: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether contractual provisions were included in the documentation for the sale by Defence Estates of the Royal Hospital Haslar to ensure that the vision for the future of the site referred to in the letter from the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Defence to the hon. Member for Gosport of 16 July 2009 would be fulfilled. [321679]

Mr. Kevan Jones: The future of the site is now a matter for Gosport borough council as the local planning authority.

As I set out in my written ministerial statement on 20 July 2009, *Official Report*, columns 94-95WS, Our Enterprise has a vision of promoting the quality of life for both individuals residing on the site and for Gosport as a whole and will continue social and health care on the site by providing a "Veterans Village", student accommodation, community healthcare and a commercial centre as well as residential uses.

Contractual provisions between the Ministry of Defence and the purchaser affecting the development of the site were not included in the sale documentation for the sale of the Haslar site.

University Officer Training Corps

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had on (a) the funding and (b) the participation of students in officer training corps units at universities; and if he will make a statement. [322613]

Mr. Kevan Jones: The Government fully recognise the value of the University Royal Naval Units, The Officer Training Corps, The University Air Squadrons and the Defence Training Undergraduate Scheme. They allow individuals to develop skills that are extremely valuable in a future career either within the armed forces or without.

Each of the services is looking at how best to support the University Training Units; until those decisions are finalised I cannot speculate about future funding levels.

No University Training Units have closed as a result of changes to funding during this financial year. Despite some reduction in attendance by Officer Cadets at University Officer Training Corps they remain oversubscribed against their establishment. The average actual strength in 2009 was around 3,500. This is against an establishment figure of 2,946.

JUSTICE

Arrest Warrants

Dr. Starkey: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what account was taken of each of the criteria in the Government's code of practice on consultation in preparing his Department's consultation on arrest warrants-universal jurisdiction. [323262]

Claire Ward: The question of arrest warrants for universal jurisdiction offences is not the subject of a consultation exercise. Given the importance of the issue, however, the Government thought it right to seek views from a small number of interested parties.

Crime: Victims

Mr. Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether the remit of the National Victims Fund will extend to British residents who are victims of crimes committed abroad. [323278]

Claire Ward: The Victims Fund is used to provide funding to third sector organisations that support those bereaved by homicide. These services are provided by

third sector organisations and are available to British residents in England and Wales regardless of where the homicide takes place.

Applications for the 2010-11 fund are being processed and results will be announced shortly.

The National Victims' Service will provide services to victims of crime who are resident in England and Wales regardless of where the crime takes place.

Mr. Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what services his Department provides for the families of British victims of homicides committed abroad. [323279]

Claire Ward: The Ministry of Justice provides funding to the charities Victim Support and SAMP National (Support After Murder and Manslaughter) to deliver services to those bereaved by homicide. The service provided by Victim Support is available to anyone in England and Wales regardless of where the homicide takes place.

The Justice Secretary recently announced the launch of a National Victims' Service. The first part of the service has begun with the introduction of the homicide scheme which will be delivered by Victim Support. This will provide focused support for each bereaved person and a range of commissioned services. Residents in England and Wales who are bereaved are entitled to support under this scheme wherever the homicide takes place.

Departmental Surveys

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) if he will publish the benchmark results of the Civil Service People Survey relating to his Department; [322308]

(2) if he will place in the Library a copy of the benchmark results of the Civil Service People Survey for his Department and its agencies. [322565]

Mr. Straw: I will arrange for the results from the Civil Service People Survey for the Ministry of Justice and its agencies to be placed in the Library of each House.

Juries: North West

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people resident in Leeds North West constituency have been summoned for jury service (a) once, (b) twice, (c) three times and (d) four times in each year since 2005. [322699]

Bridget Prentice: The following table shows, on a national level basis for each calendar year from 2000-08, the following:

- (a) how many people have been required for jury service
- (b) how many people have been supplied to the court for jury service
- (c) how many people have been deferred from the original date they were summoned for jury service
- (d) how many people have been excused from jury service
- (e) how many people have been disqualified from jury service

The Jury Central Summoning Bureau (JCSB) is not able to supply the information for Leeds North West as the data cannot be extracted in this way by the computer system.

The JCSB is also unable to provide information on how many people have been summoned for jury service more than once. This is because jurors are selected on a

completely random basis by the JCSB using the electoral voting registers supplied annually by each local authority. As the electoral registers are updated annually and due to the randomness of jury selection there is potential for some members of the public to be called for jury service more than once while some may never be called.

| | <i>Calendar year end</i> | | | | | | | | |
|--|--------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 2000 | 2001 | 2002 | 2003 | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
| Total number of summons issues | 79,115 | 579,473 | 492,561 | 461,980 | 431,432 | 388,154 | 390,671 | 412,666 | 416,689 |
| Total number of jurors supplied to the court | 24,907 | 187,080 | 197,599 | 184,833 | 187,114 | 185,193 | 181,966 | 182,661 | 183,506 |
| Deferred to serve at a later date | 8,860 | 61,435 | 59,786 | | 65,754 | 63,741 | 61,254 | 66,174 | 66,806 |
| Number refused deferral | 22 | 214 | 297 | 340 | 288 | 286 | 172 | 122 | 103 |
| Excused - by right having served in past two years | 4,700 | 32,368 | 29,120 | 28,247 | 14,887 | 4,333 | 4,277 | 4,518 | 4,244 |
| Excused - Child Care | 3,410 | 27,685 | 26,281 | 24,327 | 19,497 | 15,741 | 15,690 | 16,118 | 15,711 |
| Excused - Work Commitments | 2,781 | 26,640 | 25,628 | 19,373 | 14,961 | 14,419 | 15,998 | 16,428 | 16,857 |
| Excused - Medical | 5,650 | 44,435 | 40,982 | 35,061 | 34,016 | 32,239 | 30,332 | 32,416 | 31,289 |
| Excused - Travel Difficulties | 186 | 2,394 | 1,811 | 1,110 | 813 | 672 | 720 | 651 | 690 |
| Excused - Student | 736 | 5,468 | 5,899 | 3,979 | 2,438 | 2,150 | 2,209 | 2,273 | 2,429 |
| Excused - Moved From Area | 1,549 | 11,073 | 6,254 | 3,419 | 2,498 | 2,181 | 2,454 | 2,988 | 2,543 |
| Excused - Language Difficulties | 849 | 5,921 | 5,928 | 5,260 | 4,975 | 4,081 | 4,030 | 4,406 | 4,165 |
| Excused - Other | 2,521 | 20,678 | 22,354 | 22,400 | 23,103 | 21,658 | 24,126 | 27,784 | 30,606 |
| <i>All excused</i> | 22,382 | 176,662 | 164,257 | 143,176 | 117,188 | 97,474 | 99,836 | 107,582 | 108,534 |
| Number refused excusal | 421 | 2,494 | 1,927 | 3,453 | 4,344 | 3,585 | 2,053 | 1,641 | 1,515 |
| Disqualified - residency, mental disorders, criminality | 15,248 | 118,339 | 105,314 | 98,045 | 89,112 | 77,364 | 85,061 | 94,171 | 96,325 |
| Disqualified - on selection | 5,989 | 48,271 | 59,892 | 58,830 | 55,410 | 49,765 | 53,031 | 58,900 | 59,017 |
| Disqualified - failed Police National Computer (PNC) check | 0 | 69 | 160 | 139 | 148 | 193 | 185 | 207 | 225 |

Lionel Crabb

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will make available for public inspection in the National Archives all papers relating to the disappearance and death in 1956 of Commander Buster Lionel Crabb RN, OBE, GM; and if he will make a statement. [322999]

Mr. Wills: The National Archives holds a number of records relating to the disappearance of Commander Buster Lionel Crabb (PREM 11/2077; CAB21/3887; F0371/122885; and ADM 1/29241), all of which are available for public inspection. Some portions of these records however have been retained by the transferring Departments under section 3.4 of the Public Records Act. Where records are retained, this is the decision of the relevant Department.

Prison Sentences

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many indeterminate sentences for public protection handed down (a) between 14 July and 31 December 2008 and (b) in 2009 were given with tariffs of no more than 23 months. [323013]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the reply I gave on 8 March 2010, *Official Report*, columns 93-94W.

Prisoners: Death

Mr. Burns: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many deaths of prisoners serving a determinate sentence were recorded in each year since 2005; how many such deaths were self-inflicted; and how many determinate sentenced prisoners there were in each of those years; [323011]

(2) how many incidents of self-harm were recorded by prisoners serving a determinate sentence in each year since 2005. [323012]

Maria Eagle: The information requested is combined in the following table:

| <i>Determinate sentenced prisoners¹</i> | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 ² | 2010 ³ |
|--|--------|--------|--------|--------|-------------------|-------------------|
| Population | 56,375 | 56,218 | 56,120 | 56,852 | n/a | n/a |
| Deaths in custody | 94 | 94 | 85 | 98 | 78 | 20 |
| Self-inflicted deaths only | 29 | 36 | 29 | 25 | 20 | 4 |
| Self-harm incidents | 13,128 | 12,241 | 10,719 | 11,730 | n/a | n/a |

¹ Determinate prisoners in this answer are defined as those recorded as serving the following sentences: less than or equal to six months; more than six months but less than 12 months; more than or equal to 12 months but less than four years and more than or equal to four years but excluding life.

² Population figures for 2009 are not available at the time of writing.

³ Self-harm figures for 2009 remain subject to verification and are not yet available. 2010 figures are not available for similar reasons. Two deaths are currently awaiting further information before classifying.

Any death in prison custody is a tragic event. The Government, Ministry of Justice and the National Offender Management Service, (NOMS) are committed to learning from such events and reducing the number of self-inflicted deaths in prison custody.

NOMS has a broad, integrated and evidence-based prisoner suicide prevention and self harm management strategy that seeks to reduce the distress of all those in prison. This encompasses a wide spectrum of prison and Department of Health work around such issues as mental health, substance misuse and resettlement. Any prisoner identified as at risk of suicide or self-harm is cared for using the Assessment, Care in Custody and Teamwork procedures.

Prisons: Visits

Philip Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice if he will make it his policy to record centrally the number of closed visits made on the prison estate.

[322861]

Maria Eagle: The National Offender Management Service records centrally the number of closed visits imposed within the prison estate. In 2008-09 closed visiting conditions were imposed on 1,817 occasions.

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. The data are not subject to audit.

Public Sector: Disclosure of Information

Mr. Hurd: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice pursuant to the answer to the right hon. Member for Horsham of 25 February 2010, *Official Report*, column 664W, on public sector: disclosure of information, in respect of which of the 57 requests to the Unlocking Service which have been accepted the data requested has been released.

[322874]

Mr. Wills: The Unlocking Service is not primarily concerned with the release of data. Its main purpose is to allow people to resolve issues concerned with re-use and publishing formats of data.

Where requests have been classified as resolved, every issue identified in the original request has been fully addressed. Two of the resolved requests related to the availability of data and in both instances that data has been provided. The remaining resolved requests relate to licensing conditions, copyright notices, publishing formats and charging.

Mr. Hurd: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice pursuant to the answer to the right hon. Member for Horsham of 25 February 2010, *Official Report*, column 664W, on public sector: disclosure of information, for what reasons each request was given the status of (a) resolved, (b) unresolved and (c) part resolved.

[322916]

Mr. Wills: Requests have been classified as resolved where every issue identified in the original request has been fully addressed and the current state corresponds to the requester's description of "My ideal solution" in the original request. If the request relates to the availability of data in a particular format, that data has been provided. If the request relates to a licensing issue, for example, that issue has been addressed.

Requests have been classified as unresolved where the current state does not correspond to the requester's description of "My ideal solution" and where there has been no substantive change since the request was posted. Work will be continuing or the issue intractable.

Requests have been classified as part resolved if there has been progression towards the requester's "ideal solution" but the current state does not fully meet this. Often in these cases there is continuing work or policy development. For example, a number of the requests relate to Ordnance Survey data, where commitments made in the Smarter Government White Paper address the requester's "ideal solution" but the issues are subject to a public consultation.

Sentencing

Mr. Lidington: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people serving a custodial sentence had their conviction overturned on appeal in each year since 2005.

[322695]

Claire Ward: The information requested is not available. Data collected within the central IT systems does not currently hold sufficient detail to allow identification of the type of sentence which is the subject of each appeal against a sentence heard in the Crown Court or Court of Appeal.

Annual statistics on all appeals dealt with in the Crown Court against sentences given in the magistrates' court are published by the Ministry of Justice in table 6.10 of the annual command paper "Judicial and Court Statistics". Annual statistics on all appeals in the Court of Appeal (Criminal Division) against sentences in the Crown Court are also published in Table 1.6 of this report. The most recent edition, presenting statistics for 2004 to 2008, was published in September 2009.

Copies of "Judicial and Court Statistics" are available in the Library of the House and from the Ministry of Justice website at:

<http://www.Justice.gov.uk/publications/judicialandcourtstatistics.htm>

Trade Unions

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice pursuant to the answer of 11 March 2010, *Official Report*, columns 383-84W, on trade unions, how many of the days staff of his Department and its agencies spent on trade union activity were spent in respect of each individual trade union recognised by his Department and its agencies in the last 12 months.

[322746]

Mr. Straw: The number of days that were available to be spent on trade union activity by each of the trade unions in the Ministry in the last 12 months, for which information is available, are as follows:

| <i>MoJ (excluding NOMS)</i> | | |
|-----------------------------|------------------|-------------------|
| | <i>Total FTE</i> | <i>Total days</i> |
| DTUS | 5 | 1,100 |
| PCS GEC | 26.4 | 5,808 |
| FDA | 1 | 220 |
| Prospect | 1 | 220 |
| Total | 33.4 | 7,348 |

The days quoted do not include PCS local representatives in MoJ (excluding NOMS). This figure is not known.

| <i>NOMS</i> | | |
|---|------------------|-------------------|
| | <i>Total FTE</i> | <i>Total days</i> |
| PCS | 34 | 7,480 |
| Prospect | 2 | 440 |
| POA | 106 | 23,320 |
| Prison Governors' Association | 3 | 660 |
| Prison Service Joint Industrial Council | 18 | 3,960 |
| Total | 163 | 35,860 |

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) whether any authorisations of trade unions under section 30 of the Access to Justice Act 1999 have been withdrawn; [322741]

(2) how much has been recovered by trade unions under section 30 of the Access to Justice Act 1999 in each year since 1999; [322742]

(3) which trade unions have been authorised under section 30 of the Access to Justice Act 1999. [322747]

Mr. Straw: No authorisations of trade unions under section 30 of the Access to Justice Act 1999 have been withdrawn.

The Ministry of Justice does not collect information on the amounts recovered by trade unions or any other approved membership organisation under section 30.

All trade unions in England and Wales listed by the Certification Officer are covered to provide enhanced legal services to members and their families under the Access to Justice Act 1999. The current list is available at the website at:

www.certoffice.org

Young Offenders

Jim Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many and what proportion of young offenders supervised by youth offending teams were in full-time training and employment in (a) England and (b) each youth offending team area in each of the last four years; and how many and what proportion of young offenders were on secure remand in each youth offending team area in each of the last four years. [322241]

Maria Eagle: Data relating to this question has been placed in the House Library.

Education, training and employment: Table A shows the number and the proportion of young people on relevant youth justice disposals in each youth offending team in England who were in full-time education, training and employment (ETE) in each of the last four years. 'Relevant youth justice disposals' are defined as programmes resulting from a Final Warning with intervention, relevant community-based penalty or the community element of a custodial sentence. Relevant community-based penalties include Referral Orders, Reparation Orders, Action Plan Orders, Drug Treatment and Testing Orders, Supervision Orders (with or without conditions), Community Rehabilitation Orders (with or without conditions) and Community Punishment and Rehabilitation Orders.

Full-time ETE is defined here as 25 or more hours for young people of school age and 16 hours for those above school age.

Secure Remands: The number and proportion of young offenders on secure remand in each of the youth offending team areas in the last four years is not held centrally. However the YJB have figures for the average number of young people aged 10-17 on custodial remands in each YOT area in England in each of the last four years, which is shown in Table B. Custodial remand includes young people who are remanded in custody, convicted awaiting sentence or subject to court ordered secure remand. This data takes a snapshot of young people who are on remand at a particular point in time which is then averaged out over the year.

The data have been supplied by the Youth Justice Board and have been drawn from administrative IT systems, which, as with any large-scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing and may be subject to change overtime. Differences in counting rules may mean that figures from other databases are not directly comparable.

Young Offenders: Education

Mr. Sheerman: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps he is taking to increase the level of training and education provided to young offenders under pre-release schemes. [322996]

Maria Eagle: Government recently passed legislation through the Apprenticeships, Skills, Children and Learning Act 2009 to bring improvements for education and training for young people detained in the youth secure estate. It makes local authorities responsible for learning for young people detained in youth custody and aligns arrangements in custody with the mainstream learning sector for the first time. This aims to increase consistency and continuity of learning for young people entering and leaving youth custody. The Act also includes a new duty on local authorities to make arrangements for education and training provision for the person on their release from custody, when appropriate for them to do so.

WORK AND PENSIONS

Children: Maintenance

Mr. Salmond: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases managed by the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission relate to absent parents in Banff and Buchan constituency. [321830]

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 Maintenance and Enforcement Commission, the Secretary of State promised a substantive reply from the Child Maintenance Commissioner.

You asked the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many cases managed by the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission relate to absent parents in Banff and Buchan constituency. [321830]

Latest figures show, as at December 2009, the number of cases in Scotland is 111,050; of these 1,820 are in the Parliamentary Constituency of Banff and Buchan. These figures include old scheme cases with a full or interim maintenance assessment as well as current scheme cases with a full maintenance calculation or default maintenance decision. Figures are adjusted to reflect those cases administered clerically.

I hope you find this answer helpful.

Cold Weather Payments

Danny Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer of 8 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 68W, on cold weather payments: highlands of Scotland, in respect of how many weather stations cold weather payments have been triggered in 2010; what payments have been made in respect of each weather station in 2010; and what estimate has been made of the number of potential qualifiers in respect of each weather station in 2010. [323081]

Helen Goodman: The information requested is given in the table.

Cold weather payments in 2010 for weather stations linked to the Highlands

| <i>Weather station</i> | <i>Triggers</i> | <i>Estimated number of potential qualifiers</i> | <i>Estimated number of payments authorised</i> |
|------------------------|-----------------|---|--|
| Aultbea | 0 | 600 | 0 |
| Aviemore | 5 | 800 | 4,000 |
| Cassley | 5 | 400 | 2,000 |
| Kinloss | 3 | 15,200 | 45,600 |
| Loch Glascarnoch | 6 | 800 | 4,800 |
| Lusa | 2 | 700 | 1,400 |
| Machrihanish | 1 | 3,100 | 3,100 |
| Tiree | 0 | 100 | 0 |
| Tulloch Bridge | 7 | 2,100 | 14,700 |
| Wick Airport | 2 | 2,600 | 5,200 |

Notes:

1. The Highlands has been interpreted as the unitary authority of that name.
2. Some of the weather stations listed are also linked to areas that are not part of the Highlands.
3. Figures are based on triggers notified in the calendar year 2010 up to and including 17 March.
4. The estimates of potential qualifiers and payments authorised relate to the entire area the weather station is linked to, not just those in the Highlands.
5. The estimated numbers of potential qualifiers have been rounded to the nearest 100.
6. The estimated number of payments authorised for a weather station has been calculated as the number of triggers multiplied by the estimated number of potential qualifiers for that weather station.

Source:

DWP records of triggers to weather stations up to and including 17 March 2010 and estimated numbers of potential qualifiers by weather station.

Cold Weather Payments: Angus

Mr. Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many (a) households and (b) individuals in weather station areas covering Angus have received cold weather payments since 1 November 2009. [323342]

Helen Goodman: The available information is given in the table.

Weather stations covering Angus parliamentary constituency

| <i>Weather station</i> | <i>Estimated number of benefit units which have received cold weather payments since 1 November 2009</i> |
|------------------------|--|
| Braemar | 1,600 |
| Dyce | 24,900 |
| Leuchars | 41,100 |
| Strathallan | 10,000 |

Notes:

1. Cold weather payments are made to benefit units rather than to households or individuals. A benefit unit can be a single person or a couple and can include children.
2. Each of the weather stations listed also covers an area that is not part of Angus parliamentary constituency.
3. The estimated number of benefit units which have received cold weather payments relates to the entire area that the weather station covers, not just to that in Angus parliamentary constituency.
4. Estimated numbers have been rounded to the nearest 100.

Source:

DWP records of triggers to weather stations up to and including 18 March 2010 and estimated numbers of potential qualifiers by weather station.

The Government provide information about cold weather payments on the Directgov website at:

www.direct.gov.uk

This includes the eligibility rules, details of how payments are made and a postcode search which allows customers to find out whether the weather station that is linked to a specific postcode has triggered.

Departmental Internet

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many designs for its (a) internal website and (b) intranet her Department has commissioned since 2005; and what the cost was of each such design. [321991]

Jim Knight: The DWP internal website for staff is called DWP Intranet. No commissions for a redesign of the DWP Intranet have been made since 2005 and therefore no costs have been incurred.

Departmental Public Expenditure

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reasons the departmental expenditure limit for her Department in 2009-10 changed from £9.728 million in her Department's three-year business plan to £9.2 billion in the pre-Budget report. [317618]

Jonathan Shaw: The 2009-10 figure of £9.728 billion presented in the Department's three year business plan represented the total funding available to the Department. This included additional funding agreed at pre-Budget report 2008 and Budget 2009, to support the Department in its response to the recession.

The revised figure of £9.2 billion presented in the pre-Budget report 2009 represented a departmental group which includes the Government Equalities Office.

The Department for Work and Pensions proportion of this funding was £9.090 billion. This was reflected in the winter supplementary estimate laid in Parliament on 24 November 2009.

The Department's final funding position for 2009-10 is set out in the spring supplementary estimate which was laid in Parliament on 23 February 2010.

Departmental Travel

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how much (a) Ministers and (b) staff of each grade in (i) her Department and (ii) its agencies spent on first class travel in the last 12 months. [320392]

Jonathan Shaw: The Department has over 100,000 staff operating from over 1,000 office locations across the UK. The Department's travel policy encourages staff to travel using the most cost-effective tickets available at the time of booking and staff must consider travelling standard class where possible.

The spend for first class travel by DWP for the last 12 months (February 2009 January 2010) is as follows:

| | DWP first class travel spend (£000) |
|--|-------------------------------------|
| Ministers | 26 |
| <i>DWP agencies:</i> | |
| Jobcentre Plus | 3,134 |
| Pension, Disability and Carers Service | 1,822 |
| The Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission | 995 |
| DWP Corporate Functions | 7,452 |
| Total DWP (excluding Ministers) | 13,403 |

There was no first class air travel undertaken in the period in question and therefore all of the above figures relate to rail travel.

The split by grade is not available for the required period.

Travel by civil servants is undertaken in accordance with the principles of Managing Public Money and the Treasury handbook on Regularity and Propriety. The Civil Service Management Code sets out regulations and instructions to Departments and agencies regarding the terms and conditions of service of civil servants and the delegations which have been made by the Minister for the Civil Service under the Civil Service (Management of Functions) Act 1992 together with the conditions attached to those delegations.

The code can be accessed at:

<http://www.civilservice.gov.uk/about/resources/csmc/index.aspx>

Paragraph 8.2 of the code deals with travel and under this section Departments and agencies must ensure that staff use the most efficient and economic means of travel in the circumstances, taking into account any management benefit or the needs of staff with disabilities.

Disability Living Allowance

Steve Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what her most recent estimate is of the number of people aged between 60 and 64 years old claiming the higher rate care component of disability living allowance on the grounds of terminal illness. [322291]

Jonathan Shaw [holding answer 15 March 2010]: The information requested is provided in the table.

Disability living allowance special rules cases in payment receiving the higher rate care component as at August 2009

| | £ |
|---------------|--------|
| Aged 60 to 64 | 10,500 |

Notes:

- Figures are rounded to the nearest hundred.
- All recipients under special rules are entitled to the higher rate care component. Information on the mobility component awarded to Special Rules claimants is included, however this part of the award may not be associated with Special Rules.
- Totals show the number of people in receipt of an allowance, and excludes people with entitlement where the payment has been suspended, for example if they are in hospital.

Source:

Work and Pensions Information Directorate 5 per cent. sample.

Caution

The preferred statistics on benefits are now derived from 100 per cent. data sources. However, the 5 per cent. sample data still provide some detail not yet available from the 100 per cent. data sources, in particular, more complete information on the disabling condition of disability living allowance claimants. The Department recommends that, where the detail is only available on the 5 per cent. sample data, or disabling condition is required, the proportions derived should be scaled up to the overall 100 per cent. total for the benefit. The figures have been rated to agree with Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study totals.

Employment and Support Allowance

Mr. Harper: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the average waiting time was for a work capability assessment to be conducted for claimants for employment and support allowance in the latest period for which information is available. [319976]

Jonathan Shaw [holding answer 2 March 2010]: The average time from the date an employment and support allowance claim starts to the date that Atos advice is given is shown in the following table. Information is provided from October 2008 (when employment and support allowance was introduced) to June 2009 (the latest data that can be used to calculate a reliable average).

| | Average calendar days from claim start to Atos assessment |
|---------------|---|
| October 2008 | 148 |
| November 2008 | 145 |
| December 2008 | 145 |
| January 2009 | 135 |
| February 2009 | 129 |
| March 2009 | 121 |
| April 2009 | 112 |
| May 2009 | 104 |
| June 2009 | 100 |

Note:

The actual time that Jobcentre Plus and Atos take to complete a case may be different as we cannot exclude any backdating of a claim or include the time from Atos advice to the Jobcentre Plus decision on entitlement.

Employment Schemes

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many job point kiosks there are; how much her Department spent on job point kiosks since their introduction; what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of job point kiosks; and what plans she has for the future of such kiosks. [323482]

Jim Knight: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the chief executive of Jobcentre Plus, Darra Singh. I have asked him to provide the right hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Darra Singh:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question asking how many job point kiosks there are; how much her Department spent on job point kiosks since their introduction; what assessment she has made of the effectiveness of job point kiosks; and what plans she has for the future of such kiosks. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

The number of job points currently being managed under the terms of a commercial agreement between Jobcentre Plus and its current IT provider, Hewlett Packard, is 7,283.

Running costs for the job points have amounted to £16.7 million since August 2007. Detailed costs prior to August 2007 are not available due to the way the Department was invoiced for services at that time.

Our job points continue to form a key part of the Jobcentre Plus self service strategy and have enabled its customers to conduct approximately 89.5 million job searches a year through this key channel. Later this year, Jobcentre Plus will start to replace 5,000 of its current job points with new kiosks. These are specifically designed to improve accessibility, reliability and cost effectiveness and give a much greater opportunity to exploit new technologies to enhance customer service.

Along with this replacement project, Jobcentre Plus is also installing an enhanced central kiosk management system that will provide much greater opportunity to monitor individual kiosk use and therefore continually assess effectiveness and future development.

I hope this information is helpful.

Future Jobs Fund

Margaret Moran: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the planned duration of the Future Jobs Fund scheme is; and if she will make a statement. [318534]

Jim Knight: Details of the Future Jobs Fund were announced in Budget 2009 on page 102, box 5.4. The third bullet point states:

‘funding for local authorities and partners to take forward the creation of 100,000 new jobs in socially useful activity. 10,000 of these will be green jobs;’

and the final paragraph goes on to say:

‘To support communities most affected by rising unemployment, the Government will allocate additional funding for local authorities to provide a further 50,000 jobs in areas of high unemployment across the country.’

A copy of this Budget has been placed in the library and can also be accessed at:

www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/bud09_completereport_2520.pdf

We will continue to review the support that is available for jobseekers, and decisions on the Department’s future expenditure limits and spending allocations will be taken at the Spending Review.

Housing Benefit

Andrew Selous: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reason tenants aged over 25 years may not as of right receive housing benefit for shared accommodation for amounts less than the sole tenancy amounts they would be entitled to if that is their choice; and if she will make a statement. [322386]

Helen Goodman [*holding answer 15 March 2010*]: Housing benefit is an income-related benefit administered by local authorities to assist people on low incomes who need help to pay their rent. Tenants in the private rented sector have their benefit entitlement restricted to an amount considered to be reasonable for the area and their accommodation needs. As from 7 April 2008 the local authority uses the appropriate local housing allowance rate, based on the area where the person lives and the size of their household, to determine the maximum amount to be included in the housing benefit calculation.

In the case of single people aged 25 years and over and couples with no dependent children, the local housing allowance rate for a one bedroom property would normally be used to calculate their benefit entitlement. However, if they choose to live in a property where they do not have either exclusive use of two or more rooms, or exclusive use of one room, a bathroom and toilet and a kitchen or facilities for cooking, the shared room rate would apply.

Income Support

Jim Cousins: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions for what reasons her Department’s decision of 8 October 2009 to grant income support in respect of the case with reference NINO YX220262A with effect from 12 August 2008 has not been implemented; and when she expects that decision to be implemented. [322314]

Helen Goodman [*holding answer 15 March 2010*]: The administration of income support is a matter for Jobcentre Plus. I have asked the chief executive of Jobcentre Plus, Darra Singh, to provide my hon. Friend with the information requested.

Letter from Darra Singh:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question asking for what reasons her Department’s decision of 8 October 2009 to grant Income Support in respect of the case with reference NINO YX 22 02 62A with effect from 12 August 2008 has not been implemented; and when she expects that decision to be implemented. This is something that falls within my responsibilities as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

As this is a personal matter relating to the individual involved, I will write to you separately.

Jobcentre Plus: Recruitment

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) how many and what proportion of the 16,000 additional Jobcentre Plus positions announced in the pre-Budget report 2008 and Budget 2009 have been filled; and whether her Department is actively recruiting to fill the remainder of the positions; [322168]

(2) what the average length of time was between an application being received for one of the 16,000 additional Jobcentre Plus positions announced in the pre-Budget report 2008 and Budget 2009 and (a) the (i) offer and (ii) start date of a job and (b) the issue of a letter to an unsuccessful applicant; [322170]

(3) how many and what proportion of applicants for the 16,000 additional Jobcentre Plus positions announced in the pre-Budget report 2008 and Budget 2009 have successfully completed the application process and are awaiting appointment; [322171]

(4) how many of the additional (a) 6,000 staff announced in pre-Budget report 2008 and (b) 10,000 staff announced in Budget Report 2009 have been recruited. [322177]

Jim Knight: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is the responsibility of the chief executive, Darra Singh. I have asked him to provide the right hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Darra Singh:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your questions concerning the recruitment to 16,000 additional Jobcentre Plus positions announced in the Pre-Budget Report 2008 and Budget 2009. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

Jobcentre Plus began recruiting after the Pre-Budget Report 2008 announcement to deal with increased workloads as a result of the economic downturn. The majority of recruitment took place between April 2009 and September 2009, but Jobcentre Plus has continued making job offers in lower numbers up to December 2009. All of the additional headcount announced in the Pre-Budget Report 2008 and the Budget Report 2009 has now been recruited.

Recruitment was managed through more than 500 local recruitment exercises so as to most effectively recruit this volume of additional resource and to target recruitment activity in alignment with local workload pressures. To provide the level of detail in relation to the average time between application and offer, start date, or rejection notice that you have asked for would not be possible, as to obtain this would be at disproportionate cost.

There are Service Level Agreements within the Department with set targets for the time taken to recruit. The recruitment process from the advertisement to the point that an applicant has successfully passed sift and interview, will be completed in 45 working days. Employment checks should then be completed in 20 working days with a further 7 days where final checks are made if someone has failed initial employment checks. A formal job offer will only be made after the employment checks have been completed. The subsequent start date will depend on each individual applicant's circumstances, such as the requirement to give notice.

Those applicants not successful at any stage of the process will be informed immediately.

All of the additional positions announced have now been filled. Therefore, there is no one awaiting appointment to those posts. However, with over 100,000 applicants to these posts it meant that there were significant numbers of people achieving the required level at interview stage. Where numbers of suitable candidates exceeded demand, these people were put on waiting lists in case future posts became available.

We continue to monitor workloads and have been managing staffing at current levels since January 2010 with further recruitment on hold, apart from a few exceptions where workloads or staff turnover need addressing. We have advised the 8000 or so people that successfully completed the application process and who remain on waiting lists that it is unlikely that there will be many further offers of employment made.

I hope this information is helpful.

Jobcentre Plus: Redundancy

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many Jobcentre Plus staff (a) have been made redundant and (b) have failed to have a fixed-term contract renewed in each month since January 2008. [322172]

Jim Knight: The administration of Jobcentre Plus is the responsibility of the chief executive, Darra Singh. I have asked him to provide the right hon. Member with the information requested.

Letter from Darra Singh:

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question asking how many Jobcentre Plus staff (a) have been made redundant and (b) have failed to have a fixed term contract renewed in each month since January 2008. This is something that falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

No Jobcentre Plus staff have been made redundant since January 2008.

The table below gives details of the number of people on Fixed Term Appointments (FTAs) that left when their contracts came to an end for each month since January 2008 to September 2009. This is the latest date for which figures have been published.

Please note that this will include people who have already had their contract end date extended, but then leave on their new end date without further extension. The figures exclude people that have left before the end of their contract for various reasons, such as dismissal for poor performance and resignation. Numbers quoted are in full time equivalents.

Number of people on fixed term appointments (FTAs) who left when their contracts came to an end (January 2008 to September 2009)

| | 2008 | 2009 |
|-----------|------|------|
| January | 1 | 2 |
| February | 0 | 4 |
| March | 11 | 7 |
| April | 4 | 4 |
| May | 0 | 5 |
| June | 9 | 5 |
| July | 6 | 11 |
| August | 13 | 6 |
| September | 14 | 15 |
| October | 5 | — |
| November | 3 | — |
| December | 4 | — |

Source:
Dataview

I hope this information is helpful.

National Employment Savings Trust

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what consideration was given to the scope for the re-use of established systems and IT infrastructure in the procurement process for scheme administration services for the National Employment Savings Trust; [321842]

(2) by what mechanism the Personal Accounts Delivery Authority intends to achieve its strategic aim of re-using existing business services and IT infrastructure for the delivery of services for the National Employment Savings Trust. [321844]

Angela Eagle: A major area of focus of the scheme administration services procurement process was consideration of the benefits of, and possibilities for, the re-use of established systems and IT infrastructure.

At the pre-qualification stage, PADA challenged prospective suppliers on their existing pension administration services, client base and technology assets. Responses on these topics formed part of the consideration which led to four suppliers being short-listed for competitive dialogue.

Throughout the competitive dialogue, PADA worked with the qualified bidders to understand how they would deliver the service using pre-existing, 'off-the-shelf' software and infrastructures.

The winning bidder, Tata Consultancy Services Ltd., demonstrated their ability and commitment to using established systems by building a version of the production system, based on their existing IT infrastructure, which demonstrated the strength of their capability to deliver the service requirements.

Mr. Waterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps her Department is taking in the procurement process for scheme administration services for the National Employment Savings Trust to ensure that the preferred solution minimises the administrative burden on businesses and simplifies the contribution mechanism for employees. [321843]

Angela Eagle: NEST will be one of the schemes employers can use to fulfil their new duties under the work place pension reforms, legislated for in the Pensions Act 2008.

PADA conducted the procurement of the scheme administration services with regard to the principles set out in the Act, one of which is to minimise the burdens placed on employers. For example, producing payment schedules for employers, clearly setting out the amounts to be paid and by when. Also, ensuring that employers and workers wishing to make additional contributions can do so using a range of payment methods.

This principle is reflected in the business requirements for NEST, which were developed with regard to market research with target employers and members. The winning bidder, Tata Consultancy Services Ltd., has confirmed it will fully meet these requirements.

New Deal Schemes

Steve Webb: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Southport of 13 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 1035W, on New Deal schemes: young people, if she will provide figures for the number of repeat participants by the number of times each repeated for each New Deal programme in each year since its inception. [318391]

Jim Knight: Reliable statistics on repeat participants of the voluntary New Deal programmes would be available only at a disproportionate cost.

Pension Credit: Leeds

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Leeds North West constituency receive (a) a basic state pension and

(b) pension credit; and how much on average such people receive in pension credit each week. [322705]

Angela Eagle: As at March 2009, there were 15,100 recipients of the basic state pension in Leeds North West constituency.

Notes:

1. Caseload figures are rounded to the nearest 100.
2. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source:

Department for Work and Pensions, Information Directorate, 5 per cent. sample

The information requested on the number of recipients of pension credit in Leeds North West constituency and the average weekly award of pension credit received is in the following table:

| | Number | | Average weekly award of pension credit (£) |
|-------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|--|
| | Individual beneficiaries | Households recipients | |
| As at August 2009 | 3,680 | 3,100 | 50.55 |

Notes:

1. Caseload figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Household recipients are those people who claim pension credit either for themselves or on behalf of themselves and a partner. Beneficiaries are the number of claimants in addition to the number of partners for whom they are claiming.
3. Pension credit is claimed on a household basis. The average weekly award of pension credit is in relation to the household.
4. Parliamentary constituencies and local authorities are assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant ONS postcode directory.

Source:

DWP Information Directorate Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study 100 per cent. data

Pensioners

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate she has made of the number of active members of defined (a) benefit and (b) contribution pension schemes in each year since 1997. [323483]

Angela Eagle: The requested information is not available. The following table sets out the number of active members of defined benefit and defined contribution occupational pension schemes for available years from 1995 to 2008.

In addition, individuals may contribute to personal or stakeholder pensions, which are defined contribution pension arrangements between an individual and the pension provider. Some individuals have more than one form of pension provision which means that there will be some double counting between personal and stakeholder pension holdings and the occupational pension memberships presented above. Information on personal and stakeholder pension arrangements are published by the HMRC:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/pensions/menu.htm>

| | Million | | |
|------|-------------------------|------------------------------|-------|
| | Defined benefit schemes | Defined contribution schemes | Total |
| 1995 | 9.2 | 1.1 | 10.3 |
| 2000 | 9.0 | 1.2 | 10.1 |
| 2004 | 8.6 | 1.2 | 9.8 |
| 2005 | — | 1.0 | — |
| 2006 | 8.2 | 1.0 | 9.2 |

| | Million | | |
|------|-------------------------|------------------------------|-------|
| | Defined benefit schemes | Defined contribution schemes | Total |
| 2007 | 7.9 | 0.9 | 8.8 |
| 2008 | 8.0 | 1.0 | 9.0 |

Notes:

1. The 2005 survey did not cover the public sector and a total defined benefit figure is therefore not available.

2. Changes to the methodology for 2006 onwards mean that comparisons with 2005 and earlier years should be treated with caution.

Source:

Occupational Pension Schemes Survey.

Poverty: Birmingham

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what assessment has been made of the standard of living of (a) families in Birmingham, (b) the poorest 20 per cent. of families in Birmingham,

(c) pensioners in Birmingham and (d) the poorest 20 per cent. of pensioners in Birmingham (i) in 1997 and (ii) at the latest date for which figures is available. [321576]

Helen Goodman: The measurement of living standards is a complex and multidimensional issue and, as such, there are many possible measures. It is generally accepted that income is central to any standard of living measurement.

Income statistics published in the Households Below Average Income series only allow analysis at Government office region level. Therefore, information for Birmingham is not available, although figures relating to the west midlands Government office region are. Three-year averages are used to report regional statistics as single-year estimates are subject to volatility. Weekly income levels are rounded to the nearest pound.

Table 1: Median weekly equivalised incomes for all families and the median equivalised incomes of the 20 per cent. of families with lowest incomes, west midlands, 1997/98-1999/2000 to 2005/06-2007/08, in 2007/08 prices—before and after housing costs

| Period | Median income (£ per week) | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|--|---------------------|--|
| | Before housing costs | | After housing costs | |
| | All families | 20 per cent. of families with lowest incomes | All families | 20 per cent. of families with lowest incomes |
| 1997-98 to 1999-2000 | 336 | 169 | 275 | 122 |
| 2005-06 to 2007-08 | 369 | 181 | 315 | 133 |

Table 2: Median weekly equivalised incomes for all pensioners and the median equivalised incomes of the 20 per cent. of pensioners with lowest incomes, west midlands, 1997/98-1999/2000 to 2005/06-2007/08, in 2007/08 prices—before and after housing costs

| Period | Median income (£ per week) | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------------|--|---------------------|--|
| | Before housing costs | | After housing costs | |
| | All pensioners | 20 per cent. of pensioners with lowest incomes | All pensioners | 20 per cent. of pensioners with lowest incomes |
| 1997-98 to 1999-2000 | 262 | 158 | 224 | 131 |
| 2005-06 to 2007-08 | 324 | 187 | 301 | 169 |

Notes:

1. These statistics are based on Households Below Average Income data. The Households Below Average Income series is available in the Library.

2. Small changes should be treated with caution as these will be affected by sampling error and variability in non-response.

3. The reference period for Households Below Average Income figures is single financial years. Three sample years have been combined as regional single year estimates are subject to volatility.

4. The income measures used to derive the estimates shown employ the same methodology as the Department for Work and Pensions publication 'Households Below Average Income' series, which uses disposable household income, adjusted (or 'equivalised') for household size and composition, as an income measure as a proxy for standard of living.

5. The figures are based on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development equivalisation factors.

6. Figures have been presented on both a Before Housing Cost and After Housing Cost basis. For Before Housing Cost, housing costs (such as rent, water rates, mortgage interest payments, structural insurance payments and ground rent and service charges) are not deducted from income, while for After Housing Cost they are.

7. Incomes are presented in 2007-08 prices and have been rounded to the nearest pound sterling.

8. Families are defined as a single adult or couple living as married and any dependent children, including same sex couples (civil partnerships and cohabitantes) from January 2006. A household is made up of one or more families. Families can include individuals over state pension age.

9. The median income is the income of the middle person in the population, such that half the population have incomes below the median and half the population have incomes above the median. The median is used instead of the mean income because the mean is affected by outlying cases with very high income values. This is consistent with relevant public service agreement indicators and the Households Below Average Income publication.

Richard Burden: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what percentage of (a) the whole population, (b) children and (c) pensioners in Birmingham was living in poverty in each year since 1997. [321577]

Helen Goodman: Between 1998-99 and 2007-08 some 500,000 children were lifted out of relative poverty. Measures announced in and since Budget 2007 are expected to lift around a further 550,000 children out of poverty. Absolute poverty has been halved.

Addressing pensioner poverty has been a priority for this Government. We have targeted help on the poorest pensioners, those who need it most, while providing a solid foundation of support for all.

With the help of targeted support and additional funding there were 900,000 fewer pensioners living in relative poverty (after housing costs) in 2007-08 than in 1998-99.

Estimates of poverty, published in the Households Below Average Income series, only allow a breakdown of the overall number of people in poverty at Government Office Region level. Therefore, information for Birmingham is not available, though figures relating to the West Midlands Government Office Region are available.

Poverty for all individuals is presented both before and after housing costs. Child poverty is presented before housing costs and pensioner poverty is presented after housing costs, in line with the relevant Public Service Agreements. The most commonly used figures relate to those with incomes below 60 per cent. of contemporary median income for the three groups.

Three-year averages are used to report regional statistics as single-year estimates are subject to volatility. Figures are quoted rounded to the nearest percentage point. The following tables show the percentage of all individuals (Table 1), children (Table 2) and pensioners (Table 3) in the West Midlands Government Office Region who have incomes below 60 per cent. of the contemporary median income.

Table 1: Proportion of individuals in households with incomes below 60 per cent. of contemporary median for the West Midlands, before and after housing costs (percentage)

| Period | Proportion of individuals (percentage) | |
|----------------------|--|---------------------|
| | Before housing costs | After housing costs |
| 1997-98 to 1999-2000 | 20 | 23 |
| 1998-99 to 2000-01 | 20 | 24 |
| 1999-00 to 2001-02 | 20 | 24 |
| 2000-01 to 2002-03 | 21 | 25 |
| 2001-02 to 2003-04 | 20 | 24 |
| 2002-03 to 2004-05 | 20 | 23 |
| 2003-04 to 2005-06 | 20 | 23 |
| 2004-05 to 2006-07 | 20 | 23 |
| 2005-06 to 2007-08 | 21 | 24 |

Table 2: Proportion of children in households with incomes below 60 per cent. of contemporary median for the West Midlands, before housing costs (percentage)

| Period | Proportion of children (percentage) | |
|----------------------|-------------------------------------|----|
| | Before housing costs | |
| 1997-98 to 1999-2000 | | 28 |
| 1998-99 to 2000-01 | | 27 |
| 1999-2000 to 2001-02 | | 28 |
| 2000-01 to 2002-03 | | 26 |
| 2001-02 to 2003-04 | | 26 |
| 2002-03 to 2004-05 | | 25 |
| 2003-04 to 2005-06 | | 26 |
| 2004-05 to 2006-07 | | 26 |
| 2005-06 to 2007-08 | | 27 |

Table 3: Proportion of pensioners in households with incomes below 60 per cent. of contemporary median for the West Midlands, after housing costs (percentage)

| Period | Proportion of pensioners (percentage) | |
|----------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------|
| | Before housing costs | After housing costs |
| 1997-98 to 1999-2000 | | 28 |
| 1998-99 to 2000-01 | | 28 |
| 1999-2000 to 2001-02 | | 27 |
| 2000-01 to 2002-03 | | 28 |
| 2001-02 to 2003-04 | | 26 |
| 2002-03 to 2004-05 | | 23 |
| 2003-04 to 2005-06 | | 20 |
| 2004-05 to 2006-07 | | 18 |
| 2005-06 to 2007-08 | | 18 |

Notes:

- These statistics are based on Households Below Average Income data. The Households Below Average Income series is available in the Library.
- Small changes should be treated with caution as these will be affected by sampling error and variability in non-response.
- The reference period for Households Below Average Income figures is single financial years. Three sample years have been combined as regional single year estimates are subject to volatility.
- The income measures used to derive the estimates shown employ the same methodology as the Department for Work and Pensions publication 'Households Below Average Income' series, which uses disposable household income, adjusted (or 'equivalised') for household size and composition, as an income measure as a proxy for standard of living.
- The figures are based on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development equivalisation factors.
- Figures have been presented on both a before housing cost and after housing cost basis. For before housing cost, housing costs (such as rent, water rates, mortgage interest payments, structural insurance payments and ground rent and service charges) are not deducted from income, while for after housing cost they are.
- Proportions have been rounded to the nearest percentage point.

A local child poverty indicator—including constituency level information—has been developed that captures the number and proportion of children in families in receipt of out of work benefits, or in receipt of tax credits where their reported income is less than 60 per cent. of median income. Details can be found via the HM Revenue and Customs website at:

http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/personal-tax-credits/child_poverty.htm

The measure enables local partners to make an assessment of the level and geographical distribution of income deprivation in their area and focuses local partners on taking action to help raise family incomes.

Poverty: Children

Hazel Blears: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate she has made of the number of children in Salford who have been lifted out of poverty since 1997. [322408]

Helen Goodman: The Government's declared aim is to eradicate child poverty by 2020. Our determination to do so is as firm as ever and this is demonstrated by introducing the Child Poverty Bill. The Child Poverty Bill will bring new impetus to eradicating child poverty by 2020. It will provide a definition of success and sets a framework to guarantee that Government and their partners at national and local levels make a clear and vital contribution towards ending child poverty.

Between 1998-09 and 2007-08 some 500,000 children were lifted out of relative poverty. Measures announced in and since Budget 2007 are expected to lift around a further 550,000 children out of poverty. Absolute poverty has been halved.

Each year different households are surveyed to produce low income statistics and estimates of poverty that are published in the Households Below Average Income series. Information is therefore available about the net change in the number of children with incomes below 60 per cent. of contemporary median income.

However, estimates of poverty, published in the Households Below Average Income series, only allow a breakdown of the overall number of people in poverty at Government office region level. Therefore, information for Salford is not available, though figures relating to north-west Government office region are. These are given in the table.

Three-year averages are used to report regional statistics as single-year estimates are subject to volatility. Figures are quoted rounded to the nearest 100,000 children. Child poverty is presented before housing costs in line with the child poverty public service agreements.

Change between 1997-98-1999-2000 and 2005-06-2007-08 in the number of children in households with incomes below 60 per cent. of contemporary median for the north-west, before housing costs (million)

| Change | Number of children (million) | |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------|-----|
| | Before housing costs | |
| 1997-98-1999-2000 to 2005-06-2007-08 | | 0.1 |

Notes:

1. These statistics are based on Households Below Average Income data. The Households Below Average Income series is available in the Library.
2. Small changes should be treated with caution as these will be affected by sampling error and variability in non-response.
3. The reference period for Households Below Average Income figures is single financial years. Three sample years have been combined as regional single year estimates are subject to volatility.
4. The income measures used to derive the estimates shown employ the same methodology as the Department for Work and Pensions publication 'Households Below Average Income' series, which uses disposable household income, adjusted (or 'equivalised') for household size and composition, as an income measure as a proxy for standard of living.
5. The figures are based on Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development equivalisation factors.
6. Numbers of children have been rounded to the nearest 100,000.

A local child poverty indicator—including constituency level information—has been developed that captures the number and proportion of children in families in receipt of out of work benefits, or in receipt of tax credits where their reported income is less than 60 per cent. of median income. Details can be found via the HMRC website:

http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/personal-tax-credits/child_poverty.htm

The measure enables local partners to make an assessment of the level and geographical distribution of income deprivation in their area and focuses local partners on taking action to help raise family incomes.

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what proportion of children in postcode areas L20, L21 and L22 were living in poverty in each year since 2000. [322636]

Helen Goodman: Estimates of poverty, published in the Households Below Average Income series, only allow a breakdown of the overall number of people in poverty at Government Office Region level. Therefore, information for the postcode areas L20, L21 and L22 are not available.

Social Security Benefits

Paul Rowen: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) whether guidance has been issued to local authorities on the application of the provisions of the Contracting Out (Functions of Local Authorities: Income-Related Benefits) Order 2002 to (a) the contracting out of (i) the administration of income-related benefits relating to local housing allowance applications and (ii) functions relating to other income-related benefits and (b) the agreement of a contractual arrangement relating to the administration of income-related benefits without making financial payments for the service; [322504]

(2) what her Department's policy is on the contracting out by local authorities of arrangements for income-related benefits. [322505]

Helen Goodman [holding answer 16 March 2010]: The policy on the contracting out by local authorities of arrangements for income-related benefits is set out in The Contracting Out (Functions of Local Authorities: Income-Related Benefits) Order 2002 [SI 2002 No. 1888]. This order, which came into force on 25 July 2002, allows local authorities to authorise people other than those directly employed by them, to carry out a wider range of functions connected with the administration of housing benefit (including local housing allowance), council tax benefit and discretionary housing payments. The order does not change local authorities' ultimate responsibility and they remain fully accountable and responsible for the administration of these benefits.

Guidance circular HB/CTB A22/2002 was issued to local authorities in September 2002, giving information about the order. A copy has been placed in the Library.

Social Security Benefits: Disabled

Mr. Harper: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many and what percentage of customer claims for (a) attendance allowance, (b) disability living allowance, (c) incapacity benefit and (d) employment and support allowance have been denied in the last five years; how many and what percentage of these denied claims have been appealed against; and in how many cases the appeal has been successful. [315720]

Jonathan Shaw [holding answer 4 March 2010]: Information about the number and percentage of denied claims that have been appealed against and the subsequent number of successful appeals is not available.

Information about the work capability assessment for employment and support allowance claims in Great Britain is available in the Department for Work and Pensions Employment and Support Allowance: Work Capability Assessment Statistic Release (January 2010). A copy of this report is available in the Library and can be found on our website at:

http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/workingage/esa_wca/esa_wca_arc.asp

This report contains details of the number of initial assessments carried out since the introduction of employment and support allowance, a breakdown of the result of the assessment, including the fit for work decision and separate information relating to work capability assessment appeals.

The available information on attendance allowance, disability living allowance, and incapacity benefit is in the tables.

Number and percentage of attendance allowance and disability living allowance new claims that are denied

| | <i>Total number of attendance allowance decisions made</i> | <i>Number of attendance allowance claims denied</i> | <i>Percentage of attendance allowance claims denied</i> | <i>Total number of disability living allowance decisions made</i> | <i>Number of disability living allowance claims denied</i> | <i>Percentage of disability living allowance claims denied</i> |
|---------|--|---|---|---|--|--|
| 2005-06 | 408,390 | 85,660 | 21 | 429,290 | 228,050 | 53 |
| 2006-07 | 387,960 | 78,480 | 20 | 422,550 | 226,170 | 54 |
| 2007-08 | 373,890 | 67,860 | 18 | 456,090 | 248,820 | 55 |
| 2008-09 | 388,220 | 64,060 | 17 | 466,680 | 252,540 | 54 |

Number and percentage of attendance allowance and disability living allowance new claims that are denied

| | <i>Total number of attendance allowance decisions made</i> | <i>Number of attendance allowance claims denied</i> | <i>Percentage of attendance allowance claims denied</i> | <i>Total number of disability living allowance decisions made</i> | <i>Number of disability living allowance claims denied</i> | <i>Percentage of disability living allowance claims denied</i> |
|----------------------|--|---|---|---|--|--|
| 2009-10 ¹ | 313,480 | 54,990 | 18 | 402,620 | 223,560 | 56 |

¹ YTD January.

Notes:

1. "Denied" claims has been interpreted to mean claims that have been disallowed.
2. The number of decisions made is not equal to the number of new claims made. This is because there is always a percentage of customers who make a new claim and withdraw their request before a decision can be made. The percentage of disability living allowance and attendance allowance claims denied is defined as the number of claims denied divided by the number of decisions made.

Source:

Management Information Reports: Report Disability Allowance (RDA) and Report Attendance Allowance (RAA) 60209 and 60205.

Number and percentage of incapacity benefit new claims that are denied

| | <i>Total claims processed</i> | <i>Total claims refused</i> | <i>Percentage refused of those processed</i> |
|----------------------|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| 2006-07 | 679,160 | 319,580 | 47 |
| 2007-08 | 673,770 | 328,130 | 49 |
| 2008-09 | 485,220 | 243,620 | 50 |
| 2009-10 ¹ | *21,449 | 14,398 | 67 |

¹ To January 2010.

Notes:

1. Information is only available from 2006-07 as the MISP system holds data only from that date.
2. "Denied" claims has been interpreted as those claims refused at the new claims stage because they did not meet the criteria for incapacity benefit, i.e. they were not sick/incapacitated. This means they either did not have a medical certificate giving a reason for the incapacity from their GP therefore claimed the incorrect benefit or the sick note provided did not state an illness. These figures also include claims from those customers previously disallowed following a personal capability assessment who reclaim incapacity benefit within six months with the same condition.
3. The reduced numbers in 2009-10* are due to the introduction of employment and support allowance. Those refused as a percentage is higher as following the introduction of employment and support allowance, customers claiming incapacity benefit had to have a linking claim in order to qualify.
4. MISP is the departmental performance management, data capture and reporting tool. The statistics presented here have not been subject to the rigorous quality assurance processes that are used for official statistics and as a result they should be used with a degree of caution.

Source:

Management Information System Programme (MISP).

Mrs. May: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people aged over 65 years with each main disability condition received (a) disability living allowance and (b) attendance allowance under special rules in the latest period for which figures are available. [322166]

Jonathan Shaw: The information requested is shown in the following tables.

Disability living allowance special rules cases in payment to over 65s by main disabling condition at August 2009

| <i>Disabling condition</i> | <i>Cases in payments</i> |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Arthritis | 500 |
| Muscle/Joint/Bone Disease | — |
| Blindness/Visual Disease | — |
| Stroke Related | — |
| Malignant Disease | 5,100 |
| Chest Disease | 100 |
| Back Ailments | 200 |
| Heart Disease | 300 |

Disability living allowance special rules cases in payment to over 65s by main disabling condition at August 2009

| <i>Disabling condition</i> | <i>Cases in payments</i> |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Parkinson's Disease | — |
| Diabetes Mellitus | — |
| AIDS | — |
| Multiple Sclerosis | — |
| Other | 1,500 |

Attendance allowance special rules cases in payment by main disabling condition at August 2009

| <i>Disabling condition</i> | <i>Cases in payments</i> |
|----------------------------|--------------------------|
| Arthritis | 100 |
| Stroke Related | 100 |
| Mental Health Causes | — |
| Malignant Disease | 200 |
| Back Ailments | — |
| Heart Disease | — |
| Frailty | — |
| Other ¹ | 36,700 |

¹ This figure includes cases that have been identified as terminally ill cases but the main disabling condition has not been recorded.

Notes:

1. Figures have been rated to agree with Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study and rounded to the nearest 100.
2. Caseload totals show the number of people in receipt of an allowance, and excludes people with entitlement where the payment has been suspended, for example if they are in hospital.

Caution:

The preferred statistics on benefits are now derived from 100 per cent. data sources. However, the 5 per cent. sample data still provide some detail not yet available from the 100 per cent. data sources, in particular, more complete information on the disabling condition of disability living allowance claimants. DWP recommends that, where the detail is only available on the 5 per cent. sample data, or disabling condition (DLA) is required, the proportions derived should be scaled up to the overall 100 per cent. total for the benefit.

Source:

Department for Work and Pensions 5 per cent. sample

Social Security Benefits: Fraud

Mr. Harper: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the answer of 22 February 2010, *Official Report*, column 105W, on social security benefits: fraud, how many ongoing investigations there are into cases of benefit fraud in each of the countries listed; how many of her Department's investigating officers are based abroad, and in which countries; with which countries her Department has arrangements in relation to benefit fraud; what the total budget is for her Department's Targeting Fraud campaign; and how much has been spent on the campaign to date. [320158]

Helen Goodman [*holding answer 3 March 2010*]: Information regarding the number of ongoing benefit fraud investigations in other countries has been collected since 1 April 2009. The number of ongoing benefit fraud investigations since then in each of the countries requested is as follows:

| | <i>Number</i> |
|---------------------|---------------|
| Spain | 167 |
| USA | 54 |
| Cyprus | 32 |
| Australia | 20 |
| France | 40 |
| Greece | 11 |
| South Africa | 8 |
| Canada | 8 |
| Eire | 14 |
| Portugal | 13 |
| Austria | 0 |
| Bahrain | 0 |
| Bulgaria | 4 |
| Holland | 8 |
| India | 42 |
| Italy | 13 |
| New Zealand | 3 |
| Pakistan | 138 |
| Thailand | 40 |
| Trinidad and Tobago | 2 |

No Department for Work and Pensions benefit fraud investigators are based abroad. However, there are 16 Foreign and Commonwealth Office staff based abroad funded by the Department for Work and Pensions whose duties include undertaking information gathering on behalf of the Department for Work and Pensions to assist UK based fraud investigators in their work.

The Department for Work and Pensions has Memoranda of Understanding with the Republic of Ireland, the Netherlands, Spain, Belgium and Australia and information sharing arrangements with New Zealand and the USA to ensure the correct administration of social security and prevention of benefit fraud.

The budget for the 2009-10 Targeting Benefit Thieves campaign is £5 million. To the end of February the budget committed for 2009-10 is £4,803,420.52.

Social Security Benefits: Lone Parents

Mr. Ffello: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if she will investigate the situation whereby a non-resident parent in receipt of certain benefits including pensions paid on medical grounds can receive an income of almost £25,000 per annum and the resident parent receives the minimum weekly maintenance payment of £5 per week, irrespective of the number of children involved. [318499]

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 in respect of the current position and I have seen the response.

I should also add that as part of the development of regulations for the future child maintenance scheme, the policy affecting cases such as these is being reviewed.

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, if she will investigate the anomaly whereby a non-resident parent in receipt of certain benefits including pensions paid on medical grounds can receive an income of almost £25,000 per annum and the resident parent receives the minimum weekly maintenance payment of £5 per week, irrespective of the number of children involved. [318499]

Non-resident parents in receipt of prescribed benefits will only be assessed as being able to pay the £5 per week flat rate of maintenance. This is not affected by the amount of benefit paid.

It is possible for the parent with care to apply for a variation on the grounds that the non-resident parent receives other income which has not been taken into account. The Child Support (Variations) Regulations 2000 specifically provides for the initial £5 per week maintenance liability to be varied where the non-resident parent receives other income, which would have otherwise been taken in to account in the initial maintenance calculation process, were it not for the fact that the non-resident parent was receiving a prescribed benefit.

I hope you find this answer helpful.

Social Security Benefits: Travelling People

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether (a) council tax and (b) housing benefit may be awarded to Travellers occupying camps without planning permission. [323443]

Helen Goodman: Council tax benefit is available to anyone who is liable for council tax.

Where a Traveller's caravan occupies a non-established site or pitch for a period materially less than 12 months, with no sign of likely future use, this will generally be regarded as too transient to establish the pitch as a dwelling. For established sites or pitches, even if the occupier changes often, a banding will apply and a liability to council tax will exist.

It is established rating law, applicable to council tax that a transitory occupation of land does not amount to rateable occupation. Whether the necessary permanence of occupation has been established for liability to arise will depend on the facts in each case.

On the subject of housing benefit I refer the hon. Member to the written answer I gave him on 8 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 75W.

State Retirement Pensions

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the effects would be on (a) public service and (b) other occupational pension schemes if the level of the basic and additional state pensions were both increased by 1.5 per cent. instead of 2.5 per cent. in April 2010; and how many pensioners would (i) gain and (ii) lose as a result. [319356]

Angela Eagle: Current social security legislation provides for public service pension to be adjusted by the same rate as the additional pension, and for such adjustments to take place only if there has been an increase in the prices over a given period.

The effect of increasing both the basic state pension and additional pension by 1.5 per cent., compared with increasing the basic state pension by 2.5 per cent., would be to reduce the average increase in state pension overall as a result of uprating in April 2010, from around £2 a week to around £1.50 a week.

More detailed data on pensioners' overall income split by detailed source is not available.

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the take-up rate of basic state pension was (a) nationally, (b) in Essex and (c) in Southend in the latest period for which figures are available; and what it was in each year since 1997. [320646]

Angela Eagle: The information requested can be found in the following tables where available. The figures relate to the proportion of the population in receipt of basic state pension, who are estimated to be over state pension age and alive at the end of March 2009.

Pensioners in Great Britain in receipt of basic state pension

| | <i>Number</i> | <i>Proportion over state pension age (percentage)</i> |
|------|---------------|---|
| 2009 | 11,100,000 | 94 |
| 2008 | 10,900,000 | 95 |
| 2007 | 10,800,000 | 96 |
| 2006 | 10,600,000 | 96 |
| 2005 | 10,500,000 | 96 |
| 2004 | 10,400,000 | 96 |
| 2003 | 10,300,000 | 96 |
| 2002 | 10,200,000 | 96 |

Pensioners in Southend in receipt of basic state pension

| | <i>Number</i> | <i>Proportion over state pension age (percentage)</i> |
|------|---------------|---|
| 2008 | 33,400 | 97 |
| 2007 | 33,000 | 97 |
| 2006 | 33,200 | 96 |
| 2005 | 33,200 | 97 |
| 2004 | 33,200 | 97 |
| 2003 | 33,200 | 96 |
| 2002 | 33,800 | 96 |

Pensioners in Essex in receipt of basic state pension

| | <i>Number</i> | <i>Proportion over state pension age (percentage)</i> |
|------|---------------|---|
| 2008 | 277,000 | 95 |
| 2007 | 270,000 | 96 |
| 2006 | 263,000 | 96 |
| 2005 | 260,000 | 96 |
| 2004 | 256,400 | 97 |
| 2003 | 251,800 | 96 |
| 2002 | 247,600 | 96 |

Notes:

1. The latest population and administrative data are from 2009. The latest population figures for Essex and Southend are from the ONS Mid-2008 Population Estimates.
2. The earliest available regional caseload data only go back to 2002. Figures for Essex relate to Essex local authority district and for Southend relate to Southend-on-Sea unitary authority.
3. GB estimates are rounded to the nearest 100,000 people, those for Essex and Southend to the nearest 100 people.
4. The remaining pensioners not in receipt of a basic state pension, but eligible, will be in the process of deferring their state pension. Following a period of state pension deferral a claimant can either: (i) take a lump sum that will have accrued at a rate of two percentage points above the Bank of England base rate or; (ii) Receive extra state pension whereby an additional one per cent. is added to the value of the state pension for every five weeks of deferral.

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many (a) men and (b) women in (i) Glenrothes, (ii) Scotland and (iii) the UK qualify for the full basic state pension. [322404]

Angela Eagle: The available information is in the following table.

| | <i>Total</i> | <i>Male</i> | <i>Female</i> |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|-------------|---------------|
| Glenrothes parliamentary constituency | 11,200 | 6,000 | 5,100 |
| Scotland | 633,400 | 316,800 | 316,600 |
| GB | 6,952,000 | 3,661,200 | 3,290,700 |

Notes:

1. Figures are for claimants with a full basic state pension as at March 2009.
2. Figures are subject to a high degree of sampling error and should only be used as a guide.
3. Caseload figures are rounded to the nearest 100. Totals may not sum due to rounding.

Source:

Department for Work and Pensions, Information Directorate, 5 per cent. sample

Stroud

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if she will set out, with statistical information related as directly as possible to constituency, the effects on that constituency of the policies and actions of her Department and its predecessor since 2000. [321481]

Jonathan Shaw: DWP lead the Government's response to some of the biggest issues facing the country—welfare and pension reform—and are a key player in tackling child poverty¹. As the biggest delivery department in the UK, DWP makes a difference to millions of people every day, helping them to lead safer, fairer and more rewarding lives that are free from poverty. We want to give people more choice and control over their lives and are committed to providing greater choice and personalised support to everyone who needs it so they have the opportunity to get into and remain in work. We believe that work works. Even in economically challenging times we know that work works for the most vulnerable and the disadvantaged.

Support to find work

Through Jobcentre Plus, we are promoting work as the best form of welfare for people of working age. Since January 1998, the number of people unemployed in Stroud has increased by 31 per cent. to 1,840, and the number unemployed for more than one year has decreased by 35 per cent. to 200. From August 2000 to August 2009 the number of lone parents claiming income support in Stroud has decreased by 25 per cent. to 660.

Our New Deals have helped lone parents, the young unemployed, the long-term unemployed, disabled people, the over 50s and partners of unemployed people to move from benefit into work. Since their inception over 2.2 million people in Great Britain have found work with the support of the New Deal, and 2,670 have been helped in Stroud.

Support for children

We introduced a target to halve child poverty by 2010-11 on the way to eradicating it by 2020. Poverty is measured using a headline indicator of the proportion

of children in households with an income below 60 per cent of contemporary household median income before housing costs. This is in line with international best practice.

Statistics on the numbers of children living in poverty are not available at the constituency level.

Support for older people

Since 1997 our strategy has been to target help on the poorest pensioners while providing a solid foundation of support for all.

This year we will be spending over £13 billion more on pensioners than if we had continued with the policies that were in place in 1997. Around half of that money will go to the poorest third of pensioners.

In 1997 the poorest pensioners, who received income support, lived on £69 a week (£98 in today's prices). Today pension credit, which was introduced in 2003, means no pensioner needs to live on less than £130 a week, £198.45 for couples. As of August 2009, 4,790 pensioners in Stroud are benefiting from pension credit.

In 2007-08 there were 900,000 fewer pensioners living in relative poverty in UK compared to 1998-99 (measured as below 60 per cent. of contemporary median household income after housing costs).

Statistics on the proportion of pensioners living in relative poverty are not available at the constituency level. But the latest data for the south-west Government office region show that the proportion of pensioners in poverty (measured as below 60 per cent. of contemporary median household income after housing costs) fell from 24 per cent. to 18 per cent. since 2000².

Pensioners in the UK also benefit from a range of additional support such as the winter fuel payment which this winter is worth £250 for households with someone aged between 60 to 79 and £400 for households with someone aged 80 or over. These payments provide vital reassurance to older people that they can afford to turn up their heating during cold weather. Prior to winter 1997-98 less than £60 million per year was spent helping pensioners meet their fuel bills - we now spend around £2.7 billion on winter fuel payments alone. In winter 2008-09 (the last winter for which information is available) 25,540 people aged 60 and over benefited from winter fuel payments in Stroud.

We have also taken steps to strengthen and protect the private pensions system to ensure people can continue to have confidence to save for their future through the establishment of the Pensions Protection Fund, the Financial Assistance Scheme and a more powerful and proactive pensions regulator.

The protection system ensures that, unlike in 1997, people are not left without a pension even in the event that their employer becomes insolvent.

In total, 751 people in the south-west Government office region are receiving compensation from the Pension Protection Fund (data not available at constituency level)³.

We have also taken forward a radical package of pension reforms in the Pensions Acts of 2007 and 2008 which will deliver a fairer and more generous state pension and extend the opportunity of workplace pension saving to millions, many for the first time.

The state pension reforms begin to come into effect from 2010 and will mean around three quarters of women reaching state pension age in 2010 are expected to qualify for a full basic state pension compared to half without reform.

Support for disabled people and carers

Since 2001, we have significantly extended and improved civil rights for disabled people in areas such as employment, education, access to goods and services and transport. Disabled people in Stroud will have benefited from these improvements. The Welfare Reform Act 2009 contains powers to increase choice and control for disabled adults, including disabled parents who are entitled to state support, enabling them to choose how certain state support is used to meet their individual needs. This will be trailblazed in eight local authority sites from late 2010. Older and less well off carers have gained extra help through the provisions within the National Carers Strategy.

¹ The Department for Work and Pensions was created in 2001 and so information relates to the Department and its predecessors.

² Based on three-year averages and changes are rounded to the nearest percentage point or 100,000 pensioners between 2000-01 to 2002-03 and 2005-06 to 2007-08.

³ Regional information about assistance payments received by members from the Financial Assistance Scheme could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Vocational Training

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps her Department is taking to ensure that low-incidence sensory-impaired students will continue to be able to access national specialist residential training providers following the introduction of the new contracting arrangements. [323006]

Jonathan Shaw: The Government do not prescribe the type of training that should be available to people with specific impairments. However, the new contracts will ensure that this programme will be flexible and tailored to each individual.

We know from evaluation undertaken in 2006 that residential courses tend to exclude some customers, including those who have caring responsibilities. The very limited locations in which provision is currently available exacerbate this. The new contracting arrangements seek to ensure that appropriate support will be available locally to a broader range of customers including women, ethnic minority groups and those who are unable to travel long distances.

However, we recognise that the residential provision is important for some customer groups and so the new contracts will specify that residential training should be available where that is appropriate for the customer.

Winter Fuel Payments: York

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many households in York with at least one person aged 75 years or over received the winter fuel allowance in 2009-10. [322998]

Angela Eagle: For winter 2008-09, the latest year for which information is available, 6,500 households in the City of York constituency with at least one person aged 75 years or over received a winter fuel payment.

Notes:

1. Figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
2. Parliamentary constituencies are assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant ONS postcode directory.

Source:

DWP Information Directorate 100 per cent. data.

Written Questions: Government Responses

Grant Shapps: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions when she plans to answer Question 316427, on payments to the Government Car and Despatch Agency, tabled on 3 February 2010. [320255]

Jonathan Shaw: I replied to the hon. Member's question on 17 March 2010, *Official Report*, columns 869-70W.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Dogs: Crime

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent estimate he has made of the incidence of the use of dogs in crime. [322945]

Meg Hillier: These data are not collected centrally. We are aware of the growing concerns about the use of dangerous dogs to harass and intimidate people. This has prompted the Government to introduce the new gang injunction power under the Policing and Crime Act 2009 and launch a public consultation on managing and controlling dangerous dogs.

Immigration Removal Centres

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people were being held in immigration removal centres on the latest date for which figures are available. [322955]

Mr. Woolas: As at 31 December 2009, 2,595 people were held in UK Border Agency immigration detention, none of whom were children.

Published national statistics on the number of people detained solely under Immigration Act powers are published quarterly and are available from the Library of the House and from the Home Office website.

Antisocial Behaviour

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many incidents of anti-social behaviour were reported in (a) England and Wales, (b) each constituency, (c) each police force area, (d) each local authority area and (e) each of the smallest geographical areas for which figures are available in each year since 1997. [319523]

Alan Johnson: The number of incidents of antisocial behaviour as defined in the National Incident Category List were requested as part of police forces annual data

return in 2007-08 and 2008-09. Collection of National Standard for Incident Recording (NSIR) data through ADR 342 came into force on 1 April 2007. Prior to that, data returns for NISR were not mandatory.

Data are not returned by (b) constituency or (d) local authority area.

A copy of the detailed tables showing the figures for England and Wales, each police force area and the smallest geographical area available (police force basic command unit) in 2007-08 and 2008-09 have been placed in the House of Commons Library.

The data are normally for management information only and are not subject to the detailed checks that apply for National Statistics publications. They are provisional and may be subject to change. The data represent calls for service as recorded by police forces under the relevant categories and may be subject to local variation in reporting and classifying.

Mr. David Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of police forces in tackling antisocial behaviour. [322950]

Mr. Hanson: We expect all agencies to prioritise antisocial behaviour. ASB is to be tackled not tolerated—police and other agencies must protect victims and punish perpetrators. To that end we have asked all areas to draw up minimum standards of service for the public by the end of this month. Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary's (HMIC) tough independent inspections on police forces' performance are a welcome addition to our commitment to accountability and transparency in continuing to raise standards.

Arrest Warrants

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many European arrest warrants issued in the UK have been executed in each other EU member state in each month since their introduction. [322370]

Meg Hillier: The figures for the number of persons extradited to the UK under European arrest warrants (EAWs) since their introduction are as follows:

| | <i>Persons extradited to the UK</i> |
|------|-------------------------------------|
| 2004 | 19 |
| 2005 | 63 |
| 2006 | 76 |
| 2007 | 99 |
| 2008 | 96 |

It is not possible from current systems to provide data broken down into the number of EAWs issued in the UK which have been executed in respect of each other member state or in each month. This would require a manual examination of all files and incur disproportionate cost.

Lady Hermon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many European arrest warrants issued by each other EU member state have been executed in the UK. [322372]

Meg Hillier: SOCA and the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service (for Scotland) are the designated authorities for the receipt and transmission of European arrest warrants (EAWs) in the UK. The number of surrenders from the UK (excluding Scotland) to another member state since 2004 is as follows:

| | <i>Number</i> |
|------|---------------|
| 2004 | 24 |
| 2005 | 77 |
| 2006 | 151 |
| 2007 | 332 |
| 2008 | 515 |

It is not possible from current systems to provide data broken down into the number of EAWs issued by each other EU member state. This would require a manual examination of all files and incur disproportionate cost.

Arrest Warrants: Republic of Ireland

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many European arrest warrants issued in the UK and served on a person in the Republic of Ireland resulted in that person being delivered to the UK authorities (*a*) within one month, (*b*) within two months, (*c*) within three months, (*d*) within six months and (*e*) over six months of the warrant being served in the last three years. [323007]

Meg Hillier: It is not possible from current systems to provide data broken down by the time taken to secure transfer to UK jurisdiction of an alleged criminal from another member state of the European Union. To do so would require a manual examination of all files and incur disproportionate cost.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many European arrest warrants issued in the UK relating to sex abuse cases have been served on people in the Republic of Ireland in the last three years. [323008]

Meg Hillier: It is not possible from current systems to break down the number of European arrest warrants issued in the UK by offence type and by EU member state. To do so would require a manual examination of all files and incur disproportionate cost.

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether it is his practice to indicate to the Irish Government the (*a*) importance and (*b*) urgency of implementation of (i) extradition requests and (ii) European arrest warrants issued by the UK in relation to residents of Ireland. [323327]

Meg Hillier: Irrespective of the member state concerned, all cases are prioritised appropriately depending on the risk that the individual poses to that country and/or the intelligence available. If, as a result of this process, the case is deemed urgent, then an appropriate message would be sent to the relevant authorities in that country requesting immediate action.

Asylum

Anne Main: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the (*a*) mean and (*b*) median time taken to process an application for asylum was in December 2009. [322331]

Mr. Woolas: The public service agreement (PSA) delivery agreement 3, indicator 2 refers to the reduction in the time to conclusion of asylum application. The measure is to ensure a target percentage of cases should be resolved within six months.

The method of reporting against the target is based on the performance of the specific monthly cohort of cases reaching six months. Hence all reporting is done against a six months timeframe. A cohort is specified as those new applications received between one and 31 of each month.

The conclusion measurement requires applications to be granted asylum or some form of leave to remain in the UK, allowed at appeal or removed within 182 days (six months) to be counted as concluded.

Performance against the targets has been published in National Statistics as follows:

61 per cent. of new applications received in June 2009 were concluded, i.e. to grant asylum or some other form of leave to remain or to remove from the UK, in six months by the end of December 2009.

Published information is not available in relation to conclusion of applications in timescales other than six months.

In 1997, the average time for an initial decision was 22 months. Records are not kept for the average time for conclusion for this time.

Asylum: York

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many people who have applied for asylum and are waiting for a decision on their application are resident in York. [322113]

Mr. Woolas: The information requested is not recorded centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Borders: Patrol Craft

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many immigration patrol vessels (*a*) operate in UK waters and (*b*) have operated in UK waters in each of the last 10 years. [318704]

Alan Johnson: The UK Border Agency operates five offshore patrol ships in UK territorial waters and adjacent seas. These ships provide operational coverage 365 days a year.

These ships were transferred from HM Revenue and Customs on 5 August 2009. HM Revenue and Customs, and HM Customs and Excise before that, had operated a five ship fleet since 2002.

Prior to 2002, HM Customs and Excise operated seven smaller patrol ships and a range of smaller launches and rigid inflatable boats.

UK Border Agency vessels work regularly in support of operations by other law enforcement agencies. In addition, UKBA officers respond to instances of suspected border crime in UK waters.

Departmental Consultants

Stewart Hosie: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent on external consultants and advisers by (a) his Department, (b) each (i) non-departmental public body and (ii) executive agency for which his Department is responsible and (c) each other body sponsored by his Department in each year since 2005. [316834]

Table 2: NDPBs' consultancy expenditure

| | Financial year | | | |
|--|----------------|---------|---------|---------|
| | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 |
| Independent Police Complaints Commission (£000) | ¹ — | 53 | 158 | 578 |
| Independent Safeguarding Authority (£000) | n/a | n/a | n/a | 405 |
| National Policing Improvement Agency (£ million) | n/a | n/a | 71 | 22 |
| Security Industry Agency (£000) | 480 | 394 | 137 | 387 |
| Serious Organised Crime Agency (£ million) | n/a | 1.6 | 1.6 | 1.8 |

¹ Unavailable.

Information on other bodies sponsored by the Department is not held and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Consultancy and advisory services cover the provision to the Home Office of objective advice and assistance relating to strategy, structure, management or operations of an organisation in pursuit of its purposes and objectives. The use of external consultants provides the Department with specialist knowledge, skill, capacity and technical expertise that would not otherwise be available.

The Department's overall expenditure on consultancy services represents a small part of the Home Office's overall spend, and at the end of the first half of the current financial year, it stood at some 5.8 per cent. of total overall expenditure, down from 8 per cent. in the previous year.

The Department has in place a series of workstreams designed to bear down on departmental reliance and expenditure on consultancy and other external resources, including being the first Government Department to have introduced (in 2009) prescribed daily fee rates for contractors.

Departmental ICT

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department 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. [320424]

Mr. Woolas: No information technology project with a cost threshold of £5 million or more has been cancelled within the Home Office core or its Executive agencies prior to its completion within the last 12 months and no costs have therefore been incurred. Below this cost threshold information is not readily available and could be obtained therefore only at disproportionate cost.

Mr. Woolas: Information on the Home Department's, including the Criminal Records Bureau, United Kingdom Border Agency and Identity and Passport Service agencies, total consultancy expenditure from 2005-06 is as follows:

Table 1: Total consultancy expenditure: Home Office Headquarters, UKBA, CRB and IPS

| Financial year | Expenditure on consultancy services (£ million) |
|----------------|---|
| 2005-06 | 139 |
| 2006-07 | 148 |
| 2007-08 | 96 |
| 2008-09 | 139 |

Information on non-departmental public bodies' consultancy expenditure from 2005-06 is as follows:

Departmental Internet

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 4 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 1374W, on departmental internet, what the cost was of the website redesign. [321927]

Mr. Woolas: The Home Office website

www.homeoffice.gov.uk

underwent a major redesign in 2005 costing £110,000. It subsequently underwent a minor redesign in 2008 to incorporate new corporate branding costing £50,000.

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department 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. [321986]

Mr. Woolas: The Home Office intranet has undergone one major redesign since 2005. This took place in 2009 and cost £90,750.

Departmental Lost Property

John Mason: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what property has been recorded as (a) lost and (b) stolen from his Department in the last 12 months; and what estimate has been made of the cost of the replacement of that property. [322078]

Mr. Woolas: There is no centralised reporting mechanism for recording of reported thefts in the Home Department. To gather the information required would incur disproportionate costs.

Departmental Marketing

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department 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 (a) Real Help Now and (b) Building Britain's Future themed campaigns to date. [320450]

Mr. Woolas: The Home Office and its agencies have not spent any money on advertising, marketing, public relations or publicity in relation to (a) Real Help Now and (b) Building Britain's Future themed campaigns.

Departmental Ministerial Policy Advisers

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many full-time equivalent staff of each grade are employed by his Department to assist special advisers. [321138]

Mr. Woolas: The Department employs one higher executive officer, one executive officer and one administrative officer to assist special advisers.

Detention Centres

Mr. Carmichael: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many full-time equivalent nurses provided health services at (a) Dungavel House, (b) Tinsley House and (c) Yarl's Wood in each of the last six years; [321102]

(2) how many full-time equivalent general practitioners provided health services at (a) Dungavel House, (b) Tinsley House and (c) Yarl's Wood in each of the last six years. [321104]

Mr. Woolas: The three centres provide 24-hour on site medical care.

The information available relates to period for which the current contractor has managed the centre.

At Dungavel House, from September 2006 to May 2009, 7.5 full-time equivalent (FTE) nurses provided health services. This increased to 8.25 FTE from May 2009. 0.75 FTE of a general practitioner attends the centre daily with additional support through an on call service.

At Tinsley House, for the past six years, 5.3 FTE nurses have provided health services. 0.5 FTE of a general practitioner attends the centre daily in the current year. In each of the previous five years, the FTE has been 0.7.

At Yarl's Wood, from April 2007, 13.2 FTE nurses have provided health services. 1.1 FTE of a general practitioner attends the centre daily.

This information is taken from local data and has not been subject to the detailed checks that apply for National Statistics publications. The data are provisional and subject to change.

Mr. MacNeil: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how long on average it took for detainees to be transferred from Dungavel House to detention facilities in England in (a) 2007-08, (b) 2008-09 and (c) 2009-10. [322668]

Mr. Woolas [holding answer 16 March 2010]: The information requested is not centrally recorded and can be provided only by detailed examination of individual records at disproportionate cost.

Mr. MacNeil: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what support is available at immigration removal centres for detainees diagnosed with stress or depression. [322670]

Mr. Woolas [holding answer 16 March 2010]: All our immigration removal centres provide primary health care services equivalent to that found in the community.

In accordance with the Detention Centre Rules 2001, all detainees undergo a health screening with a nurse within two hours of their arrival, and an appointment is made for them to see a GP within 24 hours. GPs will see detainees earlier than this if there is a particular acute need.

The health care teams in immigration removal centres include Registered Mental Nurses and provide a range of welfare services such as counselling to help detainees to manage their time in detention where they are suffering from stress of depression.

Where a detainee is suffering from a more serious form of mental illness, the centres have access to psychiatrists either to advise on the more appropriate course of action, in conjunction with the local primary care trust.

Mr. MacNeil: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions he has had with his Italian counterparts on the removal to Italy of Eritrean detainees held in immigration removal centres. [322671]

Mr. Woolas [holding answer 16 March 2010]: The UK Border Agency has regular discussions with our Italian counterparts on a variety of migration issues. This includes regular contact at senior level through the Justice and Home Affairs fora in Europe relating to issues surrounding the continued implementation of the Dublin regulations. Officials in UKBA, including a seconded member of staff permanently based in Rome, regularly discuss specific cases in terms of the Dublin regulations and the logistics of removal, and a number of these cases will relate to Eritreans in detention in the UK.

Mr. MacNeil: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department on what date a Minister from his Department last visited an immigration removal centre. [322672]

Mr. Woolas [holding answer 16 March 2010]: I visited Dungavel House in December 2009.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary visited Yarl's Wood in February 2010 and my hon. Friend the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Office, the Member for Hackney, South and Shoreditch (Meg Hillier), visited Yarl's Wood in March 2010.

This information is taken from local management data and is therefore provisional and subject to change.

Entry Clearances

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what change there has been to the number of entry clearance applications granted since

the transfer of the processing of such applications from the British consulate in Tel Aviv to the British embassy in Istanbul; whether the decision to transfer responsibility for deciding such applications from Israel to Turkey was made as part of a wider Home Office policy; whether an equality impact assessment was carried out prior to this decision; and if he will make a statement.

[318455]

Mr. Woolas: The hub and spoke programme was implemented in the British Consulate in Tel Aviv on 7 April 2008. From this date, applications have been processed at the British embassy in Istanbul. Entry clearance decisions in Istanbul are made by a team of entry clearance officers (ECOs), all of whom at present are British Nationals.

Key benefits of the hub and spoke programme include the consolidation of staff and complicated administrative functions into fewer locations to improve productivity and efficiency; improved quality and consistency of decision making; greater resilience and flexibility of the overseas network by allowing staff and their work to be located in more stable locations; and the delivery of customer service benefits such as the increase in the number of locations at which applications can be registered.

For the financial year of 2007-08, 1,886 visas were granted at the British consulate in Tel Aviv. Following the implantation of the hub and spoke programme, 1,500 visas applied for in Tel Aviv were granted in the financial year of 2008-09. Israelis do not require a visa to visit the UK.

Although a formal Equality Impact Assessment did not take place, an internal impact assessment was carried out before the hub and spoke programme was implemented.

Entry Clearances: Africa

Hilary Armstrong: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment he has made of the effects of the introduction of the points-based immigration system on the number of doctors and nurses from Africa applying to work in the NHS.

[322005]

Mr. Woolas: The points based system enables health sector employers to recruit from abroad where no suitable residents are available. Where this is due to a national shortage of suitably skilled people the shortage occupation list eases their entry.

Entry Clearances: Married People

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of entry clearance applications for settlement as a spouse in the UK submitted to the British consulate in Tel Aviv were granted prior to the transfer of the processing of such applications to the British embassy in Istanbul; what proportion of applicants were of (a) Israeli and (b) non-Israeli background; and if he will make a statement. [321849]

Mr. Woolas: Between April 2007 and March 2008, 152 applications for spouse/civil partner settlement, or leading to settlement visas, were processed at the British consulate in Tel Aviv, with an issue rate of 98 per cent. The processing of such applications was transferred to the British embassy in Istanbul on 7 April 2008.

84 per cent. of the applicants were Israeli nationals, and 16 per cent. were non-Israeli nationals, as defined by the applicant's passport.

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what proportion of entry clearance applications for settlement as a spouse in the UK submitted to the British consulate in Tel Aviv between June 2008 and May 2009 and processed by the British embassy in Istanbul were granted; what proportion of applicants were of (a) Israeli and (b) non-Israeli background; and if he will make a statement. [321850]

Mr. Woolas: Between June 2008 and May 2009, 103 applications for spouse/civil partner settlement, or leading to settlement visas, were submitted to the British consulate in Tel Aviv and processed by the British embassy in Istanbul, with an issue rate of 94 per cent.

91 per cent. of the applicants were Israeli nationals, and 9 per cent. were non-Israeli nationals, as defined by the applicant's passport.

Entry Clearances: Overseas Students

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what criteria he plans to use to determine whether a Tier 4 visa sponsor is highly trusted; and for what reasons all Tier 4 visa sponsors should not be considered highly trusted. [321945]

Mr. Woolas: The criteria for Highly Trusted Sponsors will be published on 22 March. The scheme will be implemented on 6 April. The UK Border Agency has consulted with the education sector on the development of the criteria.

Highly trusted sponsors will be required to meet tough new additional criteria and demonstrate that they have a track record of success in terms of bringing genuine students to the UK. These guidelines are being introduced for sponsors who wish to recruit international students in categories where there is a higher risk of abuse.

In addition, all sponsors will be required to meet robust new minimum standards regarding the recruitment and retention of students.

David Lepper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether his Department examined visa requirements for students wishing to enter other countries with a substantial English language teaching sector in its recent revision of the Tier 4 points-based system. [322001]

Mr. Woolas: Yes, as part of the review of Tier 4, the student tier of the points based system, officials examined the visa requirements in place for students in a number of comparable countries.

Entry Clearances: Palestinians

Mr. Moore: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reasons the UK Border Agency did not issue a visa in connection with Fairtrade Fortnight to (a) Lina Mahmoud, (b) Belal Eid and (c) Nahed Besharieh; and if he will make a statement. [322326]

Mr. Woolas: The applications were refused as the Entry Clearance Officer was not satisfied they met the requirements of the Immigration Rules. The reasons for refusal were set out in the refusal notices issued to the applicants. In light of further information received, the decision was made to issue visas. However, it has not been possible to contact the applicants to make arrangements.

Greater London

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department if he will set out, with statistical evidence relating as closely as possible to each London borough, the effects on each borough of changes to his Department's policies between 2003-04 and 2008-09. [319656]

Alan Johnson: 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/>

Identity Cards

Chris Grayling: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether he classifies the implementation of biometric passports as part of the identity card scheme. [318714]

Alan Johnson: The issues of identity cards as well as the introduction of fingerprint biometric passports are part of the National Identity Service. The provisions of the Identity Cards Act 2006 will be amended by further primary legislation so that everyone aged 16 and over who applies for a British passport will have the choice of being issued with an identity card or a passport (or both documents) and for their identity details, including facial image and fingerprint biometrics, to be recorded on the same National Identity Register.

Illegal Immigrants

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many illegal immigrants were detected at each of the main ports of entry to the United Kingdom in (a) 2008 and (b) 2009. [319576]

Mr. Woolas: It is Government policy to restrict the publication of Border Force management information to a Regional level, as port-specific information could provide value to those seeking to circumvent our controls. The table therefore provides details of the number of illegal entrants detected by UK Border Force Officers at UK Ports, in 2008 and 2009, on a Regional basis. The information used to answer this question has been taken from a live database and is suitable for management information purposes. It has not been subject to the detailed checks required to qualify as National Statistics.

In addition, the UK Border Agency, working together with its partners at the Juxtaposed Controls, prevented more than 28,000 individual attempts to cross the Channel illegally in 2008, and 29,000 in 2009.

| | 2009 | 2008 |
|--------------|------|------|
| South Region | 303 | 455 |
| North Region | 23 | 45 |
| Total | 326 | 500 |

Immigrants: Detainees

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children detained at (a) Dungavel and (b) Yarl's Wood have been transferred to other immigration detention centres in each of the last six months. [321958]

Mr. Woolas [holding answer 12 March 2010]: Families with children can be detained at Dungavel House, Tinsley House and Yarl's Wood. Tinsley House currently accommodates family groups for 24 hours and Dungavel House for approximately 72 hours. Where detention is likely to extend beyond this timeframe, families are transferred to Yarl's Wood, which has the facilities to support longer periods of detention.

It is not possible to provide the information requested without examination of individual records at disproportionate cost.

National Statistics on children detained solely under Immigration Act powers on a snapshot basis are published quarterly. The information is published in Tables 9-14 of the Control of Immigration: Quarterly Statistical Summary, United Kingdom bulletins which are available from the Library of the House and from the Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics website at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration-asylum-stats.html>

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many (a) children and (b) families detained at immigration detention centres spent the entire period of their detention at a single location in the latest period for which figures are available. [321959]

Mr. Woolas [holding answer 12 March 2010]: For the period October 2009 to December 2009, 330 children left immigration removal centres. From our records, 230 had spent the entire period of their detention at a single location. These figures are based on management information. They have not been quality assured under National Statistics protocols, are rounded to the nearest 5, subject to change and should be treated as provisional.

Of the balance, some will have spent the entire period of detention at a single location but will have moved with their families for reasons such as medical appointments outside the centre, or a failed removal. We could only establish the number by examination of individual records at disproportionate cost.

The number of families held in immigration removal centres that spent the entire period of their detention at a single location can be determined only by examination of individual records at disproportionate cost.

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of the effect on the health and emotional well-being of children of transfers between immigration removal centres. [321960]

Mr. Woolas [*holding answer 12 March 2010*]: The UK Border Agency takes health and emotional wellbeing of those in its care very seriously; this is particularly true of children who are regrettably detained—with their parents—pending their removal after they refuse to leave the UK voluntarily. We introduced a new duty in November 2009 contained in the Borders, Citizenship and Immigration Act 2009, which requires the Agency to protect and promote the welfare of children. The Office of the Children's Champion, which includes professional advisers, is responsible for challenging the Agency to ensure it meets its obligations, and they provide constant advice and support to those responsible for detention and escorting matters.

Prior to detention, the Agency conducts a formal assessment of each child to identify any particular medical, safeguarding or welfare needs in order to make the necessary arrangements to support them while in detention.

Children can only be held in three Immigration Removal Centres. Tinsley House currently holds families for 24 hours and Dungavel House for up to three days. Those families who will be held for longer periods are taken to Yarl's Wood, as are those families in Scotland whose flights are departing from London. We do not normally move families between centres for any other reason.

Prior to the transfer to Yarl's Wood, a number of assessments are made to take specific account of the safeguarding and welfare of the children making the journey. These include:

The size of vehicle required to accommodate the whole family together;

The length of the journey to ensure adequate comfort breaks, suitable child activity packs, dietary requirements and refreshments;

Appropriate clothing for the weather;

Feeding and changing facilities for babies and any requirement for child safety chairs and booster seats.

The discharging centre provides Yarl's Wood with all health records, welfare assessments and care plans, documenting any special needs or support in place for the family to ensure continuity of care.

On arrival at the receiving centre the family and children are individually re-assessed by a nurse within two hours and an appointment made for them to see a GP the following day. In line with the centre's safeguarding arrangements the children continue to have their welfare monitored and assessed on a regular basis by the multi-disciplinary team of healthcare, educational, operational and other staff, together with the resident senior social worker.

Mr. MacNeil: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether members of any families being detained at immigration removal centres have been detained at different locations in each of the last 12 months. [322377]

Mr. Woolas [*holding answer 15 March 2010*]: Local management information indicates that, at 11 March 2010, 18 family members (from six families) presently detained at an immigration removal centre had been detained under Immigration Act powers at a different location within the past 12 months.

The figures provided do not constitute part of National Statistics as they are based on management information. This information has not been quality assured under National Statistics protocols and should be treated as provisional.

National Statistics on children detained solely under Immigration Act powers on a snapshot basis are published quarterly. The information is published in the Control of Immigration: Quarterly Statistical Summary, United Kingdom bulletins which are available from the Library of the House and from the Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics website at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration-asylum-stats.html>

Mr. MacNeil: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the maximum number of children is which may be detained at each immigration removal centre; and how many children were detained at each centre in the last six months. [322378]

Mr. Woolas [*holding answer 15 March 2010*]: There are 66 rooms providing a total of 152 beds where families with children may be accommodated in the immigration detention estate. They are not all occupied at any one time since their use is dependent on the make-up and size of the family.

Children may be detained as part of a family group in three immigration removal centres. Tinsley House has four family rooms of six and seven beds. Dungavel House has two three-bedded family rooms and Yarl's Wood has 60 two-bedded family rooms. The rooms are inter-linked to allow larger family groups to be accommodated together.

The number of children who entered detention solely under Immigration Act powers for the last six months of 2009 is published in table 9 of the Control of Immigration Quarterly Statistical Summary, United Kingdom Third Quarter and Table 9.1 of the Control of Immigration Quarterly Statistical Summary, United Kingdom Fourth Quarter which are available from the Library of the House and from the Home Office's Research, Development and Statistics website at:

<http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds/immigration-asylum-stats.html>

Immigration

Mr. Hancock: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps his Department takes to monitor the destination of those refused leave to remain in the UK who have not yet been removed from the UK. [315901]

Mr. Woolas: The introduction of better contact management through the use of physical reporting at reporting centres and police stations together with the use of electronic monitoring (tagging and voice recognition) has allowed the UK Border Agency to maintain contact with asylum applicants at all stages of the process and with those who have breached immigration law.

The UK Border Agency's Country of Origin Information Service continually monitors the situation in the countries of origin of those who seek international protection in the UK, taking into account information from a wide range of recognised and respected sources. We enforce

the return of an individual only where we and the courts are satisfied that the person concerned will not be at risk.

Anne Main: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much was spent on payments made in relation to immigration casework consequent on complaints to the Parliamentary and Health Service Ombudsman in each of the last five years. [322332]

Mr. Woolas: The UK Border Agency does not break down data on compensation payments into specific business areas. As a result of this, the information requested could be obtained only by the detailed examination of individual case records at disproportionate cost.

Anne Main: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much his Department paid in compensation in respect of immigration casework in each of the last five years. [322333]

Mr. Woolas: The Home Office prepares its accounts in accordance with UK GAAP (Generally Accepted Accounting Principles) adapted for the Public sector in accordance with guidance issued by HM Treasury.

The information is not collated in the way requested but compensation payments/special payments are monitored routinely as part of the broader financial management arrangements in place within the UK Border Agency.

The Agency is exploring arrangements to collate this type of information in future years.

Anne Main: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the (a) mean and (b) median time taken to process an application for further leave to remain was in December 2009. [322351]

Mr. Woolas [*holding answer 15 March 2010*]: It is not possible for the UK Border Agency to differentiate between applications for leave to remain and applications for further leave to remain. I therefore refer the hon. Member to the answer provided on 9 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 222W.

Independent Police Complaints Commission

James Brokenshire: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent estimate he has made of the proportion of complaints received by the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) investigated by the IPCC. [323277]

Mr. Hanson: The IPCC is an independent body responsible for ensuring that the police complaints system in England and Wales works effectively and fairly. The IPCC are directly involved in investigating the most serious cases, which make up a small proportion of cases overall. The remainder of cases are subject to investigation by the local police force involved or to an informal procedure called local resolution carried out by the police.

However in order to ensure that independent oversight extends to all parts of the police complaints system, complainants whose cases are dealt with by the police have a right of appeal to the IPCC.

The IPCC also has a statutory responsibility for the guardianship of the police complaints system. As part of that guardianship role, the IPCC analyses and publishes complaints statistics detailing the number and type of complaints made by members of the public and their outcomes. These reports are published on the IPCC's website.

Lockerbie: Bombings

David Mundell: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether (a) he and (b) other Ministers in his Department were consulted on the departure of Abdelbasset Al-Megrahi from the UK; [320560]

(2) whether the UK Border Agency had the power to prevent Mr. Abdelbasset Al-Megrahi from leaving the UK following his release from custody by the Scottish Executive; [320561]

(3) whether, following his release from custody by the Scottish Executive, the UK Border Agency was required to give its consent to the departure from the UK of Mr. Abdelbasset Al-Megrahi. [320562]

Mr. Woolas: My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary was kept fully informed by officials of the possible outcomes in the event that Mr. Al-Megrahi were to be released. However, the UK Border Agency is not required to give its consent to the departure of a foreign national. A foreign national can leave the UK at any time provided there are no outstanding criminal proceedings against them. We would inform the police or other agencies to determine an appropriate operational response should we become aware that an individual of interest is seeking to depart from the UK.

In the case of Mr. Al-Megrahi he was released from prison and expressed his wish to return to Libya. The UK Border Agency was aware of this but was not required to give its consent to this action.

Members: Correspondence

Clare Short: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he expects to reply to the letters from the right hon. Member for Birmingham, Ladywood dated 9 November and 15 December 2009 regarding Melicia Ann Brown (Home Office reference: B1080260). [318439]

Mr. Woolas: Reply was sent to the right hon. Member's office on 11 January 2010. A copy of the response has been sent by e-mail to the right hon. Member's office on 24 February 2010. The letter confirms that the correspondence has been passed to a caseworking unit for further consideration as the MP provided representations which required further attention.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to reply to the letter of 14 January 2010 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton regarding Mr. I. Khan. [322725]

Alan Johnson: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 4 February 2010.

A copy of the letter will be forwarded to the right hon. Member.

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when he plans to reply to the letter of 21 January 2010 from the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton regarding Mrs. H. Mohsin. [322726]

Alan Johnson: I wrote to my right hon. Friend on 17 March 2010.

Police

Sandra Gidley: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what assessment his Department has made of the relationship between the number of police officers in police forces and their effectiveness in carrying out frontline policing. [322946]

Mr. Hanson: This Government's investment in the police is at record levels. There are nearly 17,000 more police officers than in 1997, and more than 16,000 PCSOs on the streets. Crime is down by 36 per cent. In every area, crime is falling and confidence is increasing. 50 per cent of the public now agree that the antisocial behaviour and crime issues that matter to them are being dealt with.

Police: Bureaucracy

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps he has taken to reduce the amount of time spent by police officers on administrative tasks since 1997; what steps he plans to take in the next six months; what estimate he has made of the average amount of time spent by police officers on administration per (i) day, (ii) week and (iii) month; what recent representations he has received on police morale; what reply he gave; and if he will make a statement. [313278]

Mr. Hanson: The Government are committed to reducing bureaucracy in policing, including the amount of time spent by police officers on unnecessary administrative tasks.

This is why we have taken the following steps:

Reducing by up to 50 per cent the amount of data that we routinely collect from police forces;

Piloting a more proportionate approach to the recording of crime and incidents;

Scrapping the requirement for police officers to complete time sheets for the purposes of activity based costing;

Removing the requirement for police officers to complete a form when carrying out and stop and account encounter;

Investing £80 million in the rollout of mobile technology, saving officers up to 30 minutes per shift as they are able to send and receive information while on the beat;

Publishing a Policing White Paper which includes measures to improve efficiency in policing and also sets out our response to the recommendations made by Jan Berry, the independent Reducing Bureaucracy Advocate.

Over the next six months we will:

Ensure that these steps are fully implemented by all police forces;

Work with the service to formally recognise proportionate crime recording as good practice and promote its adoption by forces;

Legislate to reduce the reporting requirements for stop and search;

Support the piloting of an approach to reduce unnecessary bureaucracy involved in the police charging process; and

Continue to work with Jan Berry and the police service to encourage the adoption of more efficient business processes by police forces.

Measures of time spent on patrol and administrative tasks have been discontinued as part of the Government's commitment to reduce the burden on police forces imposed by statistical and other data. The scrapping of activity based costing has been estimated to save up to 260,000 hours per year across the police workforce. This allows officers to concentrate their efforts on fighting crime and being more visible.

The Home Office has not received any specific representation on the subject of police morale but my ministerial colleagues and I continue to enjoy constructive and regular discussions with police stakeholders, including the police staff associations.

Powers of Entry

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Peterborough of 22 February 2010, *Official Report*, column 379W, on powers of entry: public consultation, what the reasons are for the time taken to publish Lord West's report; and when he expects it to be published. [323038]

Mr. Hanson: The Home Department has been in consultation with other Government Departments as part of the review on powers of entry.

Proposals on a future framework approach for powers of entry will be set out in a public consultation document and will be published later this year.

Trade Unions

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many staff of 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. [320663]

Mr. Woolas: One member of staff is currently seconded to PCS for a period of six months under normal secondment arrangements. The Home Office is not responsible for salary payment, or provision of facilities, during the period of secondment.

The Home Office and its agencies, UKBA, IPS and CRB, employ approximately 28,000 staff in total. There are four recognised unions with 13 members of Home Office staff working as full-time union representatives under the Departmental Facilities Agreement (one FDA, one Prospect, nine PCS and two ISU representatives). In addition to the 13 full-time representatives, we also provide three members of Home Office staff as administrative support for the union representatives.

A further 79 members of our staff (three ISU and 76 PCS representatives) undertake trade union duties on an "as required" basis. The Home Office Departmental Facilities Agreements formalise the arrangements under which our staff can claim facility time but we do not keep a central record of how much time is used.

It is not possible to calculate the exact amount of facility time agreed for union activity and for this reason, it is also not possible to provide a realistic estimate of the total cost.

As part of our Departmental Facilities Agreement full-time representatives have access to dedicated office space with associated business equipment, e.g. computers, photocopying and telephony and may also utilise departmental mail, email, internet and video conferencing facilities. Union representatives provided with “as required” facility time are given access to the same or similar facilities.

UK Border Agency

Anne Main: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what response his Department has made to the parliamentary ombudsman’s recent report on the UK Border Agency. [322334]

Mr. Woolas: At the time the parliamentary ombudsman released her Special Report on the UK Border Agency Lin Homer, the chief executive of the agency, made a statement saying:

“We take the Ombudsman’s recommendations seriously and welcome the assessment that our complaints systems are improving.

The UK Border Agency is continuing to make progress in dealing with the legacy backlog of older asylum cases and has already concluded more than 220,000 cases. I am confident we are on course to conclude these cases by the summer of 2011.”

UK Border Agency: Telephone Services

Anne Main: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many calls were made to the UK Border Agency MPs’ Hotline in each of the last 12 months. [322341]

Mr. Woolas: The information is in the following table

| | <i>Number</i> |
|-------------|---------------|
| <i>2009</i> | |
| February | 2,082 |
| March | 2,468 |
| April | 2,267 |
| May | 2,344 |
| June | 2,950 |
| July | 2,586 |
| August | 2,028 |
| September | 2,311 |
| October | 2,237 |
| November | 2,177 |
| December | 1,641 |
| <i>2010</i> | |
| January | 2,444 |
| February | 2,097 |
| Total | 29,632 |

Anne Main: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what the cost to the public purse was of providing all hon. Members with a pass code for the UK Border Agency MPs’ hotline. [322348]

Mr. Woolas [*holding answer 15 March 2010*]: The work of providing all hon. Members with a pass code for the UK Border Agency MPs’ Enquiry Line was done as part of the day to day business of the MPs’ Enquiry Line at minimal cost.

Anne Main: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many full-time members of staff work on the UK Border Agency (*a*) MPs’ hotline and (*b*) public enquiry line. [322349]

Mr. Woolas [*holding answer 15 March 2010*]: The information is in the following table:

| | <i>Full-time equivalent</i> |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| (<i>a</i>) MPs’ inquiry line | 13.6 |
| (<i>b</i>) Public inquiry lines | 175.9 |

TREASURY

Business: Government Assistance

Mr. Amess: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what recent assessment he has made of the effects on small businesses of the recent downturn in the economy; what assistance he plans to give during the next six months to small businesses; what representations he has received on this issue; and if he will make a statement; [321831]

(2) what steps his Department (*a*) has taken since June 2007 and (*b*) plans to take in the next 12 months to improve the flow of credit from financial institutions to (i) small and (ii) medium-sized businesses; what recent discussions (A) he, (B) other Ministers in his Department and (C) officials in his Department have had with the Confederation of British Industry on this issue; and if he will make a statement. [321834]

Ian Pearson: The Government recognise the importance of small businesses to the UK economy. The lending commitments agreed with RBS and Lloyds over the 12 months from March 2009 have made significant amounts of lending available to creditworthy businesses. To help provide continued confidence to the business sector, these commitments will remain in place until March 2011.

The Government are also exploring the development of non-bank lending channels, as outlined in its 2009 discussion paper. Officials have engaged with key stakeholders on this topic, including the CBI who supports the idea of non-bank lending for diversifying sources of business finance. As indicated at pre-Budget report, the Government will provide an update on non-bank lending in the upcoming Budget.

More generally, the UK’s small businesses proved resilient during the downturn: company liquidations were lower than in the 1990s recession and there were on average a total of 47,366 new start-ups each month in 2009—higher than both 2007 and 2008.

Ministers and Government officials have continued to engage with trade bodies and the major banks throughout the crisis and will continue to do so in order to monitor the flow of credit to businesses. Ongoing work with banks and business groups through the Small Business

Finance Forum aims to improve the transparency of banks' lending practices and help to restore confidence to the business sector.

Government have also put in place a range of wider support for small businesses. This has included:

targeted, temporary access to finance support through the 'Real Help' for business package, which included the Working Capital Scheme, Capital for Enterprise Fund and Enterprise Finance Guarantee (now extended to April 2011);

a mix of permanent and targeted, temporary tax support to ease cash flow difficulties through Time to Pay (which will extend payment times for business tax on a permanent basis), extended loss carry-back arrangements (until November 2010) and a deferral in the planned increase of the small companies taxation rate (with the rate remaining at 21 per cent. during 2010-11);

further progress in cutting the costs of regulation through a planned reduction of 25 per cent. in administrative burdens of regulation by May 2010; and

increased funding for SME employers to invest in the training of their staff through Train to Gain.

Child Trust Fund: Children in Care

Ruth Kelly: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what assessment he has made of the performance of stakeholder Child Trust Funds managed by the Official Solicitor or Accountant of Court on behalf of looked-after children. [322392]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry [*holding answer 17 March 2010*]: The Child Trust Fund legislation provides that the Official Solicitor for England and Wales and the Official Solicitor for Northern Ireland manage the Child Trust Fund accounts of looked-after children where there is no one with parental responsibility. It is part of their duties to review the Child Trust Fund accounts under their control to ensure they continue to meet the best interests of the child.

The Child Trust Fund legislation also provides that in Scotland the Accountant of Court manage these accounts. She is responsible to Scottish Ministers.

Departmental Air Travel

Simon Hughes: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many domestic flights in Great Britain officials of his Department took in an official capacity in 2008-09; and at what cost to the public purse such flights were taken. [300969]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: Tickets for domestic flights are purchased through HM Treasury's travel management company for both officials and Ministers. Separate details of travel by officials and additional information relating to tickets purchased directly by the traveller are not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

Excise Duties: Motor Vehicles

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the likely change to revenue to the Exchequer arising from the first year rate tax on new motor vehicles in each of the next three financial years. [322362]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry [*holding answer 16 March 2010*]: Differential first-year rates of vehicle excise duty (VED) will encourage the purchase of more fuel-efficient cars, by providing a strong signal to the consumer at the point of purchase.

There are 13 different standard rates of VED. From April 2010, under differential first-year rates:

cars in bands A to D—emitting up to 130 grams of carbon dioxide per kilometre (g/km)—will pay no VED in the first year;

cars in bands E to G—emitting between 130 g/km and 165 g/km—will pay the same as under the standard rate; and

cars in bands H to M—emitting over 165 g/km—will pay a rate higher than the standard rate. Only around a quarter of new cars are forecast to fall into this category and only 2 per cent. of new cars are forecast, to fall into band M and face the top rate of £950.

From 2010 onwards, the Exchequer will therefore see reduced revenue from new cars in bands A to D, but increased revenue in bands H to M. The net impact of both of these changes, against a standard rate baseline, is:

| | <i>Additional revenue (£ million)</i> |
|---------|---------------------------------------|
| 2010-11 | 60 |
| 2011-12 | 45 |
| 2012-13 | 15 |

This will contribute to cutting carbon dioxide from motoring.

Full details of VED rates for 2010 are available at:

http://www.direct.gov.uk/en/Motoring/OwningAVehicle/HowToTaxYourVehicle/DG_172916

Government Departments: Bank Cards

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of the guidance given to civil servants on spending money via Government procurement cards. [323514]

Ian Pearson: General Government Procurement Card (GPC) guidance is provided by Buying Solutions to Departments in the form of an electronic toolkit which is available in both CD ROM format or as a download from the OGC website at

www.ogc.gov.uk/procurement_documents_eprocurement.asp

Government Departments: Reviews

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer which organisations are accredited gateway reviewers. [323579]

Ian Pearson: Organisations currently authorised to arrange and manage OGC Gateway reviews are:

OGC (on behalf of central Government)

Ministry of Defence

Department of Health/NHS

Local Partnerships (on behalf of local government)

Scottish Executive

Northern Ireland Civil Service

Dutch Government

State of Victoria (Australia)

Organisations currently piloting the Gateway review process with the objective of becoming authorised are:

Welsh Assembly Government

Police service of England and Wales (NPIA)
 Government of New Zealand
 Federal Government of Australia
 Brisbane City Council
 Australian State of Queensland
 Australian State of New South Wales
 Australian State of Tasmania
 Australian State of South Australia
 Australian State of Western Australia

Housing: Leaseback Arrangements

Robert Neill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library a copy of each substantive response to his Department's consultation on Regulating the sale and rent-back market. [323154]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: In February 2009, HM Treasury published a consultation on regulating the sale and rent back market. A summary of the 35 responses to the consultation was published in June 2009. This document is available on the Treasury website at

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/consultsalerent_response020609.pdf

A copy of has been placed in the Library of the House.

Housing: Valuation

Robert Neill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 22 February 2010, *Official Report*, column 237W, on valuation, what proportion of the £14 million of expenditure on the Automated Valuation Model has been incurred since October 2005. [323183]

Ian Pearson: The Valuation Office Agency's Automated Valuation Model technology is used to support of a range of activities associated with domestic property valuation. Some 50 per cent. of expenditure has been incurred since 1 October 2005.

National Insurance Contributions

Lorely Burt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the likely effect on the level of employment of a one percentage point increase in national insurance contributions. [322807]

Mr. Timms: For both small and large companies, the increase in national insurance contributions in 2011 represents only a very small proportion of their total costs. Therefore, in the climate of stronger economic growth forecast by the Treasury and independent commentators in 2011 and beyond, the Government expect the rise in national insurance contributions to be affordable, and any impact on employment to be limited. Past experience has shown such increases can be made without employment falling. The increase in 2011 is accompanied by an increase in the primary threshold to protect lower earners.

Non-Domestic Rates: Ports

Robert Neill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will initiate an independent review of the Valuation Office Agency's handling of the new retrospective business rates regime on firms in ports. [323155]

Ian Pearson: The Valuation Office Agency has been subject to a Framework Review conducted by an HMRC Director reporting to the Minister then responsible for the Agency, the Financial Secretary to the Treasury. The Framework Review is available at:

http://www.voa.gov.uk/publications/framework_doc/voa-review-09.pdf

Non-Domestic Rates: Valuation

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many (a) new assessments and (b) reassessments have been undertaken by the Valuation Office Agency in each year since 1999; and how many businesses were listed at each port in each of those years. [322287]

Ian Pearson: The information requested in respect of (a) and (b) cover the following three Rating Lists:

1995 Rating Lists—1 April 1995 to 31 March 2000

2000 Rating Lists—1 April 2000 to 31 March 2005

2005 Rating Lists—1 April 2005 to 31 March 2010

Total number of (a) 'new' assessments and (b) 'Reassessments' (other) for all classes of property undertaken by the VOA since 1 April 1999 is included in the following table.

| <i>April to March each year</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>England</i> | <i>Wales</i> | <i>England and Wales</i> |
|---------------------------------|-------------|----------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| 1999-2000 | New | 37,680 | 2,220 | 39,900 |
| | Other | 220,460 | 11,370 | 231,830 |
| 2000-01 | New | 71,660 | 3,170 | 74,830 |
| | Other | 382,700 | 20,500 | 403,200 |
| 2001-02 | New | 34,560 | 1,760 | 36,320 |
| | Other | 213,550 | 12,310 | 225,860 |
| 2002-03 | New | 33,270 | 1,830 | 35,100 |
| | Other | 220,480 | 12,570 | 233,050 |
| 2003-04 | New | 33,040 | 1,890 | 34,930 |
| | Other | 211,520 | 12,560 | 224,090 |

| <i>April to March each year</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>England</i> | <i>Wales</i> | <i>England and Wales</i> |
|---------------------------------|-------------|----------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| 2004-05 | New | 33,590 | 2,320 | 35,920 |
| | Other | 225,370 | 12,060 | 237,430 |
| 2005-06 | New | 40,580 | 2,630 | 43,210 |
| | Other | 309,570 | 14,680 | 324,250 |
| 2006-07 | New | 42,110 | 2,880 | 44,990 |
| | Other | 264,110 | 13,270 | 277,370 |
| 2007-08 | New | 38,690 | 2,910 | 41,600 |
| | Other | 247,030 | 14,950 | 261,980 |
| 2008-09 | New | 41,360 | 2,840 | 44,200 |
| | Other | 244,240 | 15,730 | 259,980 |
| 2009-10 | New | 32,340 | 2,050 | 34,400 |
| | Other | 226,230 | 13,760 | 239,990 |

Note:

All figures rounded to the nearest 10.

The above information has been extracted from the Valuation Office Agency's operational database.

In response to how many businesses were listed at each port in each of those years I refer the hon. Member to the answer given on 4 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 1335W.

Revenue and Customs: Data Protection

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) what estimate he has made of the number of people whose personal data was put at risk by HM Revenue and Customs data security incidents in 2008-09; [317292]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of people whose personal data was inappropriately disclosed by HM Revenue and Customs in 2008-09; [317293]

(3) what progress HM Revenue and Customs has made towards meeting its target on the timeliness of reporting of data security incidents; [317300]

(4) what progress HM Revenue and Customs has made towards meeting its target on the reduction of data security incidents; [317301]

(5) what definition of a data security incident HM Revenue and Customs uses in relation to its departmental objective to reduce the number of such incidents by 2012; [317302]

Mr. Timms: HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) is committed to protecting the sensitive information it has access to. To drive performance in this area, HMRC has targets:

to drive towards zero the number of data security incidents reportable to the Information Commissioner,
reduce the volume of customer data lost, and
for staff to report incidents promptly.

HMRC defines a data security incident as:

loss or theft of paper, letters and files containing 'personal data';
loss, theft or insecure disposal of portable equipment and media that carries 'personal data'; and
unauthorised disclosure of customer information.

The Department's planned actions to achieve these targets are set out in its annual business plan. The Department's performance against these objectives is set out in its annual reports and resource accounts. These are available at:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/about/reports.htm>

It is not possible to provide accurate data regarding the total number of people whose personal data was put at risk or inappropriately disclosed during 2008-09.

Taxation

Mr. Duncan Smith: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer when he expects to publish the Treasury Minute outlining the Government's response to the Second Report from the Committee of Public Accounts' HM Revenue and Customs: Improving the processing and collection of tax HC97. [323204]

Sarah McCarthy-Fry: The Government's Treasury Minute response to the Committee of Public Accounts Report—HM Revenue and Customs: improving the processing and collection of tax was published as Cm 7818 on 11 March 2010.

Taxation: Business

Lorely Burt: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what consideration his Department has given to means of simplifying the tax system in respect of small businesses. [322806]

Mr. Timms: The Government are committed to simplifying the tax system where it can and has included simplicity as one of the six principles of the "Tax Framework for Business", on which it is currently consulting. Further information is available at:

http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/tax_governmenttaxforum_index.htm

Since 2006 the Government have brought forward measures that reduce administrative burdens imposed by the tax system on business by around £540 million

per annum. More details on the steps being taken to reduce burdens on small businesses are set out in the series of HM Revenue and Customs reports on "Delivering a new relationship with business", available at:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/better-regulation/related-links.htm>

Valuation Office Agency: Local Government

Robert Neill: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer pursuant to the answer of 26 February 2010, *Official Report*, column 806W, on the Valuation Office: local government, if he will place in the Library a copy of the request for a legislative gateway submitted by the Valuation Office Agency. [323083]

Ian Pearson: HM Revenue and Customs consider this an internal policy document relating to the formulation of tax policy and should not be published.

Mr. Stewart Jackson: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer whether the Valuebill XML schema has the capacity to transfer building control notice data. [323545]

Ian Pearson: No.

Valuation Office Agency: Manpower

Mr. Austin Mitchell: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many (a) assessment officers, (b) staff working in the former statutory ports and (c) staff of the Valuation Office Agency there were in each year since 1999. [322288]

Ian Pearson: In answer to (a) and (b), I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to him on 2 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 1021W.

The average number of full-time equivalent staff employed at the Valuation Office Agency from 1999-2000 to 2008-09 was:

| | <i>Average number of staff employed during the year (full-time equivalents)</i> |
|-----------|---|
| 1999-2000 | 4,016 |
| 2000-01 | 3,948 |
| 2001-02 | 3,814 |
| 2002-03 | 3,843 |
| 2003-04 | 4,436 |
| 2004-05 | 4,955 |
| 2005-06 | 5,084 |
| 2006-07 | 4,428 |
| 2007-08 | 4,096 |
| 2008-09 | 3,843 |

TRANSPORT

Aerials: Planning Permission

Robert Neill: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what guidance his Department has issued to Network Rail on the requirement for environmental impact assessments to be undertaken in respect of its telecommunications masts under the terms of the EU Directive on Strategic Environmental Assessment, 2001/42/EC. [323159]

Chris Mole: The Department for Transport has given no explicit advice to Network Rail on the requirement to undertake environmental impact assessments under the terms of EU Directive 2001/42/EC.

Aviation: Accidents

Graham Stringer: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how many incidents were recorded of objects falling from commercial aeroplanes over the UK in each of the last five years; and how many such objects have caused (a) personal injury and (b) damage to buildings. [323015]

Paul Clark: The statistics requested are set out in the following table.

| | <i>Reports</i> | <i>Damage</i> | <i>Injury</i> |
|--|----------------|---------------|---------------|
| <i>Aircraft components (commercial aircraft)</i> | | | |
| 2010 | 1 | 1 | 1 |
| 2009 | 4 | 0 | 0 |
| 2008 | 5 | 0 | 0 |
| 2007 | 3 | 0 | 0 |
| 2006 | 1 | 0 | 0 |
| 2005 | 4 | 1 | 0 |
| <i>Ice (all aircraft)</i> | | | |
| 2010 | 2 | 2 | 0 |
| 2009 | 22 | 13 | 1 |
| 2008 | 19 | 11 | 0 |
| 2007 | 25 | 17 | 0 |
| 2006 | 27 | 17 | 1 |
| 2005 | 27 | 18 | 0 |

¹ No reports so far

BAM Nuttall

Mr. Paice: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how many infrastructure projects funded in part or in whole by his Department are under construction by BAM Nuttall; how many of those projects are (a) design and build projects, (b) being financed under the pain/gain mechanism and (c) past their target completion date. [320588]

Chris Mole: The Highways Agency currently has three maintenance projects under construction by BAM Nuttall. The details are as follows:

| <i>Project Title</i> | <i>(a and b) Type</i> | <i>(c) Target Completion Date</i> |
|--|-------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| A5 Beech Road-M1 Junction 9 Lighting Renewal | Pain and Gain Mechanism | 31 March 2010 |
| M3 Hard Shoulder Strengthening Phase 1 | Pain and Gain Mechanism | 30 April 2010 |
| M3 Hard Shoulder Strengthening Phase 2 | Pain and Gain Mechanism | 30 April 2010 |

For local major schemes it is the responsibility of the promoting authority to decide on the most suitable procurement route. From the local major schemes currently under construction in which the Department for Transport has agreed to contribute funding, the following table provides information on those being constructed by BAM Nuttall.

| <i>Project Name</i> | <i>(a and b) Type of Contract</i> | <i>(c) Completion Target Date</i> |
|--------------------------------|---|-----------------------------------|
| Cambridgeshire Guided Busway | Design and Build including a Pain and Gain Mechanism. | February 2009 |
| Connecting Derby Phase 2 and 3 | Pain and Gain Mechanism | December 2010 |

The Department is also providing funding to a number of Community Infrastructure Fund schemes. One of which is the South East Hampshire Rapid Transit Phase 1 scheme between Fareham and Gosport. BAM Nuttall was appointed by Hampshire county council to deliver the main construction aspects of the scheme. This contract is a standard construction contract using a priced bill of quantities. A target completion date as such is not applicable as community infrastructure funding is made available up until 31 March 2011.

Departmental Lost Property

John Mason: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what property has been recorded as (a) lost and (b) stolen from his Department in the last 12 months; and what estimate has been made of the cost of the replacement of that property. [322083]

Chris Mole: The Department for Transport includes seven agencies, a shared service centre and the central Department, with a total staff of over 19,000. The figures provided here for lost and stolen property are for the entire Department including its agencies and shared service centre. The figures provided do not include losses or thefts where records are not available, where equipment has not been procured centrally, or where such losses or thefts were not reported.

The number of items of lost and stolen property from the Department in the last 12 months and their total estimated replacement cost are as follows.

| <i>Item</i> | <i>Lost</i> | <i>Stolen</i> | <i>Estimated cost (£)</i> |
|--|-------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| Laptop computers | 2 | 18 | 7,972.00 |
| PC | — | 1 | 500.00 |
| Laptop encryption dongles | 9 | 1 | 250.00 |
| Blackberry | 15 | 4 | 5,130.00 |
| Blackberry charger | 3 | — | 24.34 |
| Iron Key memory stick | — | 2 | 55.87 |
| Mobile phone | 22 | 4 | 806.00 |
| USB broadband modem | — | 1 | 50.00 |
| Satellite navigation | 1 | — | 79.99 |
| PC mouse | 4 | — | 40.00 |
| PC keyboard | 1 | — | 10.00 |
| Radios | 1 | 1 | 400.00 |
| Cash | 3 | — | 15.00 |
| Watch | 3 | — | 1.00 |
| Pair of cufflinks | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Silver coloured metal three flowers/butterflies stones | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Keys | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Wallet | 3 | — | 1.00 |
| Phillips shaver white blue | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Black strap watch gents | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Leather money holder with £5.55 inside | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Ladies purse | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Metal framed glasses | 1 | 1 | 1.00 |
| Gold bracelet | 1 | — | 1.00 |

| <i>Item</i> | <i>Lost</i> | <i>Stolen</i> | <i>Estimated cost (£)</i> |
|---------------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------------------|
| Black hat | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| USB con | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Photograph | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Bag | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Encryption fob | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Brown bag | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Pair of cufflinks | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Black umbrella | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Travel dress and money | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Bracelet | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Whole metal propel pencil | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Radio terminal | 2 | — | 1.00 |
| Shirts | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Wash bag | 1 | 1 | 1.00 |
| Diamond solitaire ring | 1 | — | 1.00 |
| Grit from grit bin | — | 1 | 1.00 |
| Bikes | — | 2 | 1.00 |

East Coast Railway Line

Miss McIntosh: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what recent representations he has received on the effectiveness of the operation of the East Coast Main Line route; and if he will make a statement. [322793]

Chris Mole: There have been no significant representations received by the Department for Transport relating to the effectiveness of the East Coast route.

Exhaust Emissions

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what estimate he has made of the total carbon dioxide emissions from buses in the last 10 years; and what projection he has made of such emissions from buses in the next (a) 10, (b) 20 and (c) 50 years. [317024]

Mr. Khan: Bus carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions for the last 10 years can be found in Table 3.7 of Transport Statistics Great Britain (TSGB) at:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/statistics/datatablespublications/energyenvironment/tsgbchapter3energyenvi2009.xls>

The Department for Transport's most recent forecasts of total road transport carbon dioxide emissions for England were produced as part of the road transport forecasts for 2010, 2015, and 2025. These are available in 'Road Traffic Forecasts 2008: Results from the Department for Transport's National Transport Model', which is available at:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/pgr/economics/ntm/roadtransport/forecasts08/rtf08.pdf>

The total forecast changes in carbon dioxide emissions for Public Service Vehicles (PSVs), which includes buses and coaches, forecast percentage changes in PSV carbon dioxide emissions in England compared with 2003 for 2010, 2015 and 2025 are provided in the following table:

Carbon dioxide emissions percentage change compared with 2003,
England

| | Percentage |
|------|------------|
| 2010 | -3 |
| 2015 | -2 |
| 2025 | -0.4 |

These figures include an assumption for rising congestion levels, causing slowing vehicle speeds and increasing CO₂ emissions as a result.

No such forecasts are available for 2020, 2030, and 2060.

Heathrow Airport: High Speed Two

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what estimate has been made of the effect on the number of flights to and from Heathrow Airport of High Speed Two coming into operation. [323360]

Chris Mole: No specific estimate has been made of the effect on the number of flights to and from Heathrow. Modelling carried out by HS2 Ltd estimates that a high speed rail line from London to the West Midlands reduces the number of daily air passengers between all UK airports by 11,000. A wider network would present greater potential for modal shift from aviation.

Midland Metro

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport when he plans to release funding for the Midland Metro extension. [323171]

Mr. Khan: On 18 March 2010, the Department for Transport announced initial funding approval for the Midland Metro Line One extension scheme promoted by Centra, West Midlands Passenger Transport Executive.

In providing initial approval, the Department has indicated that it is willing to provide up to £81 million towards the scheme costs subject to some additional development work being undertaken by the promoter. This is a significant first step. No funding will be released until the promoter has met all of our conditions and remaining approval processes.

Motor Vehicles: Excise Duties

Anne Milton: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport pursuant to the answer of 9 February 2010, *Official Report*, column 845W, on the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA), and with reference to the draft Better Regulation Executive report, whether the DVLA's draft enforcement strategy is the same as the enforcement policy currently being drafted. [323062]

Paul Clark: The two things are not the same.

The enforcement strategy deals with the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's responsibility with respect to Vehicle Excise Duty enforcement.

The recent Better Regulation Executive report focused on the regulation of business. Their reference to the enforcement policy relates to the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's operation of the Registration of Number Plate Suppliers scheme.

Mr. Greg Knight: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what the cost to the public purse of administering the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency's free prize draw promotion for motorists renewing their vehicle tax online or by telephone has been to date. [323289]

Paul Clark: The cost to the public purse of administering the free prize draw for motorists renewing their vehicle tax online or by telephone is as follows:

| | £ |
|-----------------------|-----------|
| June 2008-March 2009 | 13,697.69 |
| April 2009-March 2010 | 11,332 |

The cars offered as prizes were donated free of charge by the manufacturer.

Network Rail:

Mr. Hands: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport (1) what costs Network Rail incurred on air journeys within Great Britain since its inception; [323719]

(2) how much Network Rail spent on (a) drivers and (b) taxis for use by executive staff in each year since its inception; [323720]

(3) what (a) salaries, (b) bonuses, (c) emoluments, (d) pension contributions and (e) expenses were paid to executive staff employed by Network Rail in each year since its inception; [323721]

(4) what costs Network Rail incurred on (a) legal advice, (b) marketing agencies and public relations, (c) public affairs, (d) agency staff, (e) redundancy payments and (f) other severance payments in each year since its inception. [323732]

Chris Mole: Network Rail is a private sector not-for-dividend company limited by guarantee. The Department for Transport does not hold the information requested.

This is an operational matter for Network Rail as the owner and operator of the national rail network. The hon. Member should contact Network Rail's Chief Executive at the following address for a response to his questions:

Iain Coucher
Chief Executive
Network Rail
Kings Place
90 York Way
London, N1 9AG.

Railways

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what research has been done on the business case on the proposed route of a high-speed rail link (a) including starting with a link between London and Birmingham and (b) directly from London on to the north of England and Scotland. [323361]

Chris Mole: The report published by HS2 Ltd estimates the benefit:cost ratio of their proposed line from London to the West Midlands to be 2.4:1, rising to 2.7:1 with the inclusion of wider economic benefits such as agglomeration.

The report also made a strategic assessment of the business case for a range of options for a network linking London to Scotland, and concluded that the 'Inverse A' network, with branches either side of the Pennines, was most promising with an indicative benefit:cost ratio of 2.3:1.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport which organisations have informed his Department of their support for a shorter journey time by rail between London and Birmingham. [323362]

Chris Mole: The Department receives regular correspondence and other representations from a range of organisations on a range of issues, including high speed rail.

"High Speed Rail", the Command Paper published on 11 March 2010, sets out the Government's intention to consult by the autumn on the proposals it contains. It is at this stage that all interested parties will have opportunity to comment on the proposed high speed rail network, including any journey time savings it could deliver.

A summary list and the full text of detailed submissions that stakeholders submitted during the engagement process undertaken by HS2 Ltd was published alongside "High Speed Rail".

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what assessment has been made of the economic effects of a reduction in rail journey times of 20 minutes between London and Birmingham; and if he will make a statement. [323363]

Chris Mole: HS2 Ltd assessed the comparative business cases of new high speed and conventional lines between London and the West Midlands, which would deliver a 35 minute and 20 minute reduction in journey times respectively (assuming the conventional line, like the high speed proposal, included no intermediate stations between the two conurbations).

Its conclusion was that the slower journey times offered by a conventional speed line would reduce the number of people travelling on the line in comparison to the high speed alternative by 20 per cent. This would cause overall benefits to fall by 23 per cent. or £6.7 billion, in contrast to a net cost saving to Government of around £1 billion.

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what assessment has been made of the effects of tunnelling activities associated with the high-speed rail route proposed in Chesham and Amersham constituency on chalk aquifers in the area. [323364]

Chris Mole: The potential for the construction of HS2 to affect surface drainage and ground water would be fully assessed during the detailed design stage of the project, which itself would commence following consultation should the Government choose to proceed.

HS2 Ltd would draw from the experience gained by others in the construction of tunnels through similar geology. Appropriate mitigation of such effects would be undertaken during construction, if necessary.

Railways: Birmingham

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport pursuant to the statement of 11 March 2010, *Official Report*, columns 446-50, on high speed rail, when work will commence on the section of the route between the Birmingham spur and where the line joins the existing West Coast Mainline north of Lichfield; how many tracks there will be on this section; and whether any additional tracks will run adjacent to the existing West Coast Mainline. [322686]

Chris Mole: 'High Speed Rail' states that subject to public consultation and parliamentary approval, work on this section of the line could commence after the opening of Crossrail from 2017. The preferred route option as outlined in 'High Speed Rail' indicates that the line would have two tracks. The new line would not run adjacent to the West Coast Main Line other than within the immediate vicinity of the junction between the two, which would be located to the north-east of Lichfield. Maps setting out this information are available on the Department for Transport's website at:

www.dft.gov.uk/highspeedrail

Railways: Chesham

Mrs. Gillan: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport which roads in Chesham and Amersham constituency have been identified for the routing of traffic in connection with the construction of the High Speed Two route; and what estimate he has made of the likely effect on the volume of traffic on such roads of the construction of High Speed Two. [322674]

Chris Mole [*holding answer 16 March 2010*]: We would seek to minimise the effects of construction wherever possible. Initial decisions on whether to build a high speed line and what route that line should take will be taken in light of the autumn 2010 consultation. Thereafter the full effects and any associated mitigation measures would be subject to an environmental impact assessment, as part of the Hybrid Bill process, which would itself be subject to further public scrutiny.

Railways: North West

Michael Fabricant: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport pursuant to the Statement of 11 March 2010, *Official Report*, columns 446-50, on high speed rail, when he expects work to commence north of where the proposed high speed line joins the existing West Coast Mainline north of Lichfield to provide a high speed rail service to Leeds and to Manchester. [322687]

Chris Mole: Subject to public consultation and parliamentary approval, the initial London to Birmingham high speed line would join onto the West Coast Main Line near Lichfield. This would allow high speed services to run up the West Coast Main Line to destinations including Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow. Construction of this initial leg would not start until after the opening of the Crossrail line from 2017 at the earliest.

Following on from this initial leg, High Speed Rail also proposes an initial core high speed network which extends further north, with high speed lines extending beyond the West Midlands to Manchester and Leeds. The initial core high speed network is now subject to detailed planning and technical work and it is not therefore possible at this stage to state when construction of this section of the network might commence.

Railways: Safety

Mr. David Anderson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what discussions the Secretary of State has had with the Office of Rail Regulation on the number of maintenance staff required to be employed by Network Rail in order to maintain present safety standards; and if he will make a statement. [323236]

Chris Mole: I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave on 28 January 2010, *Official Report*, column 999W.

The independent Office of Rail Regulation has reviewed Network Rail's proposals for the restructuring of its maintenance function so as to be assured that the safety implications of the changes are being well managed. The Office of Rail Regulation announced the outcome of this review on 3 March. Ministers have discussed the proposals in the course of their routine meetings with the independent Office of Rail Regulation.

Railways: Todmorden

Kitty Ussher: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport with reference to his contribution of 15 October 2009, *Official Report*, columns 547-48, on the Todmorden rail link, what recent assessment he has made of the prospects for a fast direct train link from Burnley to Manchester via the Todmorden curve; and if he will make a statement. [323001]

Chris Mole: The Department for Transport has had recent discussions with the scheme promoters, Network Rail and Northern Rail about the provision of a direct service between Burnley and Manchester via a reinstated curve at Todmorden. It has been confirmed that such a scheme is feasible, but it would require capital funding of around £7 million for the reinstatement of the Todmorden Curve and it is most likely that on-going subsidy would be required at least in the early years.

The promoters are aware that both capital and initial on-going subsidy costs of the scheme have to be funded through local and regional funding sources. The Government provide funding to the region through the regional funding allocation so that they can decide what projects should be given priority from the resources available. Once implemented, if the scheme demonstrates its success after three years then the Department for Transport would consider funding the service as part of the national rail network, subject to funds being available in the period 2014-19 (control period 5).

Roads: East Sussex

Norman Baker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport if he will make it his policy not to take any definitive decisions pursuant to the public inquiry into the compulsory purchase orders necessary to allow the Bexhill to Hastings link road to proceed before the forthcoming general election. [323172]

Mr. Khan: The inspector's report for the Bexhill to Hastings link road orders was received on 12 March 2010 and is being considered. A decision as to whether or not to confirm the orders will be made in due course.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what timetable applies to the submission to the Secretary of State of the report by the Inspector on the public inquiry for the Bexhill to Hastings link road. [323437]

Mr. Khan: The inspector's report for the Bexhill to Hastings link road orders has now been received and is being considered. A decision as to whether or not to confirm the orders will be made in due course.

Gregory Barker: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport whether the Inspector's report on the public inquiry for the Bexhill to Hastings link road is required to be considered by any person or authority other than the Secretary of State. [323508]

Mr. Khan: The Inspector's report for the Bexhill to Hastings link road has now been received and is being considered. The Secretary of State for Transport delegates responsibility for confirming Transport Orders following a Public Inquiry to officials.

Roads: Repairs and Maintenance

Mr. Whittingdale: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport how much was spent (a) in total and (b) per head of population on road improvements in (a) England, (b) the East of England and (c) Essex in each of the last 10 years. [323332]

Mr. Khan: A table containing the information requested has been placed in the Libraries of the House.

The table includes estimated expenditure on motorways and trunk roads in the East of England, but expenditure on the strategic road network is not available by local authority boundary. The table also excludes shadow tolls for design, build, finance and operate contracts on the strategic road network.

Rolling Stock: North of England

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Transport what steps the Government plans to take to provide additional diesel train capacity in the North of England. [323438]

Chris Mole: Discussions are taking place with Northern Rail to plan and justify the provision of additional vehicles to meet peak-hour capacity requirements in the northern cities, and the Department for Transport has already agreed some contract changes with Northern Rail, whereby a net 18 additional diesel vehicles will be used to lengthen certain train services. The electrification of the Great Western main line, and routes in the north-west, will release further diesel vehicles for deployment in the north.

CHILDREN, SCHOOLS AND FAMILIES

Academies: Sponsorship

Mr. Keetch: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families what consultation his Department undertook prior to the clawback of £260,295 funding from The Hereford Academy; if he will review the decision to implement the funding clawback; and if he will make a statement. [323005]

Mr. Coaker: As with maintained schools, funding for academies is primarily based on pupil numbers. The funding agreement for The Hereford Academy provides for a clawback of funding should actual pupil numbers fall short of funded numbers by more than 2.5 per cent.

Following consultation with The Hereford Academy, it was decided to apply a clawback over an extended period by reducing monthly payments through to August 2011, so as to reduce the impact. The academy has replied seeking a reduction in the amount to be clawed back; this case is currently being considered. In the meantime a clawback has not been put into effect.

Children: Death

Chris Huhne: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families how many deaths of

children (a) nationally and (b) in each local authority area under the age of five were reported in each of the last five years; how many such deaths were attributable to neglect or lack of parental care; and how many such children had been monitored by local authority children's or social services before their death. [315357]

Dawn Primarolo [*holding answer 3 February 2010*]: Data published by the Office for National Statistics (ONS) for each of the last five years from 2004 show that 3,591, 3,561, 3,716, 3,665, and 3,699 deaths of children aged 0 to four were registered each year in England and Wales. The following table gives the number of such deaths by local authority area.

Over that period only one death of a child aged under five was registered as having an underlying cause of "neglect and abandonment". (This category excludes children aged under 28 days.) It is not possible however to determine the number of cases where neglect was a factor in deaths registered as being due to other underlying causes.

Data on the number of child deaths where the child was being provided with a service from their local authority's children's social care at the time of the death is not collected centrally.

Counts of deaths in children aged 0 to four years by local authority in England, 2004-08

| Local authority | Deaths (children) | | | | |
|------------------------------|-------------------|------|------|------|------|
| | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
| Barking and Dagenham | 21 | 14 | 21 | 19 | 22 |
| Barnet | 16 | 33 | 15 | 19 | 26 |
| Barnsley | 20 | 13 | 17 | 13 | 7 |
| Bath and North East Somerset | 10 | 4 | 12 | 10 | 5 |
| Bedfordshire | 23 | 33 | 24 | 19 | 30 |
| Bexley | 18 | 13 | 13 | 13 | 13 |
| Birmingham | 155 | 137 | 167 | 154 | 157 |
| Blackburn with Darwen | 15 | 23 | 19 | 22 | 17 |
| Blackpool | 9 | 9 | 19 | 12 | 10 |
| Bolton | 26 | 29 | 34 | 24 | 31 |
| Bournemouth | 8 | 13 | 10 | 7 | 7 |
| Bracknell Forest | 4 | 8 | 8 | 8 | 9 |
| Bradford | 52 | 84 | 71 | 88 | 77 |
| Brent | 22 | 24 | 32 | 29 | 38 |
| Brighton and Hove | 23 | 19 | 21 | 18 | 16 |
| Bristol, City of | 33 | 30 | 28 | 28 | 42 |
| Bromley | 20 | 13 | 15 | 14 | 15 |
| Buckinghamshire | 25 | 30 | 25 | 35 | 33 |
| Bury | 16 | 11 | 13 | 11 | 9 |
| Calderdale | 19 | 19 | 15 | 18 | 20 |
| Cambridgeshire | 30 | 29 | 35 | 34 | 40 |
| Camden | 21 | 19 | 13 | 13 | 12 |
| Cheshire | 46 | 39 | 43 | 38 | 43 |
| City of London and Hackney | 19 | 29 | 24 | 32 | 31 |
| Cornwall and Isles of Scilly | 31 | 29 | 26 | 27 | 28 |
| Coventry | 37 | 22 | 22 | 27 | 41 |
| Croydon | 23 | 41 | 36 | 29 | 34 |
| Cumbria | 25 | 21 | 28 | 24 | 27 |
| Darlington | 7 | 8 | 13 | 10 | 10 |
| Derby | 18 | 15 | 12 | 26 | 26 |
| Derbyshire | 54 | 33 | 40 | 33 | 44 |
| Devon | 41 | 36 | 32 | 38 | 28 |
| Doncaster | 20 | 29 | 30 | 26 | 27 |
| Dorset | 18 | 22 | 19 | 19 | 15 |
| Dudley | 14 | 28 | 26 | 14 | 28 |

Counts of deaths in children aged 0 to four years by local authority in England, 2004-08

| Local authority | Deaths (children) | | | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|------|------|------|------|
| | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
| Durham | 27 | 33 | 34 | 28 | 25 |
| Ealing | 21 | 24 | 30 | 20 | 24 |
| East Riding of Yorkshire | 22 | 15 | 10 | 11 | 16 |
| East Sussex | 27 | 19 | 33 | 25 | 35 |
| Enfield | 24 | 32 | 35 | 31 | 28 |
| Essex | 70 | 62 | 73 | 85 | 75 |
| Gateshead | 9 | 14 | 18 | 15 | 16 |
| Gloucestershire | 33 | 32 | 28 | 35 | 28 |
| Greenwich | 29 | 16 | 29 | 27 | 19 |
| Halton | 11 | 11 | 12 | 15 | 9 |
| Hammersmith and Fulham | 9 | 14 | 13 | 9 | 11 |
| Hampshire | 55 | 47 | 59 | 58 | 52 |
| Haringey | 33 | 34 | 30 | 23 | 25 |
| Harrow | 20 | 31 | 15 | 17 | 12 |
| Hartlepool | 8 | 3 | 11 | 15 | 3 |
| Havering | 11 | 6 | 15 | 10 | 8 |
| Herefordshire, County of | 9 | 12 | 8 | 6 | 10 |
| Hertfordshire | 55 | 62 | 50 | 58 | 73 |
| Hillingdon | 15 | 15 | 20 | 27 | 16 |
| Hounslow | 22 | 24 | 12 | 26 | 24 |
| Isle of Wight | 7 | 1 | 6 | 6 | 8 |
| Islington | 21 | 17 | 20 | 15 | 15 |
| Kensington and Chelsea | 4 | 9 | 7 | 9 | 5 |
| Kent | 68 | 83 | 78 | 74 | 77 |
| Kingston upon Hull, City of | 15 | 16 | 29 | 15 | 25 |
| Kingston upon Thames | 13 | 9 | 8 | 5 | 3 |
| Kirklees | 46 | 41 | 46 | 42 | 43 |
| Knowsley | 13 | 11 | 5 | 10 | 12 |
| Lambeth | 31 | 31 | 28 | 28 | 29 |
| Lancashire | 89 | 93 | 88 | 82 | 84 |
| Leeds | 50 | 66 | 61 | 61 | 52 |
| Leicester | 33 | 30 | 37 | 41 | 34 |
| Leicestershire | 18 | 44 | 43 | 35 | 34 |
| Lewisham | 18 | 29 | 23 | 20 | 35 |
| Lincolnshire | 47 | 38 | 40 | 45 | 44 |
| Liverpool | 33 | 46 | 36 | 33 | 35 |
| Luton | 22 | 21 | 28 | 26 | 24 |
| Manchester | 58 | 58 | 41 | 64 | 60 |
| Medway | 24 | 14 | 17 | 15 | 13 |
| Merton | 18 | 13 | 21 | 11 | 15 |
| Middlesbrough | 11 | 15 | 8 | 10 | 14 |
| Milton Keynes | 20 | 20 | 22 | 16 | 24 |
| Newcastle upon Tyne | 21 | 18 | 12 | 11 | 23 |
| Newham | 53 | 28 | 45 | 43 | 28 |
| Norfolk | 41 | 42 | 44 | 47 | 41 |
| North East Lincolnshire | 8 | 11 | 13 | 17 | 12 |
| North Lincolnshire | 12 | 13 | 12 | 6 | 10 |
| North Somerset | 9 | 6 | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| North Tyneside | 10 | 9 | 8 | 9 | 5 |
| North Yorkshire | 28 | 29 | 23 | 27 | 24 |
| Northamptonshire | 56 | 41 | 53 | 50 | 49 |
| Northumberland | 6 | 10 | 10 | 23 | 11 |
| Nottingham | 27 | 29 | 37 | 29 | 19 |
| Nottinghamshire | 44 | 38 | 46 | 49 | 49 |
| Oldham | 26 | 17 | 27 | 22 | 23 |
| Oxfordshire | 39 | 33 | 41 | 31 | 39 |
| Peterborough | 12 | 23 | 23 | 20 | 17 |
| Plymouth | 15 | 17 | 13 | 21 | 17 |
| Poole | 8 | 6 | 8 | 8 | 10 |
| Portsmouth | 13 | 10 | 10 | 11 | 15 |
| Reading | 18 | 17 | 14 | 17 | 25 |
| Redbridge | 26 | 20 | 29 | 28 | 19 |
| Redcar and Cleveland | 16 | 7 | 13 | 6 | 5 |
| Richmond upon Thames | 7 | 11 | 6 | 9 | 6 |

Counts of deaths in children aged 0 to four years by local authority in England, 2004-08

| Local authority | Deaths (children) | | | | |
|------------------------|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
| Rochdale | 14 | 17 | 22 | 21 | 19 |
| Rotherham | 28 | 20 | 17 | 22 | 26 |
| Rutland | 1 | 3 | 2 | 1 | 4 |
| Salford | 17 | 17 | 20 | 21 | 23 |
| Sandwell | 32 | 37 | 39 | 37 | 47 |
| Sefton | 10 | 25 | 14 | 7 | 12 |
| Sheffield | 44 | 34 | 45 | 54 | 34 |
| Shropshire | 14 | 12 | 13 | 16 | 19 |
| Slough | 10 | 16 | 16 | 16 | 22 |
| Solihull | 9 | 14 | 15 | 10 | 20 |
| Somerset | 28 | 24 | 23 | 26 | 27 |
| South Gloucestershire | 16 | 9 | 16 | 7 | 5 |
| South Tyneside | 7 | 7 | 12 | 8 | 5 |
| Southampton | 7 | 15 | 14 | 14 | 21 |
| Southend-on-Sea | 9 | 9 | 10 | 8 | 6 |
| Southwark | 33 | 23 | 34 | 48 | 36 |
| St. Helens | 12 | 16 | 21 | 11 | 12 |
| Staffordshire | 48 | 55 | 53 | 70 | 50 |
| Stockport | 22 | 18 | 10 | 16 | 18 |
| Stockton-on-Tees | 21 | 8 | 14 | 11 | 15 |
| Stoke-on-Trent | 33 | 34 | 25 | 23 | 21 |
| Suffolk | 48 | 25 | 28 | 47 | 41 |
| Sunderland | 26 | 8 | 16 | 19 | 10 |
| Surrey | 40 | 51 | 48 | 55 | 49 |
| Sutton | 10 | 12 | 12 | 9 | 18 |
| Swindon | 17 | 12 | 10 | 14 | 15 |
| Tameside | 11 | 10 | 20 | 12 | 20 |
| Telford and Wrekin | 12 | 10 | 17 | 6 | 22 |
| Thurrock | 8 | 9 | 17 | 16 | 14 |
| Torbay | 6 | 10 | 8 | 6 | 6 |
| Tower Hamlets | 20 | 20 | 20 | 25 | 15 |
| Trafford | 7 | 9 | 14 | 15 | 12 |
| Wakefield | 26 | 27 | 22 | 19 | 32 |
| Walsall | 37 | 36 | 28 | 32 | 36 |
| Waltham Forest | 36 | 24 | 31 | 24 | 27 |
| Wandsworth | 15 | 29 | 20 | 19 | 23 |
| Warrington | 14 | 14 | 12 | 10 | 14 |
| Warwickshire | 39 | 32 | 21 | 29 | 36 |
| West Berkshire | 8 | 9 | 13 | 11 | 8 |
| West Sussex | 38 | 31 | 51 | 41 | 35 |
| Westminster | 17 | 16 | 18 | 12 | 8 |
| Wigan | 14 | 19 | 31 | 23 | 19 |
| Wiltshire | 20 | 22 | 24 | 14 | 31 |
| Windsor and Maidenhead | 6 | 4 | 10 | 9 | 9 |
| Wirral | 19 | 22 | 16 | 21 | 22 |
| Wokingham | 3 | 4 | 7 | 11 | 8 |
| Wolverhampton | 27 | 21 | 23 | 17 | 28 |
| Worcestershire | 39 | 41 | 31 | 40 | 21 |
| York | 10 | 16 | 11 | 13 | 9 |
| England | 3,591 | 3,561 | 3,716 | 3,665 | 3,699 |

Source:

Data extract from the SOPHIE database. Boundaries assigned using the August 2008 National Statistics postcode directory. Contact: Healthgeog@ons.gov.uk

Children: Health

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families what assessment he has made of the relative fitness levels of pupils who walk or cycle to school compared to those who are driven.

[320940]

Gillian Merron: I have been asked to reply.

The Government have not commissioned any work comparing fitness levels of children who walk or cycle to school, to those who are driven.

Neither is any assessment currently made of children's fitness levels on a national scale. We do, however, measure children's physical activity levels in line with the chief medical officer's (CMO) recommendations that children aged 5 to 16 need at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity every day to be healthy. The

Health Survey for England 2008 showed that 32 per cent. of boys and 24 per cent. of girls aged two to 15 were meeting the CMO recommendation.

Children's Centres: Public Relations

Bill Wiggin: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families how much has been spent on public relations in respect of Sure Start children's centres in each year since 2004; how much is planned to be spent in 2009-10; and if he will make a statement.

[304044]

Dawn Primarolo: The amount spent on public relations in respect of Sure Start Children's Centres is set out in the following table. Children's Centres are becoming a universal service for young children and their families—it is important that all families are aware of the services centres offer and are able to access them. So this financial year, a major national communications campaign, including public relations activities, has been funded to raise awareness of children's centres.

Table 1: Spending on public relations specifically related to Sure Start children's centres where figures are available since 2004

| Financial Year | Amount (£) |
|----------------|------------|
| 2009/10 | 346,000 |
| 2008/09 | 13,000 |
| 2007/08 | 35,000 |

Table 1: Actual and planned spend (for 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11)

| | Actual spend in 2008-09 | Planned spend | | £ million |
|--|-------------------------|---------------|----------------------|-----------|
| | | 2009-10 | 2010-11 ¹ | |
| (a) Entry to Employment | 170.0 | 223.0 | 2— | |
| (b) Community service ³ | 0 | 468.0 | 478.0 | |
| (c) Community service local authority pilots ⁵ | 0 | 2.0 | 5.0 | |
| (d) Opportunities to participate in community service at school ⁶ | 0 | 2.0 | 9.0 | |
| (e) Youth Taskforce | 12.5 | 22.2 | 19.6 | |
| (f) Youth Opportunity Fund | 36.0 | 40.9 | 41.2 | |
| (g) Youth Capital Fund ⁷ | 29.0 | 46.6 | 26.5 | |
| (i) Empowering Young People pilots | 6.7 | 0.0 | 0.0 | |
| (j) Residential (including Do It 4 Real) | 5.5 | 6.3 | 6.5 | |
| (k) Youth Sector Development Fund (YSDF) | 13.5 | 36.2 | 39.7 | |
| (l) Youth Leadership Fund | 0.7 | 2.3 | 3.1 | |
| (m) Young People's Workforce Reform | 6.0 | 10.0 | 10.0 | |
| (n) myplace capital | 2.4 | 27.8 | 133.7 | |
| (o) Youth Media Fund | 3.7 | 3.3 | 4.1 | |
| (p) Other activity programmes for young people | 0.0 | 0.0 | 0.0 | |

¹ 2010-11 data are based on allocations.

² In 2010-11 Entry to Employment (E2E) will become part of provision under the broader Foundation Learning pathway. Funding for Foundation Learning has yet to be determined within the 16-19 further education budget.

³ Funding of £146 million was made available to deliver Community Service following the announcement in April 2009.

⁴ Includes £64 million/year for community action opportunities as part of E2E (2009-10) and Foundation Learning (2010-11). This funding covers both the overall learning provision and the community action element within it: it therefore overlaps with the funding set out in line (a).

⁵ The funding for local authority pilots is also included in the figure provided for (b).

⁶ The funding provided to support all schools in providing opportunities to engage their pupils in community service is also included in the figure provided for (b).

⁷ Youth Capital Fund (YCF) includes YCF+ funding.

Note:

Do It 4 Real, Youth Media Fund, YSDF and Youth Leadership Fund spend includes contributions from other Government Departments.

Table 2: Positive Activities for Young People allocations within the area based grant (for 2008-09, 2009-10 and 2010-11)

| | £ million | | |
|---|-----------|---------|---------|
| | 2008-09 | 2009-10 | 2010-11 |
| (h) Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP) | 52.85 | 74.50 | 94.50 |

Departmental Finance

Mr. Maude: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families how much his Department spent on (a) Entry to Employment, (b) community service places, (c) community service local authority pilots, (d) opportunities to participate in community service at school, (e) Youth Taskforce, (f) Youth Opportunity Fund, (g) Youth Capital Fund, (h) Positive Activities for Young People, (i) Empowering Young People pilots, (j) residential (including Do it 4 Real), (k) Youth Sector Development Fund, (l) Youth Leadership Fund, (m) Youth Workforce Reform, (n) Myplace, (o) Youth Media Fund and (p) other activity programmes for young people in 2008-09; and how much his Department plans to spend on each such programme in (i) 2009-10, (ii) 2010-11 and (iii) 2011-12.

[318118]

Dawn Primarolo: Table 1 as follows shows spend on each of the programmes for 2008-09 and allocations for 2009-10 and 2010-11, except for item (h) Positive Activities for Young People (PAYP). Allocations for this are provided in table 2 as funding for PAYP is included in the area based grant so while local authorities receive a nominal allocation, decisions on planned and actual spend are determined locally.

No funding has been allocated for any of these programmes in 2011-12 as this is outside the current spending review period.

Departmental Surveys

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families if he will place in the Library a copy of the benchmark results of the Civil Service People Survey for his Department and its agencies.

[322570]

Ms Diana R. Johnson: The 2009 People Survey results for DCSF are now available in the House Libraries. These results are also available on the DCSF website at the following link:

<http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/aboutus/staffsurvey/>

The Department does not have any agencies.

Free School Meals: GCSE

Michael Gove: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families how many and what

proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals were entered for GCSEs in each subject in 2009. [318410]

Mr. Coaker: The information is shown in the following table.

Number and percentage of pupils entered for GCSEs in each subject in 2009 by free school meal eligibility

| | <i>Number of FSM pupils entered</i> | <i>Percentage of all FSM pupils at the end of Key Stage 4</i> | <i>Number of non-FSM pupils entered</i> | <i>Percentage of all non-FSM pupils at the end of Key Stage 4</i> |
|--|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Biological Science | 3,525 | 4.7 | 67,757 | 13.4 |
| Chemistry | 2,985 | 4.0 | 64,334 | 12.8 |
| Physics | 2,954 | 4.0 | 64,231 | 12.7 |
| Core Science | 53,925 | 72.5 | 378,560 | 75.1 |
| Additional Science | 30,470 | 41.0 | 275,635 | 54.7 |
| Additional Applied Science | 6,965 | 9.4 | 39,902 | 7.9 |
| Single Award Science | 53,927 | 72.5 | 378,603 | 75.1 |
| English | 67,351 | 90.5 | 487,358 | 96.6 |
| Maths | 68,130 | 91.6 | 489,359 | 97.0 |
| Statistics | 6,112 | 8.2 | 63,908 | 12.7 |
| Design and Technology and Electronics | 1,028 | 1.4 | 10,583 | 2.1 |
| Design and Technology and Food Technology | 7,003 | 9.4 | 58,591 | 11.6 |
| Design and Technology and Graphics | 5,498 | 7.4 | 49,547 | 9.8 |
| Design and Technology and Resistant Materials Technology | 7,889 | 10.6 | 60,360 | 12.0 |
| Design and Technology and Systems Control | 436 | 0.6 | 5,325 | 1.1 |
| Design and Technology and Textiles Technology | 4,551 | 6.1 | 34,133 | 6.8 |
| Office Technology | 3,465 | 4.7 | 28,372 | 5.6 |
| Information Technology | 3,791 | 5.1 | 46,167 | 9.2 |
| Business Studies | 5,696 | 7.7 | 63,969 | 12.7 |
| Home Economics | 3,401 | 4.6 | 19,158 | 3.8 |
| Geography | 11,049 | 14.9 | 137,972 | 27.4 |
| History | 13,466 | 18.1 | 160,715 | 31.9 |
| Music | 2,951 | 4.0 | 39,641 | 7.9 |
| Art and Design | 17,714 | 23.8 | 135,362 | 26.8 |
| Fine Art | 4,019 | 5.4 | 36,876 | 7.3 |
| English Literature | 44,942 | 60.4 | 399,628 | 79.2 |
| Drama | 8,124 | 10.9 | 70,021 | 13.9 |
| Media, Film and Television Studies | 7,314 | 9.8 | 52,715 | 10.5 |
| Physical Education | 10,314 | 13.9 | 117,719 | 23.3 |
| Religious Studies | 16,202 | 21.8 | 137,223 | 27.2 |
| French | 10,273 | 13.8 | 130,311 | 25.8 |
| German | 3,098 | 4.2 | 58,014 | 11.5 |
| Spanish | 3,294 | 4.4 | 42,685 | 8.5 |
| Italian | 171 | 0.2 | 2,615 | 0.5 |
| Arabic | 676 | 0.9 | 751 | 0.1 |
| Bengali | 581 | 0.8 | 598 | 0.1 |
| Chinese | 109 | 0.1 | 1,168 | 0.2 |
| Dutch | 209 | 0.3 | 211 | 0.0 |
| Gujarati | 38 | 0.1 | 718 | 0.1 |
| Japanese | 48 | 0.1 | 797 | 0.2 |
| Modern Greek | 25 | 0.0 | 346 | 0.1 |
| Modern Hebrew | 12 | 0.0 | 230 | 0.0 |
| Panjabi | 111 | 0.1 | 760 | 0.2 |

Number and percentage of pupils entered for GCSEs in each subject in 2009 by free school meal eligibility

| | <i>Number of FSM pupils entered</i> | <i>Percentage of all FSM pupils at the end of Key Stage 4</i> | <i>Number of non-FSM pupils entered</i> | <i>Percentage of all non-FSM pupils at the end of Key Stage 4</i> |
|------------|-------------------------------------|---|---|---|
| Persian | 144 | 0.2 | 253 | 0.1 |
| Polish | 61 | 0.1 | 2,021 | 0.4 |
| Portuguese | 254 | 0.3 | 938 | 0.2 |
| Russian | 62 | 0.1 | 871 | 0.2 |
| Turkish | 523 | 0.7 | 624 | 0.1 |
| Urdu | 1,248 | 1.7 | 2,747 | 0.5 |

Notes:

1. Figures are revised.
2. Figures relate to pupils at the end of Key Stage 4 in maintained schools.

Source:

National Pupil Database

GCE A-level

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families how many pupils not eligible for free school meals achieved three A grades at A-level in (a) 1997 and (b) the most recent year for which figures are available. [311636]

Ms Diana R. Johnson [*holding answer 22 March 2010*]: Pupil level data relating to free school meal eligibility was not collected in 1997. In 2008, 14,431 (10.5 per cent.) pupils not eligible for free school meals achieved three or more A grades at A-level. The percentage is of all pupils not eligible for free schools meals entered for at least one GCE/Applied GCE A level/Double Award in 2008.

The figures relate to 16 to 18-year-olds (age at start of academic year, i.e. 31 August 2007) in maintained schools only who were eligible for free school meals when they were academic age 16. The figures do not include the achievement of students in further education sector colleges previously eligible for free school meals.

Offences Against Children: Doncaster

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families whether the Audit Commission will have access to the full serious case review into the case of Children J produced by Doncaster Safeguarding Children Board during its forthcoming inspection of Doncaster. [314489]

Dawn Primarolo: It is for the Audit Commission to determine the information it needs for the purposes of undertaking a Corporate Governance Inspection and to discuss this with the relevant local authority in each case.

Pre-school Education

Mr. Davey: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families what statutory duties there are on local authorities in England to provide nursery places for three and four year olds; what remedies are available to parents in instances where a local authority fails to fulfil that duty; and if he will make a statement. [317721]

Dawn Primarolo: Section 7 of the Childcare Act 2006, together with the regulations made under it (the

Local Authority [LA] (Duty to Secure Early Years Provision Free of Charge) Regulations 2008), place a duty on English local authorities to secure that early years provision is available free of charge for 12.5 hours a week for 38 weeks of the year for every child in its area for the two years prior to their reaching compulsory school age (children reach compulsory school age at the start of the next school term after they turn five). This must be available from a provider who delivers the Early Years Foundation Stage.

Statutory guidance makes clear that local authorities should put in place appeals procedures for parents who are not satisfied that their child has received their free entitlement and if a parent is not satisfied with the way in which their appeal has been conducted or believe the local authority has acted unreasonably they may make a complaint to the local authority ombudsman.

A legal challenge by way of judicial review for breach of the statutory duty could also be brought. If the court is satisfied that the LA is in breach of its duty under the Childcare Act it can order that the LA take action to remedy this.

In addition, by virtue of section 15 of the Childcare Act, a parent may also complain to the Secretary of State under section 496, 497 or 497A of the Education Act 1996. The Secretary of State has intervention powers under sections 496, 497 and 497A of the Education Act 1996, for instance to direct that the local authority discharge its statutory duty.

Pre-school Education: Hemsworth

Jon Trickett: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families how many childcare places have been created in Hemsworth since 1997. [316612]

Dawn Primarolo: Information on the number of child care places is not available for parliamentary constituencies.

Pre-school Education: Lancashire

Mr. Wallace: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families what funding streams are available for (a) pre-schools and (b) play groups in Lancashire. [321633]

Dawn Primarolo [*holding answer 11 March 2010*]: Pre-school settings and playgroups which are Ofsted registered are eligible to receive funding from their local

authority (LA) to deliver the free entitlement for three and four-year-olds to up to 12.5 hours free early learning and child care a week. This will be increased to 15 hours from September 2010. The settings may also receive funding from their LA to deliver free early years places to their most disadvantaged two-year-olds. These settings are eligible for funding from the Sure Start Early Years and Childcare Capital Grant which is also distributed by local authorities, of which £642 million has been made available nationally between 2008-11 to support settings to increase access, quality and inclusion for all children.

Pre-school settings and playgroups are also eligible for funding from other smaller funding streams which are distributed by LAs in accordance with the Sure Start, Early Years and Childcare Grant and Aiming High for Disabled Children Grant: 2009-10 Memorandum of Grant, 20 February 2009.

Schools: Vetting

Mr. Leech: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families what vetting and barring guidance applies to visits to schools by representatives of religious organisations; and how many such representatives have been refused access to schools in accordance with that guidance in each of the last three years. [317168]

Dawn Primarolo: The guidance on the arrangements that schools need to make in relation to visitors from different organisations is contained in 'Safeguarding Children and Safer Recruitment in Education'. The Department does not collect any information on how many visitors have been refused access to schools. The decision on whether or not to refuse access to a school is made at a local level by school staff and governing bodies, who are best placed to make these judgments.

Support for All: The Families and Relationships

Mrs. Maria Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families how much his Department allocated for the publication and distribution of the Think Fathers best practice guide referred to in the Green Paper, Support for All: the Families and Relationships in the last 12 months. [318282]

Dawn Primarolo: The funding for the new support for families as outlined in Support for All: a Families and Relationships Green Paper has been allocated from current budgets. In the last 12 months, around £25,000 has been allocated for the publication and distribution of the Think Fathers best practice guide.

Mrs. Maria Miller: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families how much his Department has allocated for the publication and distribution of free parenting support booklets as referred to in the Green Paper, Support for All: the Families and Relationships. [318286]

Dawn Primarolo: The funding for the new support for families as outlined in Support for All: a Families and Relationships Green Paper has been allocated from current budgets.

The parenting booklet for parents of teenagers will be taken forward next financial year and consequently no money has been spent on it to date. Around £150,000 has been allocated for their publication and distribution for 2010-11.

Teachers: Complaints

Michael Gove: To ask the Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families whether his Department has updated its study of 2003-04 entitled Allegations Audit. [315519]

Dawn Primarolo: Similar data to that collected in the 2003-04 Allegations Audit was collected in 2004-05, and less detailed data on allegations was collected in 2007. The data collected in 2004-05 was used to inform the development of guidance on handling allegations of abuse made against those who work with children and young people, but was not published as a data set. The data collected in 2007 was used to inform the review of implementation of guidance on handling allegations. The analysis of this data was included within the report of the review published in May 2009 and is available to download from the Every Child Matters website.

OLYMPICS

Departmental Surveys

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Minister for the Olympics if she will place in the Library a copy of the benchmark results of the Civil Service People Survey for the Government Olympic Executive. [322580]

Tessa Jowell: The Government Olympic Executive (GOE) reports to me as Minister for the Olympics through the Permanent Secretary to the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). Results for GOE will be included in the DCMS results for the October 2009 staff survey. This will be published on the DCMS website in April 2010 and following publication a copy will be placed in the Library.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

All England Lawn Tennis and Croquet Club: Travel

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport whether he has had recent discussions with representatives of the All England Lawn Tennis Club on the provision of transport for tennis players, officials and VIPs for the 2010 All England Tennis Championships by a company that is not licensed under the 1998 Private Hire Vehicles (London) Act 1998; and if he will make a statement. [323365]

Mr. Sutcliffe: There have been no such discussions with Ministers or officials in the Department for Culture(Media and Sport).

This is a matter for the All England Lawn Tennis Club.

Coastal Areas: Regeneration

Mr. Ellwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what recent progress has been made on the final round of funding for the Sea Change project; and if he will make a statement. [322498]

Margaret Hodge [*holding answer 16 March 2010*]: The final round of Sea Change funding was announced on 16 November, with £8.8 million being allocated. This means a total of £38 million has been allocated to 32 resorts over the three waves of the programme.

Cricket: Public Participation

Mr. Crabb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) what estimate his Department has made of the number of people who have played cricket over the last five years; [322685]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of people who regularly play cricket in England. [322693]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Active People Survey commissioned by Sport England shows that 207,500 adults are taking part in at least one moderate intensity, 30 minute session of cricket each week. In addition, 428,400 people played cricket at least once a month in 2009-10.

The Active People Survey was first run in 2005-6. The number of people who have played cricket over the last five years is set out in the table.

| | <i>Number</i> |
|---------|---------------|
| 2005-6 | 380,300 |
| 2007-8 | 419,500 |
| 2008-9 | 428,000 |
| 2009-10 | 428,400 |

The latest information on cricket participation can be found on the Sport England website at the following link:

http://www.sportengland.org/research/active_people_survey/active_people_survey_4/aps4_quarter_1/idoc.ashx?docid=de15dfc8-b419-4f0f-bfd5-8adc6c53dabd&version=1>

Culture: Databases

Mr. Hunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport (1) how many applications to attend his Department's Rewired Culture event on 27 March 2010 have been received; [323265]

(2) how many Rewired State events were held in 2009; how much each cost; and how many people attended each such event. [323266]

Margaret Hodge: 70 people had signed up so far for the Rewired Culture event.

Rewired State is a not for profit company. Rewired Culture is the first Rewired event that has been organised by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, although the Department was a sponsor of Young Rewired State in 2009 along with Central Office of Information, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, and the Chief Information Officer Council.

Departmental Food

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport if he will take steps to ensure that the meat and dairy products procured by his Department and its non-departmental bodies are free range or produced to standards equivalent to those of the RSPCA Freedom Food scheme. [323067]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Department has no canteen facilities which use meat or fresh dairy products. We advise our non-departmental public bodies on best practice in food procurement, drawing on relevant guidance provided by DEFRA and the Office of Government Commerce.

Departmental Theft

Mr. Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport what steps his Department is taking to deter theft from within the Department. [322643]

Mr. Sutcliffe: The Department's buildings are covered by CCTV and have 24 hour security guarding. Security is kept under review and the Department follows best practice on physical security set out in the Cabinet Office Security Policy Framework.

The Department will be implementing 'hot-desking' at the end of March in its main building, which will include a clear desk policy. This will provide an additional security measure to prevent thefts.

Sports: Finance

Mr. Crabb: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport how much funding has been provided for (a) cricket, (b) football and (c) rugby by his Department in 2009-10. [322683]

Mr. Sutcliffe: Sport England invests in the national governing bodies of cricket, football and rugby through the Whole Sport Plans (WSP), which run for a four-year period (2009 to 2013).

The table shows the funding provided for 2009.

| | <i>2009 investment (£)</i> |
|--------------|----------------------------|
| Cricket | 10,545,199 |
| Football | 7,851,278 |
| Rugby league | 6,101,145 |
| Rugby union | 9,351,857 |

Sport England also invests £15 million Exchequer funding each year to the Football Foundation to support projects including kit, safe goalposts, all weather pitches and floodlights.

ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

Boilers: Carbon Emissions

Graham Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what the efficiency ratings are in respect of the Standard Assessment Procedure for the calculation of carbon emissions of domestic boilers using B30K oil. [322830]

Joan Ruddock: The Oil Firing Technical Association (OFTEC) commissioned efficiency trials which compared C2 kerosene, BS 2869 and B30K in the same boiler and the results are indicated in the following table. While this is a small sample, the results suggest there may be a marginal difference in efficiency from using B30K compared with kerosene alone.

Nonetheless, manufacturers of those boilers that have been modified to burn B30K have yet to submit information on boiler efficiency for inclusion in the Boiler Efficiency Database. This database is the repository of boiler efficiency information that underpins the Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) and can be accessed at:

www.sedbuk.com

| | Fuel | |
|-----------------------------------|----------|-------|
| | Kerosene | B30K |
| Output (kW) | 26.2 | 26.4 |
| Full load efficiency (Percentage) | 97.9 | 97.4 |
| Part load efficiency (Percentage) | 100.2 | 101.4 |

Boilers: Government Assistance

Mr. Chope: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent assessment he has made of the operation of the boiler scrappage scheme; and if he will make a statement. [322937]

Joan Ruddock [*holding answer 18 March 2010*]: The boiler scrappage scheme has proved popular and appears to have stimulated many people to consider replacing their boiler. We estimate that the scheme is helping householders to save around £200 a year off fuel bills and reduce emissions and sustain work for 130,000 installers and employees of the 25 UK-based boiler manufacturers.

Carbon Emissions: Housing

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether his Department has (a) commissioned and (b) undertaken any research of the level of consumer awareness of the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target; and if he will make a statement. [323553]

Joan Ruddock: The Government are taking a number of steps to ensure consumers are assisted in understanding the support available to them. The Government support a one-stop shop through the Energy Saving Trust which provides free advice to consumers on energy saving as well as providing easy access to the full range of Carbon Emission Reduction Target offers. This is supported by the Government's overarching Act on CO₂ marketing campaign which demonstrates the benefits of the energy saving measures offered under the Carbon Emission Reduction Target as part of coverage in national television, press, radio and online. We have recently conducted qualitative research among consumers to help deepen our understanding of attitudes, behaviours, motivations and barriers for home insulation. Longer term, we have set out our intention as part of the 'Warm Homes, Greener Homes' strategy to continue to improve and simplify consumer access to, and navigation of, energy saving information. This will combine with effective branding and marketing to build awareness and trust in the available products and services.

Malcolm Bruce: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what consideration he has given to the introduction of a sunset clause in the eligible measures under the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target; and if he will make a statement. [323554]

Joan Ruddock: The supplier obligation (now termed the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target) has been set over three-year cycles precisely to allow Government to reflect on its successes and to evolve the scheme so that it only pulls through the most energy efficient products with the most potential to provide for household sector carbon emissions reductions. The measures eligible for each phase are subject to full public consultation. The consultation on the April 2011 to December 2012 extension of the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target, which concluded on 14 March 2010, specifically asked whether Government should introduce up front sunset clauses for products when they reach a certain level of market penetration. Consultation responses are now being considered.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much his Department has spent on office refurbishments since its inception. [320471]

Joan Ruddock: Since its inception on 3 October 2008 the Department has spent a total of £1,649,504 on refurbishments.

Departmental Sick Leave

Gregory Barker: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many working days were lost in his Department as a result of (a) stress and (b) other illnesses in 2008-09. [311572]

Joan Ruddock: The average working days lost due to illness for 2008-09 was 2.6 days. We are unable to provide a breakdown of this by category of illness for this period of time.

Departmental Surveys

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change if he will place in the Library a copy of the benchmark results of the Civil Service People Survey for his Department. [322571]

Joan Ruddock: The DECC Employee Engagement Survey results are now available in the Library.

The results are also available on the DECC website
<http://www.decc.gov.uk/en/default.aspx?nl=26&n2=1138&n3=1139&preview=true>

Energy: Conservation

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much funding has been allocated to (a) each pay as you save pilot scheme and (b) the pay as you save scheme for (i) 2009-10 and (ii) 2010-11. [322707]

Joan Ruddock: The Government have made £4 million available for the Home Energy Pay As You Save pilots. £2 million in 2009-10 and £2 million in 2010-11. The five pilot projects were announced in December 2009.

Spend profiles are based on individual pilot start-up plans. Budgets for 2010-11 are indicative only and are subject to review and first year evaluation. All figures in the Following table excludes operating costs.

| Pilot Project | £000 | |
|-------------------------|---------|----------------------|
| | 2009-10 | 2010-11 ¹ |
| British Gas | 500 | 500 |
| Birmingham City Council | 70 | 800 |
| B & Q | 400 | 600 |
| Gentoo | 200 | 200 |
| Stroud District Council | 200 | 300 |

¹ Indicative

Fuel Poverty: Leeds

Greg Mulholland: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent estimate he has made of the number of households in fuel poverty in Leeds North West constituency. [322834]

Mr. Kidney: The most recently available sub-regional split of fuel poverty relates to 2006, and shows that there were 4,200 households in the Leeds North West constituency that were classified as living in fuel poverty.

Guanidine

Graham Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment he has made of the potential contribution of guanidine to his Department's renewable energy strategy. [323017]

Joan Ruddock: None. Guanidine is a potential chemical carrier for hydrogen—which can be used in modified internal combustion engines (ICEs), turbines or fuel cells. Guanidine is a solid at room temperature. Its advocates claim that this offers some advantages over the current methods for storing hydrogen as a compressed gas or cryogenic liquid.

Nuclear Power Stations: Construction

Mr. Dai Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change pursuant to the answer of 16 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 799W, on nuclear power stations: construction, whether representatives of non-governmental organisations participating in the planned forum will be reimbursed for (a) travel, (b) subsistence and (c) accommodation expenses; whether assistance will be provided to those representatives to cover loss of earnings consequent on attendance at the planned forum; and what budget has been allocated to support the work of the forum. [323624]

Mr. Kidney: Representatives of non-governmental organisations participating in the planned forum will be offered the following:

(a) Reasonable travel costs to be reimbursed;

(b) Subsistence payments will not be offered although suitable refreshments will be provided depending on the time of day.

(c) Accommodation expenses will not be paid. Loss of earnings will not be covered. No specific budget has been allocated. Any costs associated with the planned forum will be covered within the running costs of the Office for Nuclear Development.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Departmental Food

Mr. Sanders: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will take steps to ensure that the meat and dairy products procured by his Department and its non-departmental bodies are free range or produced to standards equivalent to those of the RSPCA Freedom Food scheme. [323068]

Mr. Michael Foster: All food products procured on behalf of the Department for International Development (DFID) in the UK are purchased by our catering contractors, Charlton House Catering Services. Charlton House Catering Services uses only nominated suppliers that are able to demonstrate conformity with current animal welfare legislation. They procure free range produce where possible within cost constraint and are working with Assured Food Standards to identify and promote products that qualify under the Red Tractor assurance scheme. DFID will ensure that in any future re-entering of the catering contract, due regard will be given to animal welfare standards as part of the awarding criteria.

Departmental Internet

Mr. Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to the answer of 1 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 877W, on departmental internet, what the cost was of the refresh of its website. [323567]

Mr. Michael Foster: I refer the hon. Gentleman to the answer of 14 December 2009, *Official Report*, column 806W, on Departmental Internet.

Departmental Written Questions

David Davis: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether the dates of publication of any regular statistics or reports by his Department have been affected by planning for the forthcoming general election. [323458]

Mr. Michael Foster: On the announcement of a general election, the Cabinet Secretary issues guidance to Departments on their activities during the pre-election period. This will be published on the Cabinet Office website.

Regular statistical releases and reports will continue to be issued and published during the election period on dates which have been pre-announced.

Developing Countries: Disabled

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he plans to take to ensure that each of his Department's country programmes record and report on their support for access to education for children with disabilities. [322718]

Mr. Michael Foster: Lack of reliable data on enrolment, attendance, achievement and completion of education by children with disabilities is an issue in most countries where the Department for International Development (DFID) provides support to education. DFID's new Education Strategy sets out our commitment to publish a new toolkit which aims to support country programmes and partners in delivering inclusive education for children with a disability. This will include working with national partners on data collection and monitoring. At an international level, progress will require working with the Global Monitoring Report (GMR) and UNESCO's Institute for Statistics (UIS).

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will support proposals for the establishment of rights for disabled people to an inclusive education at the forthcoming (a) (i) G8 and (ii) G20 summit in Canada and (b) the Millennium Development Goals Review in September 2010. [322719]

Mr. Michael Foster: Every child should have access to a good quality basic education. The Department for International Development (DFID) will continue to advocate for the education of children with disabilities in all forums, including the G8, G20 and the United Nations Millennium Development Goals Review Summit. DFID recognises the importance of supporting primary aged children with disabilities to receive an education, as well as other children who have been denied access, for achieving the Millennium Development Goal.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if his Department will use the Fast Track Initiative's equity and inclusion framework when part of a donor group charged with assessing education sector plans submitted to the Fast Track Initiative. [322720]

Mr. Michael Foster: The Department for International Development (DFID) will support the Education for All-Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) to ensure that countries are supported to tackle exclusion of children from education including those with a disability. DFID has been a member of the small task team of donors and civil society which has led on the production and piloting of the FTI's equity and inclusion framework. DFID's Rwanda office is currently using the framework in partnership with the national Government and we would expect to use the framework in other DFID partner countries where education sector plans are being assessed under the FTI.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will support proposals for the insertion of an indicator on disability into the Indicative Framework that guides education sector planning under the Fast Track Initiative. [322721]

Mr. Michael Foster: The Department of International Development (DFID) has been one of the lead partners within the Education for All-Fast Track Initiative (EFA-FTI) in supporting the development of an Equity and Inclusion Tool. This will ensure that countries which are supported address the barriers to education faced by marginalised children including those with a disability.

The Indicative Framework is currently under review. In the context of this review, DFID will continue stress the importance of including equity and inclusion issues.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will request (a) the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and (b) other international organisations to provide greater support for developing countries to monitor educational access for children with disabilities. [322722]

Mr. Michael Foster: Supporting developing countries to monitor children's access to education is important for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. The Department for International Development (DFID) is already providing financial support to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (£200,000 in 2009-10) and the UNESCO Global Monitoring Report (£300,000 in 2009-10) to collect and disseminate statistical information of children's enrolment. As part of our continuing dialogue with these and other organisations, we have advocated the need for data collection to include statistics for children with disabilities. DFID supported calls for equity-based reporting of statistics from participants to the DFID Millennium Development Goals Conference on 11 March 2010.

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how the toolkit on inclusive education announced in his Department's education strategy will be disseminated to (a) country programmes and (b) other development partners; and what steps he plans to take to encourage take-up of the toolkit in his Department's country programmes. [322716]

Mr. Michael Foster: The toolkit to support country programmes and partners in delivering inclusive education for children with disabilities will be finalised by the end of March and disseminated to countries over the following three months. Country offices will be encouraged to make use of the toolkit and share extensively with other development partners, through forums such as local education groups (LEG).

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development when he expects the toolkit on inclusive education announced in his Department's education strategy to be delivered. [322717]

Mr. Michael Foster: The new toolkit to support country programmes and partners in delivering inclusive education for children with disabilities will be completed by the end of March and disseminated to countries in the following three months.

Developing Countries: Tuberculosis

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department is taking to ensure the provision of high quality healthcare services to tackle tuberculosis in the next five years. [323373]

Mr. Michael Foster: The Department for International Development (DFID) combats tuberculosis through our contributions to multilateral organisations such as

the World Health Organisation; partnerships like STOP TB and the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, TB and Malaria (GFATM); bilateral programmes; and DFID's support for research.

DFID has pledged £1 billion from 2008 to 2015 to GFATM, which estimates that it has supported the detection and treatment of 5.4 million people with TB. In addition, we have a 20-year commitment of up to €60 million per year by 2010 to UNITAID, which by 2011 is aiming to triple access to rapid tests for multi-drug resistant (MDR) TB and reduce the price MDR-TB medicines by 25 per cent. The UK is also investing £6 billion up to 2015 to improve health systems in developing countries, essential to improving the quality, availability and accessibility of health services, particularly by the most poor and vulnerable, including those with TB.

Fiji: Storms

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what humanitarian assistance his Department is providing to Fiji following Cyclone Tomas. [323497]

Mr. Michael Foster: The Department for International Development (DFID) has provided £100,000 to the Fiji Red Cross to help with the immediate disaster relief efforts.

Rwanda: Politics and Government

Mr. Bruce George: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development pursuant to the answer of 5 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 1416W, on Rwanda: politics and government, what representations his Department has made to ensure that full political rights, within the framework of Rwandan law, are upheld. [322684]

Mr. Thomas: Officials of the Department for International Development (DFID) are in regular contact with representatives of the Government of Rwanda regarding the registration of opposition political parties. DFID officials also work in close coordination with their Foreign and Commonwealth office (FCO) colleagues on this issue. The British high commissioner in Kigali has recently discussed the registration of political parties with the Rwandan Ministers of Foreign Affairs and Local Government. He has been assured that those parties which meet the criteria laid down in Rwandan law will be able to register.

Sri Lanka: Overseas Aid

Mr. McGrady: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department is taking to seek to improve the humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka. [322864]

Mr. Michael Foster: Since September 2008, the Department for International Development (DFID) has allocated £12.5 million to the humanitarian response in Sri Lanka. Recently, we have funded impartial agencies such as the International Organisation for Migration to support the safe transportation of internally displaced

persons (IDPs) returning from the camps to their areas of origin and United Nations operations to provide transitional shelter.

DFID has a full-time humanitarian adviser based at the British high commission in Colombo. Our adviser remains in regular contact with the Government of Sri Lanka, UN Country Team, International Committee of the Red Cross, NGOs and humanitarian donors in order to bring about an improvement in both the humanitarian situation and international response. For more information on DFID's humanitarian response please see:

www.dfid.gov.uk/srilankacrisis

Teachers: Training

Mr. Clifton-Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether the 130,000 teachers to be trained each year under his Department's education strategy will be trained in using inclusive education methodologies. [322715]

Mr. Michael Foster: The Department for International Development's (DFID's) education strategy includes a commitment to produce a toolkit and guidance to support country programmes and partners in delivering inclusive education for children with disabilities. Ensuring teachers are trained effectively is likely to be included as one strategy to help improve the access of children with disabilities to a good quality basic education.

In Vietnam DFID has provided £243 million to the Primary Education for Disadvantaged Children (PEDC) programme, which includes a strong focus on primary education for children with disabilities. This programme includes a range of components including teacher training and professional development, along side the development of learning materials and preparation of a national strategy for Inclusive Education.

FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

Angola: Foreign Relations

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aims and objectives he has set for UK foreign policy in respect of Angola. [323370]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Bilateral relations with Angola are good. We are keen to develop a strategic partnership with this important country and work more closely on regional and international issues of mutual interest. We believe that the UK has much to contribute to Angola's economic, social and political development. Our foreign policy priorities include democracy, good governance, human rights and development. The UK has a very strong trade relationship with Angola. Combined visible trade alone was over £600 million last year. British companies have long been major investors in the oil sector, but are increasingly looking for investment partnerships in new areas such as financial services, pharmaceuticals and consumer goods. This is in line with the Angolan Government's wish to diversify the economy.

Aung San Suu Kyi

Jo Swinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Burmese government on the publication of an election law preventing Aung San Suu Kyi from participating in the forthcoming elections in Burma. [323292]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: There have been no opportunities for discussions with the Burmese government since the election laws were announced. My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister made a statement describing the targeting of Aung San Suu Kyi and her party "vindictive and callous". He also wrote to UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon referring to the forthcoming meeting of the Group of Friends to ensure a united and effective international response to the unfair terms imposed by the regime's election laws. At the Human Rights Council on 15 March, at which Burmese Government representatives were present, the Government condemned the election laws. Our Ambassador in Rangoon continues to remind the military regime at every opportunity that without the participation of ethnic groups and the democratic opposition the forthcoming elections will not be credible.

Burma: Asylum

Jo Swinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of recent arrests and deportation to Burma of Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh. [323328]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We are concerned by the recent reports by Medecins Sans Frontieres and Physicians for Human Rights on the situation facing displaced Rohingyas in Bangladesh. We have raised the plight of the Rohingyas and their status with the Government of Bangladesh, both bilaterally and in concert with EU partners. Officials from our High Commission in Dhaka, including the High Commissioner, have visited the camps for displaced Rohingyas, which are run by UN agencies. We are also supporting the European Commission and UN programmes for Rohingyas through the UK's core funding to the EU and the UN.

Burma: Dams

Jo Swinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the forcible relocation of civilians by the Burma regime for the Myitsone dam construction in Kachin State, Burma. [323293]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We are concerned about the impact of the construction of the Myitsone Dam on the environment and the human rights of local people. Officials from our embassy in Rangoon have visited the dam site on several occasions, most recently in January 2010. We understand that local people have been told to leave the area, although have so far refused to do so. Our embassy in Rangoon is supporting work to assess the social and environmental impact of this and other dam projects.

Burma: Ethnic Groups

Jo Swinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of the mortar-bombing of a school in Karen, Burma; and if he will make a statement. [323291]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: We are aware of reports detailing State Peace and Development Council attacks on unarmed civilians that took place in February 2010, in which two people were injured and unfortunately one schoolboy was killed. We remain deeply concerned about the situation in Karen State where attacks carried out by the Burmese army and their Karen client organisations on civilians have been particularly intense over the past two years. We have repeatedly called for a halt to such offensives and called on the military regime and the Karen National Union to intensify their efforts to bring about a permanent end to the conflict.

China: Human Rights

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps he is taking to promote human rights in China. [323350]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Promotion of human rights is a fundamental part of our relationship with China. Despite economic and social progress, which has raised 500 million out of poverty in just 30 years, progress in civil and political rights has been much slower with a marked deterioration in some areas. It is in our interests to help China do better in these areas through greater respect for human rights, transparency and accountability. Our approach includes high-level messaging to encourage political progress and project work to deliver concrete assistance on the ground.

My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary raised a range of human rights issues including individual cases during his recent visit to China on 15-17 March. He made clear that human rights are our basic values—and a vital part of any stable and sustainable system.

The UK/China Human rights Dialogue provides an open channel of communication with the Chinese Government about human rights concerns and allows issues to be discussed in greater depth. The latest round took place on 18-19 March.

Engaging with China on human rights requires sustained commitment. Therefore we will continue to raise human rights at every available opportunity as made clear in our public strategy for engagement with China, published in January 2009.

Conflict Resolution: Females

Jo Swinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department plans to allocate additional funding for the purpose of tackling violence against women overseas consequent on the creation of the new ministerial role to which Baroness Kinnock has been appointed; whether civil service posts will be dedicated to providing support for that ministerial post; whether the Government plans to bring forward an integrated strategy for tackling violence against women overseas; and whether performance indicators will be used to assess the effectiveness of the Government's work to tackle violence against women overseas. [323168]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: On International Women's day, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister announced that my noble Friend Baroness Kinnock will be given responsibility for leading the Government's work to tackle violence against women overseas. This is the first time such a dedicated responsibility has existed within the Government and reflects the growing awareness of the impact of violence against women on societies around the world and its effect on our international policies towards security, the economy and development.

The appointment of Baroness Kinnock will ensure that the existing resources available for work on violence against women in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, the Department for International Development and the Ministry of Defence, including staff, are effectively co-ordinated, ensuring a coherent UK approach. Baroness Kinnock will provide a high level voice on this issue, ensuring UK assistance is targeted and that opportunities are seized to share best practice. The Government have undertaken a public consultation with a view to revising the UK's National Action Plan on Women Peace and Security. We will continue to engage with civil society as this is developed. We are considering the inclusion of indicators to measure progress and are also supporting the development of international indicators at the UN level.

Departmental Marketing

Mr. Syms: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs 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. [320458]

Chris Bryant: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not conducted any Real Help Now or Building Britain's Future themed campaigns.

Departmental Sick Leave

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many sick days members of his Department have taken in each month of each year since 1997. [315971]

Chris Bryant: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) is committed to reducing sickness absence. The average number of days sick leave by UK staff has decreased from 8.9 days in 1997 to 3.5 days in 2009. Per capita sickness absence in the FCO has been consistently below the public sector average.

We do not keep records centrally of sick leave taken by locally-engaged staff members. This information could be obtained only at a disproportionate cost.

Data collection since 1997 has been complicated by the introduction of new Pay and management information systems. It is therefore possible that the figures given below do not reflect consistent recording methods.

Annual figures are available from 2000 and monthly figures from April 2006:

| | <i>Total number of days</i> | <i>Average number of days per officer</i> |
|------------------------|-----------------------------|---|
| 1997 | n/a | 8.9 |
| 1998 | n/a | 8.0 |
| 1999 | n/a | n/a |
| 2000 | ¹ 20,900 | 6.3 |
| 2001 | 25,012 | 6.6 |
| 2002 | 27,720 | 4.7 |
| 2003 | 33,219 | 5.6 |
| 2004 | 35,969 | 6.2 |
| 2005 | 20,904 | 3.4 |
| 2006 | 19,102 | 3.1 |
| 2007 | 20,650 | 3.6 |
| 2008 | 20,267 | 3.6 |
| 2009 | 21,271 | — |
| n/a = Not available | | |
| ¹ Estimated | | |
| | <i>Number</i> | |
| <i>2006</i> | | |
| April | 2,232 | |
| May | 2,168 | |
| June | 1,868 | |
| July | 1,819 | |
| August | 1,726 | |
| September | 1,690 | |
| October | 1,648 | |
| November | 1,895 | |
| December | 1,549 | |
| <i>2007</i> | | |
| January | 1,682 | |
| February | 1,674 | |
| March | 1,770 | |
| April | 1,641 | |
| May | 1,777 | |
| June | 1,530 | |
| July | 1,723 | |
| August | 1,671 | |
| September | 1,572 | |
| October | 1,832 | |
| November | 2,028 | |
| December | 1,750 | |
| <i>2008</i> | | |
| January | 2,186 | |
| February | 1,895 | |
| March | 1,717 | |
| April | 1,845 | |
| May | 1,372 | |
| June | 1,258 | |
| July | 1,541 | |
| August | 1,250 | |
| September | 1,797 | |
| October | 1,847 | |
| November | 1,621 | |
| December | 1,938 | |
| <i>2009</i> | | |
| January | 1,986 | |
| February | 2,036 | |
| March | 1,931 | |

| | <i>Number</i> |
|-------------|---------------|
| April | 1,761 |
| May | 1,793 |
| June | 1,669 |
| July | 2,111 |
| August | 1,563 |
| September | 1,469 |
| October | 1,827 |
| November | 1,773 |
| December | 1,352 |
| <i>2010</i> | |
| January | 1,385 |

David Simpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many staff in his Department have had five or more periods of sickness absence of less than five days in two or more of the last three years. [316464]

Chris Bryant: The number of staff who had five or more periods of sickness absence of less than five days in two or more of the last three years was 86 out of around 5,500 UK based civil servants (this figure includes staff in FCO services). Central records of sickness leave are kept only for UK-based civil servants within the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. No central records of sickness leave are kept for locally engaged staff working overseas. Contacting all overseas posts to gather this information would incur disproportionate cost.

Egypt

Norman Baker: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the reason was for the visit of HM Ambassador in Egypt to the Egyptian Foreign Minister in Cairo in March 2003. [323270]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: On 23 March 2003, our ambassador in Cairo met the Egyptian Foreign Minister to hand over a letter from then Prime Minister, Tony Blair to President Mubarak. He also discussed UK military action in Iraq.

Ethiopia: Foreign Relations

Mr. Soames: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what aims and objectives he has set for UK foreign policy in respect of Ethiopia. [323369]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Ethiopia is one of the world's poorest countries, and a high priority for development. The UK's development programme aims to reduce poverty in Ethiopia, and to support progress towards the Millennium Development Goals. Encouraging progress has been made in recent years. In financial year 2009-10, the Department for International Development has provided over £200 million. Working in partnership with the Ethiopian Government, this has been used to support humanitarian relief, help expand public services, support improvements in governance, and stimulate growth.

The development of an open, democratic political system is an important objective for UK work in Ethiopia. The British Government are working with all parties to address concerns around political space, with the aim that Ethiopian elections in May are as good as possible. The UK is concerned by aspects of the human rights situation in Ethiopia and we are working with a range of partners to address these.

The British and Ethiopian Governments collaborate on regional priorities including Sudan, all parts of Somalia, and on migration and counter-terrorism. Ethiopia is a key partner on international climate change work, and has provided an important African leadership role.

Homicide

Mr. Burrowes: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what services his Department provides for the families of British victims of homicides committed abroad. [323280]

Chris Bryant: We will not always know whether a specific death is due to homicide, but when a British national dies abroad, including in suspicious circumstances, when they are not already aware we will work with the UK police to inform their next of kin as soon as possible. Consular staff in London are then available to update the family on any new developments.

If the death is in suspicious circumstances we can suggest ways to raise concerns with the local authorities, offer basic information about the local police system and legal system and provide lists of local lawyers, interpreters and support groups. We will consider making appropriate representations to the local authorities if there are concerns that an investigation is not being carried out in line with local procedures or if there are justified complaints about discrimination against the person who has died or their family.

General information on how we can help families of British nationals who die abroad in suspicious circumstances is set out in our public guide "Support for British Nationals Abroad: A guide". We also publish "Guide for bereaved families" which offers more detailed information. All Foreign and Commonwealth Office publications are available on our website at:

<http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travelling-and-living-overseas/publications>

Iran: Nuclear Power

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he is having with his international counterparts on Iran's nuclear ambitions and capability. [323501]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Addressing Iran's nuclear ambitions and capability is one of the UK's top foreign policy concerns, and others in the international community share this assessment. Iran must restore the international community's confidence in its nuclear programme. I discuss the issue with international counterparts regularly. My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed the importance of the dual track approach of engagement and pressure with Foreign Minister Yang, State Councillor Dai and Premier Wen in Beijing on 16 March.

Mexico

Mr. Drew: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent reports he has received on the level of violence in Mexico; and how many British citizens are (a) in jail and (b) awaiting trial in Mexico. [323294]

Chris Bryant: The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) receives regular reporting from the British embassy on various topics including the security situation in Mexico. This reporting is based on information shared with US, EU and other partners, and from the Mexican authorities.

Even with the regrettably high levels of violence in some parts of Mexico, tackling the drugs cartels and organised crime there is vital. Most recently, Members of the House may have seen reporting in the press of a tragic incident killing three individuals related to the US Consulate in Ciudad Juarez. I am sure you will join me in offering condolences to all those affected, in addition to the messages already given by our ambassador in Mexico and by our embassy in Washington.

The FCO Travel Advice is kept under constant review in light of new information, and on 18 March this was upgraded to advise against all but essential travel to Ciudad Juarez.

There are currently no British citizens in jail or awaiting trial in Mexico.

Nigeria: Politics and Government

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the Government of Nigeria on developments in that country since the beginning of January 2010. [323498]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: My right hon. Friend the Foreign Secretary discussed developments in Nigeria with the Nigerian Foreign Minister Chief Ojo Maduekwe on 11 February. My noble Friend Baroness Kinnock, Minister for Africa, met Chief Maduekwe during the African Union Summit in Addis at the end of January and in London in February. Our High Commissioner and senior visitors from the Foreign and Commonwealth Office also regularly discuss political developments with the Government of Nigeria.

Pakistan: Kidnapping

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with the government of Pakistan following the kidnap and release of a five year old British boy. [323500]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: I have had no such discussions. The operation to bring about Sahil's safe release has been an excellent example of close co-operation between UK and Pakistan law enforcement agencies. Our high commission in Islamabad have also kept in close touch with the Pakistan authorities.

Rwanda: Politics and Government

Mr. Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will discuss with the Rwandan Government freedom of political expression for members of the Green Party and other political groups in that country. [323499]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: Our High Commission in Kigali remains in regular contact with the full spectrum of political opinion in Rwanda, meeting regularly with political parties from both Government and Opposition, including the Green Party. We have discussed the registration of new political parties and issues surrounding political space with the relevant Ministers in the Rwandan Government, and at ministerial level between Baroness Kinnock and Rwandan Foreign Minister Louise Mushikiwabo. We also continue to engage with the Rwandan National Election Commission over the practicalities of the forthcoming August 2010 presidential elections.

Western Sahara: Human Rights

Ms Katy Clark: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether the UN Security Council has been briefed on the human rights situation in occupied Western Sahara by the UN Secretary General's special envoy on Western Sahara. [322786]

Mr. Ivan Lewis: The UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy to Western Sahara regularly briefs the Security Council on developments in the conflict of Western Sahara, including the human rights situation. The current Personal Envoy, Christopher Ross, last briefed the Security Council on 18 February. Mr. Ross holds regular discussions with members of the Security Council on a range of issues related to the conflict.

The Secretary-General will submit his report on the latest developments in Western Sahara to the Security Council in advance of the renewal of the UN Mission for the referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) mandate at the end of April.

HEALTH

Abortion

Anne Milton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 8 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 51W, on abortion, on what date he expects to place in the Library a copy of the information requested. [323507]

Gillian Merron: The information requested was placed in the Library on 18 March 2010.

Children: Abuse

John Mann: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what resources his Department provides for therapeutic services for children who have experienced abuse. [322872]

Phil Hope: We are committed to ensuring that children can access appropriate support when it is needed. Keeping Children and Young People in Mind: the Government's full response to the independent review of CAMHS (child and adolescent mental health services) sets out a clear model for effective local services, together with statutory guidance for primary care trusts and local authorities. A copy has already been placed in the Library. We will also continue to support Children's Trusts to deliver quality emotional and mental health services. An independent National Advisory Council is already holding Government to account on progress.

Community Care

Anne Milton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with Sir David Nicholson on the merits of independent provider arms for community care. [314713]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State regularly meets officials to discuss a number of issues.

Community Health Services

Mr. David Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health for what reason the number of options available to NHS trusts under the Transforming Community Services programme has been reduced; and if he will make a statement. [322744]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The range of options available to primary care trusts for the future provision of their community services has not been reduced. In February 2010 the Department published Transforming Community Services: The assurance and approvals process for PCT-provided community service which set out a range of options for primary care trusts (PCTs) to consider. The guidance explained that there is no prescribed form(s) and that proposals will be judged on their merits through a nationally defined assurance process.

The guidance makes clear, however, that in relation to Community Foundation Trusts the Department expects relatively few proposals to be sufficiently developed to meet the assurance tests and be deliverable within the required timeframe. Similarly, the Department expects relatively few proposals for continued direct provision to meet the assurance requirements sufficiently, by demonstrating that they are partnered with strong commissioning and will not detract from the PCTs core role as a commissioner.

Transforming Community Services: The assurance and approvals process for PCT-provided community service has already been placed in the Library and is available at:

www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_112147

Dental Services: Chesterfield

Paul Holmes: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many dentists were practising in Chesterfield constituency on the latest date for which figures are available; and how many of them were accepting new NHS (a) adult and (b) child patients on that date. [323290]

Ann Keen: The information is not available in the format requested, however the number of dentists with national health service activity in Derbyshire County Primary Care Trust (PCT), which covers the Chesterfield constituency, for year ending 31 March 2009, was 364.

The number of adult patients seen by an NHS dentist in Derbyshire County PCT for the period 1 April-30 June 2009, was 268,162. The number of children seen for the same period was 98,386.

Note:

Patients seen are allocated to PCT via the dentist which they attend for treatment and not by the home postcode of the patient. Most patients will live within the PCT/strategic health authority in which they receive primary care dental services but some will attend a dentist further a field (near their place of employment, for example).

Source:

The Information Centre for health and social care.

Direct Payments

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health in circumstances in which an individual lacks the capacity to choose to receive a direct payment for social care and that payment is made to a suitable person, who his Department deems to be the owner of the sum paid. [323355]

Phil Hope: The sum paid in the form of a direct payment is paid to the suitable person who will receive payment on behalf of the person who lacks capacity. The suitable person holds those monies in trust for the person lacking capacity. The person lacking capacity is the beneficiary.

The suitable person will be responsible for managing the direct payments and buy services to meet the needs of the individual. However, councils also have a duty to set up financial monitoring arrangements for audit purposes to ensure that the person's needs are being met and that the finances are properly managed.

Disabled: Social Security Benefits

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether people in receipt of attendance allowance or disability living allowance will receive the full social care entitlement under the Government's proposed reforms of the social care system. [307720]

Phil Hope: If disability benefits for older people are reformed as part of the National Care Service, those receiving the affected benefits at the time of reform would continue to receive the same level of cash support. We will give more details about the National Care Service offer in our White Paper later this year.

Food: Health Hazards

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions (a) Ministers and (b) officials in his Department have had with representatives of the food industry on the effects of the provision of information on the (i) salt, (ii) sugar and (iii) fat content of foods on the ability of people to manage their (A) diabetes, (B) heart disease, (C) stroke, (D) obesity and (E) other chronic medical conditions; what recent representations he has received on those matters; and if he will make a statement. [323140]

Gillian Merron: The Department and Food Standards Agency (FSA) officials have regular and ongoing discussions with a wide range of stakeholders within the food industry about the provision of nutritional information for fat, saturated fat, sugar and salt both on front and back of pack.

Front of pack (FOP) labelling responds to United Kingdom consumer's desire for clear, simple, honest nutrition information and it is widely accepted that FOP labelling is a useful initiative which is valued by consumers in terms of making it easier to make healthier choices when shopping. Research and feedback from consumers has indicated that FOP labelling is often used by those with health and medical conditions such as those listed, to inform purchasing decisions.

The FSA has developed a framework to strengthen UK FOP arrangements and develop a mechanism by which a single effective approach to FOP labelling which assists consumers to make healthier choices can be delivered.

Food: Marketing

Tim Loughton: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) who represents his Department at World Health Organisation discussions on the marketing of food to children; and what recent discussions he has had on that matter with (a) food, advertising and marketing industry representatives and (b) others; [323113]

(2) what recent discussions he has had on his Department's policy on marketing restrictions as part of discussions within the World Health Organisation on food marketing to children. [323218]

Gillian Merron: The chief medical officer represents the UK Departments of Health at the WHO Executive Board and the World Health Assembly at which the issue of food marketing to children has been discussed. In addition, officials are involved in discussions with WHO Europe on the same topic and have regular discussions with a range of stakeholders including representatives of the food advertising and marketing industries.

Genito-urinary Medicine: Databases

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the new Sexual and Reproductive Health Activity Dataset will capture data from (a) general practitioners, (b) community contraceptive clinics and (c) other care settings. [323353]

Gillian Merron: The Sexual and Reproductive Health Activity Dataset (SRHAD) has been developed to replace the aggregate KT31 Central Return, which currently provides limited aggregate information on contraception from sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. SRHAD will capture data from all SRH services (formally known as family planning clinics/community contraceptive clinics) who collect the KT31 data and report it to the NHS Information Centre.

Currently general practitioners and other care settings are not required to capture data for SRHAD. Inclusion of these services within the data standard is being considered for the future.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make it his policy to collect data from the NHS on (a) the training received by professionals delivering sexual and reproductive health services and (b) the number of professionals accredited to fit long-acting reversible contraceptives. [323354]

Gillian Merron: The Sexual and Reproductive Health Activity Dataset (SRHAD) has been developed to capture the services being provided to those attending sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services. Neither the SRHAD or the KT31 Central Return (which SRHAD replaces) records information on staffing or training within SRH services.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) when his Department plans to replace the KT31 form with the new Sexual and Reproductive Health Activity dataset; [323379]

(2) when the implementation of the new Sexual and Reproductive Health Activity Dataset will begin. [323380]

Gillian Merron: The Sexual and Reproductive Health Activity Dataset (SRHAD) should be implemented from 1 April 2010. However, it is recognised that information technology (IT) systems within sexual and reproductive health (SRH) services will need to be developed and/or reconfigured to enable SRHAD to be collected and reported as required. SRH providers are encouraged to submit SRHAD returns as soon as possible starting from 1 April 2010. However, for sites requiring time to develop IT systems to collect SRHAD they will continue to submit an annual KT31. KT31 will be retired once all SRH sites are able to submit SRHAD, which is anticipated to be achieved by the end of the year 2011-12.

Mr. Stephen O'Brien: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) what data items will be collected under the new Sexual and Reproductive Health Activity Dataset; [323381]

(2) whether the new Sexual and Reproductive Health Activity Dataset will include data on removals of long-acting reversible contraceptives. [323382]

Gillian Merron: Removal of long-acting reversible contraceptives will be recorded in the Sexual and Reproductive Health Activity Dataset (SRHAD) under the SRH Care Activity data item. A list of all of the data items included in SRHAD has been placed in the Library.

Health Services: Greater London

Mr. Sharma: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what information his Department holds on the number of patients who used maternity services in London North West district in each of the last five years. [322442]

Ann Keen: Information is not held in the format requested. Information is available on the number of finished consultant delivery episodes at individual national health service health care providers.

The NHS trusts in London north west with a maternity department in at least one of their sites are: Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust; Ealing Hospital NHS Trust; West Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust; Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust; Royal

Brompton and Harefield NHS Trust; North West London Hospitals NHS Trust; and Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust.

The information is shown in the following table.

Count of finished consultant delivery episodes at selected NHS health care providers, in the years 2004-05 to 2008-09—NHS Hospitals, England

| NHS healthcare provider | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust | 3,304 | 3,513 | 3,843 | 4,191 | 4,084 |
| Ealing Hospital NHS Trust | 2,788 | 2,924 | 2,680 | 2,973 | 3,016 |
| West Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust | 3,396 | 3,375 | 2,015 | 3,782 | 3,924 |
| Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust | 4,572 | 4,847 | 6,004 | 5,208 | 5,336 |
| Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Trust | 0 | 0 | 0 | * | * |
| North West London Hospitals NHS Trust | 5,159 | 4,923 | 4,791 | 5,368 | 4,952 |
| Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust | n/a | n/a | n/a | 9,338 | 9,693 |
| St. Mary's NHS Trust | 4,204 | 4,438 | 4,390 | n/a | n/a |
| Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust | 4,580 | 4,776 | 4,783 | n/a | n/a |
| Total | 28,003 | 28,796 | 28,506 | * | * |

Notes:

1. A finished consultant episode (FCE) is defined as a period of admitted patient care under one consultant within one health care provider. FCEs are counted against the year in which the FCE finishes. The episode types used for deliveries are "delivery episode" and "other delivery event".

2. Assessing growth through time: HES figures are available from 1989-90 onwards. Changes to the figures over time need to be interpreted in the context of improvements in data quality and coverage (particularly in earlier years), improvements in coverage of independent sector activity (particularly from 2006-07) and changes in NHS practice. For example, apparent reductions in activity may be due to a number of procedures that may now be undertaken in outpatient settings and so no longer included in admitted patient HES data.

3. Data quality: HES are compiled from data sent by more than 300 NHS trusts and primary care trusts in England and from some independent sector organisations for activity commissioned by the English NHS. The NHS Information Centre for health and social care liaises closely with these organisations to encourage submission of complete and valid data and seeks to minimise inaccuracies. While this brings about improvement over time, some shortcomings remain.

4. Small numbers: To protect patient confidentiality, figures between 1 and 5 have been replaced with "*" (an asterisk). Where it was still possible to identify numbers from the total an additional number (the next smallest) has been replaced. In this case it has not been possible to suppress an additional number as all others have been published. For this reason the total has been suppressed so that the value of the replaced figure cannot be calculated.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), The NHS Information Centre for health and social care.

Health Services: Isle of Man

Andrew Mackinlay: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the reciprocal health agreement between the UK and the Isle of Man has been placed on the agenda of the forthcoming Ministerial meeting of the British-Irish Council; and if he will make a statement. [323009]

Gillian Merron: The Department has not sought to place the reciprocal health agreement between the United Kingdom and the Isle of Man on the agenda of the forthcoming meeting of the British Irish Council.

Health Services: Merseyside

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much has been spent on the care and support of people with learning difficulties on Merseyside in each year since 2005. [322634]

Ann Keen: The information requested is not available in the format required. However, information on programme budgeting estimated expenditure on Merseyside primary care trusts' (PCT) own populations for learning disabilities is shown in the following table:

Estimated expenditure on own population on learning disabilities

| PCT name | 2004-5 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 |
|---------------------------|--------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| Halton and St. Helens PCT | 7,157 | 9,042 | 10,777 | 16,066 | 17,103 |
| Knowsley PCT | 6,219 | 7,405 | 1,892 | 13,137 | 4,832 |
| Liverpool PCT | 33,158 | 20,629 | 24,011 | 24,552 | 26,043 |
| Sefton PCT | 5,528 | 10,582 | 7,723 | 9,111 | 12,069 |
| Wirral PCT | 14,415 | 15,849 | 11,724 | 18,038 | 21,189 |

Notes:

1. In order to improve data quality, continual refinements have been made to the programme budgeting data calculation methodology since the first collection in 2003-04. The underlying data which support programme budgeting data are also subject to yearly changes. Caution is therefore advised when using programme budgeting data to draw conclusions on changes in PCT spending patterns between years.

2. Figures include expenditure across all sectors. Disease specific expenditure do not include expenditure on prevention, or general practitioner expenditure, but do include prescribing expenditure.

Source:

Annual PCT programme budgeting financial returns

Hospital Beds: Salford

Hazel Blears: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many beds were available in NHS hospitals in Salford in (a) 1997 and (b) the last 12 months for which figures are available. [322407]

Ann Keen: The information requested is shown in the following table:

| | 1997-98 | Total 2008-09 |
|--|---------|------------------|
| <i>Beds in wards open overnight</i> | | |
| Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust | 833 | 808 |
| Greater Manchester West Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust | — | 623 |
| Salford Primary Care Trust | — | 53 |

Day only beds

| | | |
|------------------------------------|----|----|
| Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust | 40 | 51 |
|------------------------------------|----|----|

Notes:

1. The Salford Hospitals Trust gained foundation trust status on 1 August 2006 when it became known as the Salford Royal NHS Foundation Trust.
2. The Bolton, Salford and Trafford Mental Health NHS Trust did not exist in 1997-98. However, it achieved foundation trust status on 1 February 2008 when it became known as the Greater Manchester West Mental Health NHS Foundation Trust.

Source:

The Information Centre for health and social care—KH03 beds census

Hospitals: Waiting Lists

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average waiting time for an appointment in hospital was after referral by a general practitioner for suspected cancer cases in each year since 2005; and if he will make a statement. [322486]

Ann Keen: Statistics on average waiting times between urgent referral for suspected cancer and being seen by a specialist are not collected centrally. The two week wait for all cancers was introduced from 2000. From this date forward, all patients urgently referred for suspected cancer by their general practitioner could expect to be seen by a specialist within 14 days of referral. The following table details the numbers of patients covered by this standard and the reported performance for the period April 2005 to December 2008:

| Period (where referral was received within 24 hours) | Total seen | Number of patients seen within 14 days | Percentage performance |
|--|------------|--|------------------------|
| Q1 2005-06 | 134,813 | 134,246 | 99.6 |
| Q2 2005-06 | 137,471 | 136,932 | 99.6 |
| Q3 2005-06 | 133,328 | 133,122 | 99.8 |
| Q4 2005-06 | 134,828 | 134,688 | 99.9 |
| Q1 2006-07 | 145,460 | 145,319 | 99.9 |
| Q2 2006-07 | 151,546 | 151,392 | 99.9 |
| Q3 2006-07 | 155,256 | 155,126 | 99.9 |
| Q4 2006-07 | 152,392 | 152,243 | 99.9 |
| Q1 2007-08 | 157,615 | 157,445 | 99.9 |

| Period (where referral was received within 24 hours) | Total seen | Number of patients seen within 14 days | Percentage performance |
|--|------------|--|------------------------|
| Q2 2007-08 | 163,756 | 163,587 | 99.9 |
| Q3 2007-08 | 168,376 | 168,230 | 99.9 |
| Q4 2007-08 | 164,612 | 164,326 | 99.8 |
| Q1 2008-09 | 186,364 | 186,120 | 99.9 |
| Q2 2008-09 | 189,397 | 188,832 | 99.7 |
| Q3 2008-09 | 186,206 | 185,924 | 99.8 |

From 1 January 2009 onwards the definitions and methodology used to calculate these statistics are no longer directly comparable to those used previously. This change means that the national health service no longer adjusts these data to separate referrals after 24 hours or account for the impact of patient choice, where individuals elect to delay their appointment. Statistics for the period January 2009 to December 2009 are included as follows:

| Period | Total seen | Number of patients seen within 14 days | Percentage performance |
|------------|------------|--|------------------------|
| Q4 2008-09 | 191,508 | 181,038 | 94.5 |
| Q1 2009-10 | 221,364 | 208,265 | 94.1 |
| Q2 2009-10 | 229,101 | 216,177 | 94.4 |
| Q3 2009-10 | 228,272 | 218,174 | 95.6 |

Graham Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what average NHS waiting times for residents of (a) Manchester, Blackley and (b) the City of Manchester were in each of the last five years. [323016]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The information is not collected in the format requested. The information that is available is shown in the following tables.

Average (median) waiting times for first out-patient appointment (weeks)—patients still waiting at month end, time periods 2006-10 (commissioner based)

| Primary care trust (PCT) | Position at month end | Median (weeks) |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|----------------|
| South Manchester | March 2006 | 3.7 |
| Central Manchester | March 2006 | 3.9 |
| North Manchester | March 2006 | 3.8 |
| Manchester PCT | March 2007 | 3.2 |
| Manchester PCT | March 2008 | 2.7 |
| Manchester PCT | March 2009 | 2.2 |
| Manchester PCT | January 2010 | 2.4 |

Notes:

1. PCT mergers took place in 2006. Figures are shown for organisations that existed at the time.
2. Out-patient waiting times are measured from referral by the general practitioner to first outpatient appointment to the consultant.
3. The figures show the median waiting times for patients still waiting for their first out-patient appointment at the end of the period stated.
4. Median waiting times are calculated from aggregate data, rather than patient level data, and therefore are only estimates of the position on average waits.

Source:

Department Waiting List Collections (QM08R and MMRCOM)

Average (median) in-patient waiting times for elective admission (weeks)—patients still waiting at month end, time periods 2006-10 (commissioner based)

| <i>PCT</i> | <i>Position at month end</i> | <i>Median (weeks)</i> |
|--------------------|------------------------------|-----------------------|
| South Manchester | March 2006 | 5.4 |
| Central Manchester | March 2006 | 4.8 |
| North Manchester | March 2006 | 6.0 |
| Manchester PCT | March 2007 | 5.8 |
| Manchester PCT | March 2008 | 4.9 |
| Manchester PCT | March 2009 | 3.9 |
| Manchester PCT | January 2010 | 5.3 |

Notes:

1. PCT mergers took place in 2006. Figures are shown for organisations that existed at the time.
2. In-patient waiting times are measured from decision to admit by the consultant to admission to hospital.
3. The figures show the median waiting times for patients still waiting for admission at the end of the period stated.
4. Median waiting times are calculated from aggregate data, rather than patient level data, and therefore are only estimates of the position on average waits.

Source:

Department Waiting List Collections QF01 and MMRCOM

Average (median) waiting times from referral to treatment (weeks)—patients seen within each month, time periods 2006-10 (commissioner based)

| <i>PCT</i> | <i>Position at month end</i> | <i>Median (weeks)—admitted patients</i> | <i>Median (weeks)—non-admitted patients</i> |
|----------------|------------------------------|---|---|
| Manchester PCT | March 2007 | 19.5 | — |
| Manchester PCT | March 2008 | 8.1 | 4.1 |
| Manchester PCT | March 2009 | 7.9 | 3.1 |
| Manchester PCT | December 2009 | 7.9 | 3.7 |

Notes:

1. Waiting times are for patients treated during the month and are from referral to first definitive treatment.
2. Data for non-admitted patients were first published in August 2007.
3. Admitted data are on an unadjusted basis for March 2007 and adjusted thereafter.
4. Median waiting times are calculated from aggregate data, rather than patient level data, and therefore are only estimates of the position on average waits.

Source:

Department Monthly RTT Return

Mental Health Services: Advocacy

Lynne Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 10 March 2010, *Official Report*, column 351W, on mental health services: advocacy, whether he plans to make public the information being collected by the Care Quality Commission on the availability of independent mental health advocates in hospitals which detain patients under the Mental Health Act 1983; and if he will issue guidance to the Care Quality Commission requiring the inclusion of information on the availability and accessibility of independent mental health advocates in annual statements for establishments registered to take detained patients under the provisions of the Mental Health Act 1983. [323224]

Phil Hope: It is for the Care Quality Commission (CQC) to decide whether or not to publish this information. The CQC has informed us that it will publish the results of its survey of independent mental health advocacy services and that it hopes to do so in an annual report which will be laid before Parliament later this year.

Mental Health Services: Expenditure

Mr. Donaldson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much the NHS has spent on (a) mental illness, (b) personality disorder, (c) learning disability, (d) brain injury and (e) step-down rehabilitation services provided by partnerships in care in each of the last three years; [323018]

(2) for what reasons the NHS sub-contracts mental health and psychiatric services to Partnerships in Care; and what recent assessment he has made of the effect on NHS expenditure of that practice. [323019]

Phil Hope: The provision of local health services, and the funding thereof, are decisions that should be made by primary care trusts and their strategic health authorities. Clinicians are best placed to decide on what services their local communities need and how they are provided. Information is not held centrally on local contracts with individual providers of care.

Mental Health Services: Finance

Mr. Amess: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding has been allocated to the provision of cognitive behavioural therapy in (a) Southend, (b) Essex and (c) England in each of the last five years. [323120]

Phil Hope: Prior to the inception of the Improving Access to Psychological Therapies (IAPT) programme in 2008 no central information was collected about the funding of cognitive behavioural therapy in the national health service. Consequently, the Department on has figures for the period 2008-09 onwards.

The IAPT programme has begun to roll out services in all primary care trusts (PCTs) across England over a three-year period. In years one and two (2008-09 and 2009-10) growth money has been allocated centrally to PCTs that have demonstrated, through the submission of clear delivery plans, that they are ready to run an IAPT service.

In 2008-09 £33 million was allocated to this programme and in 2009-10 an additional £103 million was allocated across England, in 2010-11 £173 million will be allocated.

In Essex, four PCTs have established IAPT services and a total of £681,000 was allocated in year one and a further £1,620,000 was allocated in year two.

The PCT covering Southend is South East Essex PCT which established an IAPT service in October 2009 following the allocation of £517,000 of funding.

Muscular Dystrophy: West Midlands

Mr. David Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the average age of death was for people diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy who died in the West Midlands Strategic Health Authority area in the last 12 months. [322490]

Angela E. Smith: I have been asked to reply.

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 recent question asking what the average age of mortality was for people diagnosed with Duchenne muscular dystrophy in the West Midlands Strategic Health Authority area in the last 12 months. (322490)

The information collected at death registration provides statistics on deaths which were caused by specific conditions, or to which specific conditions were known to have contributed. It is not possible to obtain from these mortality statistics any information about all persons diagnosed with, or receiving treatment for, a specific condition.

Internationally accepted guidance from the World Health Organisation requires only those conditions that contributed directly to the death to be recorded on the death certificate. Medical practitioners and coroners are not supposed to record all of the diseases or conditions present at or before death, and whether a condition contributed is a matter for their clinical judgement.

Deaths are coded to an underlying cause of death using the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10). The codes in ICD-10 do not allow the identification of deaths specifically with a cause of Duchenne muscular dystrophy. The figure given below is therefore based on deaths from all types of muscular dystrophy, including Duchenne.

The average (mean) age at death for people with an underlying cause of death of muscular dystrophy¹ in West Midlands strategic health authority was 48 years in 2008 (the latest year available)^{2, 3}.

¹ Deaths were identified using the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) code G71.0.

² Based on boundaries as of February 2010.

³ Figures are based on deaths registered in 2008.

Neuromuscular Services: West Midlands

Mr. David Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what discussions he has had with representatives of the West Midlands Strategic Health Authority on access to specialist care for people in that region diagnosed with a rare neuromuscular condition.

[322491]

Ann Keen: No such discussions have been held with the West Midlands Strategic Health Authority on access to specialist care for people in the West Midlands region.

The number of patients in the West Midlands diagnosed with muscular dystrophy and related neuromuscular conditions is approximately 5,000.

It is the responsibility of primary care trusts to ensure the provision of services for neuromuscular dystrophy patients in that region, including access to national health service funded muscular dystrophy care advisers.

NHS: Foreign Workers

Mr. Willis: To ask the Secretary of State for Health if he will make an assessment of the effects on the number of jobs in the NHS of the outsourcing of finance departments to SBS Solutions in India.

[323025]

Mr. Mike O'Brien: The Department does not hold data on the number of jobs in the national health service that are released when finance and accounting

functions are outsourced to NHS Shared Business Services (NHS SBS). It is the responsibility of each trust when moving these functions to NHS SBS to determine the number of posts required following outsourcing.

Jenny Willott: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many private recruitment agencies recruited health workers from Africa for work in the NHS prior to the introduction of the NHS Code of Practice on International Recruitment; how many have done so since its introduction; and if he will make a statement; [323319]

(2) how many health workers from Africa were employed in the NHS immediately prior to the introduction of the NHS Code of Practice on International Recruitment; how many have been so employed since its introduction; and if he will make a statement; [323320]

(3) what steps his Department is taking to (a) monitor and (b) enforce compliance with the NHS Code of Practice on International Recruitment; and if he will make a statement. [323321]

Ann Keen: There is no centrally held information on the country of origin of health-workers.

It is not known how many agencies have recruited specifically from Africa since 2001. The number of British private recruitment agencies registered with the NHS Code of Practice in August 2005, when records began, was 256 this rose to 531 in January 2010.

NHS Employers is responsible for the management, promotion, advice and guidance on international recruitment.

Swine Flu: Vaccination

Graham Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the take-up rate has been for swine influenza vaccinations by each qualifying group in each of the last six months. [323080]

Gillian Merron: Cumulative, provisional data on the uptake of swine influenza vaccine each month since the beginning of the vaccination programme (October 2009) are given in the following tables for those in the usual seasonal influenza clinical risk groups, pregnant women, healthy children aged six months to below five years and front line healthcare workers. Healthcare worker data are collected weekly, so data to the end of the closest week to the end of each month are given in table 2.

There are no data available on the uptake of swine influenza vaccine by household contacts of the immunocompromised and frontline social care workers—the other groups identified to receive swine flu vaccine.

The data show uptake of at least one dose of swine influenza vaccine—most people only require one dose of vaccine.

Table 1

| | <i>Uptake by those in clinical risk groups aged under 65 years (including pregnant women)</i> | <i>Uptake by those in clinical risk groups aged 65 years and older</i> | <i>Uptake by pregnant women</i> | <i>Uptake by healthy children aged six months to under five years</i> | <i>Percentage</i> |
|----------|---|--|---------------------------------|---|-------------------|
| October | 0.2 | 0.1 | 0.1 | | 0.0 |
| November | 18.7 | 9.9 | 9.1 | | 1.0 |
| December | 31.7 | 27.2 | 15.1 | | 2.9 |
| January | 34.8 | 36.2 | 15.7 | | 13.5 |
| February | 35.7 | 40.0 | 15.8 | | 21.1 |

Table 2

| | <i>Uptake by frontline health care workers (percentage)</i> |
|--|---|
| Week 45 (end 8 November 2009) ¹ | 15.3 |
| Week 48 (end 29 November 2009) | 27.1 |
| Week 52 (end 27 December 2009) | 38.0 |
| Week 4 (end 31 January 2010) | 39.4 |
| Week 8 (end 28 February 2010) | 39.9 |

¹ The earliest data available

Thromboembolism: Health Services

John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much funding his Department has allocated to the Venous Thromboembolism Exemplar Network in each of the last three years. [322533]

Ann Keen: No funding has been allocated directly to the Venous Thromboembolism (VTE) Exemplar Network. The aim is to mainstream good practice on VTE within the national health service, and the network demonstrates what a number of NHS organisations have achieved.

John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how much funding has been allocated to the National Venous Thromboembolism (VTE) Strategy in each of the last five years, excluding funding allocated to the National VTE Commissioning for Quality and Innovation goal; [322534]

(2) how much funding has been allocated to the (a) Healthcare Acquired Infection Reduction Strategy, (b) National Venous Thromboembolism Strategy and (c) National Cervical Cancer Vaccination Programme in each of the last five years. [322545]

Ann Keen: The amounts of funding for the areas requested are as follows.

The following table represents funding from the Department and its arm's length bodies on the Healthcare Acquired Infection Reduction Strategy. Other organisations have had a role in tackling HCAs but their expenditure could not be separately identified. For a more detailed breakdown of these costs, please see sections 15 and 16 (p.31-36) of the National Audit Office Report, which can be found at:

www.nao.org.uk/publications/0809/reducing_healthcare_associated.aspx

| | <i>£ million</i> |
|---------|------------------|
| 2004-05 | 6.5 |
| 2005-06 | 7 |
| 2006-07 | 8 |
| 2007-08 | 10 |

| | <i>£ million</i> |
|---------|------------------|
| 2008-09 | 24.5 |
| Total | 57 |

Source:

National Audit Office (NAO) report: Reducing Healthcare Associated Infections in Hospitals in England—12 June 2009.

The following table shows funding for venous thromboembolism (VTE) prevention strategy for the past five years and the current financial year. These figures do not include any of the funding related to the national VTE Commissioning for Quality and Innovation (CQUIN) goal. Prior to 2007 the funding of VTE prevention work was limited to expenses for the VTE Expert Working Group members and other related domestic costs for hosting meetings.

| | <i>£</i> |
|---------|----------|
| 2004-05 | n/a |
| 2005-06 | n/a |
| 2006-07 | n/a |
| 2007-08 | 93,500 |
| 2008-09 | 125,936 |
| 2009-10 | 192,764 |
| Total | 412,200 |

A national vaccination programme against human papillomavirus, which causes cervical cancer, began in September 2008. The Department has allocated funds to PCTs for the implementation of the programme. The funding levels (which do not include the cost of the vaccines as this is commercially confidential), which varied by year depending on the number of catch-up cohorts that the vaccine was offered to, were as follows:

| | <i>£ million</i> |
|---------|------------------|
| 2004-05 | n/a |
| 2005-06 | n/a |
| 2006-07 | n/a |
| 2007-08 | n/a |
| 2008-09 | 18.9 |
| Total | 18.9 |

| | <i>Current and future funding (£ million)</i> |
|---------|---|
| 2009-10 | 42 |
| 2010-11 | 9.2 |
| Total | 52.1 |

John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance his Department has issued on the implementation of the Venous Thromboembolism National Commissioning Goal to (a) strategic health authority managers, (b) primary care trust managers, (c) acute trust managers and (d) other healthcare professionals.

[322536]

Ann Keen: The following guidance and support has been made available on the implementation of the Venous Thromboembolism (VTE) National Commissioning Goal within the Commissioning for Quality and Innovation (CQUIN) payment framework:

Details of the national CQUIN goal on VTE risk assessment for 2010-11 were included within published guidance on the CQUIN payment framework in December 2009.

www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_091443

Draft guidance on data collection was put onto UNIFY on 26 January 2010 for UNIFY users.

Some basic information on VTE and CQUIN has been put on the Department's website at:

www.dh.gov.uk/en/PublicHealth/HealthProtection/Bloodsafety/VenousThromboembolismVTE/DH_113359

Inquiries on the VTE goal within CQUIN from staff in the national health service are being answered individually by the Department and the queries that come up regularly will also be used to form a Frequently Asked Questions section in guidance currently being prepared.

John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what guidance he has issued to NHS healthcare professionals on the revised 2010 National Venous Thromboembolism Risk Assessment Model on 2 March 2010; and if he will make a statement.

[322537]

Ann Keen: The Department's venous thromboembolism (VTE) risk assessment template was revised in February 2010 in conjunction with the National Institute for Clinical Excellence (NICE) to ensure it was fully compliant with the guidance issued by NICE in January 2010. This then became a National VTE Risk Assessment Tool for hospitals to use. To raise awareness about the risk assessment, information has been put on the Department's website at:

www.dh.gov.uk/en/PublicHealth/HealthProtection/Bloodsafety/VenousThromboembolismVTE/DH_113359

John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the role of the National Patient Safety Agency will be under the National Venous Thromboembolism Prevention Strategy.

[322538]

Ann Keen: The National Patient Safety Agency (NPSA) have been key stakeholders and supportive of the work on preventing venous thromboembolism (VTE) from the outset. As we move into implementation of VTE prevention, appropriate opportunities for greater involvement of NPSA are now emerging.

John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were diagnosed with (a) deep vein and (b) pulmonary thrombosis in each of the last five years.

[322543]

Ann Keen: Information on admitted patients in hospital who have a diagnosis of deep vein thrombosis (DVT) or pulmonary embolism (PE) is shown in the following table—Patients treated by their general practitioner or as out-patients are not included.

Counts of finished consultant episodes¹ with a main or secondary diagnosis² of DVT and PE, 2004-05 to 2008-09, England³

| | Finished consultant episodes by diagnosis ⁴ | | |
|---------|--|-------------|-----------------|
| | DVT ⁵ | | PE ⁶ |
| | All relevant ICD codes | ICD10 I80.2 | |
| 2008-09 | 62,066 | 46,786 | 56,029 |
| 2007-08 | 61,050 | 46,031 | 49,114 |
| 2006-07 | 61,459 | 46,257 | 46,685 |
| 2005-06 | 63,373 | 48,952 | 43,360 |
| 2004-05 | 59,695 | 46,303 | 40,059 |

¹ A finished consultant episode (FCE) is a continuous period of admitted patient care under one consultant within one health care provider. FCEs are counted against the year in which they end. Figures do not represent the number of different patients, as a person may have more than one episode of care within the same stay in hospital or in different stays in the same year.

² The information is the number of episodes where this diagnosis was recorded in any of the 20 (14 from 2004-05 to 2006-07) primary and secondary diagnosis fields in a Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) record. Each episode is only counted once, even if the diagnosis is recorded in more than one diagnosis field of the record.

³ Activity in English NHS Hospitals and English NHS commissioned activity in the independent sector.

⁴ Counts for the different diagnoses shown are not necessarily mutually exclusive and therefore summing the different diagnoses is not possible (e.g. a patient may have a DVT and a PE in a single episode, and would be counted once in each relevant column—double counting would occur if the values were summed).

⁵ Diagnosis is recorded in HES using ICD10 codes. ICD10 code I80.2 is used for a diagnosis of DVT where there is no further information on the site of the thrombosis. However DVT may also be recorded under a number of different codes, although these codes may also include cases which are not considered deep. The full list of relevant ICD10 codes is as follows:

I80.0 Phlebitis and thrombophlebitis of superficial vessels of lower extremities

I80.1 Phlebitis and thrombophlebitis of femoral vein

I80.2 Phlebitis and thrombophlebitis of other deep vessels of lower extremities

I80.3 Phlebitis and thrombophlebitis of lower extremities, unspecified

I80.8 Phlebitis and thrombophlebitis of other sites

I80.9 Phlebitis and thrombophlebitis of unspecified site

O22.2 Superficial thrombophlebitis in pregnancy

O22.3 Deep phlebothrombosis in pregnancy

O87.0 Superficial thrombophlebitis in the puerperium

O87.1 Deep phlebothrombosis in the puerperium

⁶ Pulmonary embolisms are coded as I26.0 (Pulmonary embolism with mention of acute cor pulmonale) and I26.9 (Pulmonary embolism without mention of acute cor pulmonale).

Note:

Assessing growth through time: HES figures are available from 1989-90 onwards. Changes to the figures over time need to be interpreted in the context of improvements in data quality and coverage (particularly in earlier years), improvements in coverage of independent sector activity (particularly from 2006-07) and changes in NHS practice. For example, apparent reductions in activity may be due to a number of procedures which may now be undertaken in outpatient settings and so no longer included in admitted patient HES data.

Source:

Hospital Episode Statistics (HES), The NHS Information Centre for health and social care

John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the role of the Academy of Medical Royal Colleges will be in relation to the National Venous Thromboembolism Strategy.

[322553]

Ann Keen: At a joint meeting of the Department, Academy of Royal Colleges and Strategic Health Authority Medical Directors in October 2009, it was agreed to work together on tackling venous thromboembolism prevention through professional leadership provided by the Academy coupled with national health service system levers. The Academy confirmed their commitment to provide the necessary leadership in November 2009.

John Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Health pursuant to the answer of 8 February 2010, *Official Report*, column 717W, on thrombosis, what format of the electronic version of the National Venous Thromboembolism Risk Assessment Model will take; and if he will make a statement. [322659]

Ann Keen: Work to develop a prototype venous thromboembolism (VTE) risk assessment tool is ongoing. A prototype tool is being piloted at three national health service secondary care locations. The pilot work is aimed at testing the utility of a VTE risk assessment checklist on mobile and hand-held digital equipment.

When complete we will consider the contribution of this pilot work with the context of overall VTE prevention programme.

Tuberculosis: Health Services

Julie Morgan: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps his Department is taking to assist hard to reach groups, including those from black and minority ethnic communities and people who are homeless, to access medical services for the prevention and treatment of tuberculosis. [323420]

Gillian Merron: The Department is funding a United Kingdom charity, TB Alert, to provide awareness raising messages for groups vulnerable to tuberculosis (TB), including black and minority ethnic communities, to increase referrals for TB testing and treatment.

The Department also funds the Find & Treat (F&T) programme in London, to work alongside local TB services. The F&T team are providing support to homeless people in accessing medical services for the prevention and treatment of TB. F&T have provided help to over 400 people with TB to complete their treatment.

WOMEN AND EQUALITY

Written Questions: Government Responses

Mrs. May: To ask the Minister for Women and Equality when she plans to answer question 310346, on Lord Sugar of Clapton, tabled on 7 January 2010. [322104]

Maria Eagle: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 18 March 2010, *Official Report*, columns 995-96W.

CABINET OFFICE

Deaths: Ovarian Cancer

Mrs. Curtis-Thomas: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many women died of ovarian cancer in Merseyside in each year since 1997. [322630]

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:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many women died of ovarian cancer in Merseyside in each year since 1997. (322630)

The table attached provides the number of deaths where ovarian cancer was the underlying cause of death, for women in Merseyside metropolitan county from 1997 to 2008 (latest year available).

Table 1: Number of deaths where ovarian cancer¹ was the underlying cause of death in females, Merseyside², 1997-2008³

| | Females Deaths |
|------|-------------------|
| 1997 | 87 |
| 1998 | 112 |
| 1999 | 102 |
| 2000 | 108 |
| 2001 | 119 |
| 2002 | 95 |
| 2003 | 120 |
| 2004 | 114 |
| 2005 | 111 |
| 2006 | 103 |
| 2007 | 106 |
| 2008 | 117 |

¹ Cause of death for ovarian cancer was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) code 183.0 for the years 1997 to 2000, and Tenth Revision (ICD-10) code C56 from 2001 onwards. The introduction of ICD-10 in 2001 means that the numbers of deaths from this cause before 2001 are not completely comparable with later years.

² Based on boundaries as of February 2010.

³ Figures are for deaths registered in each calendar year.

Deaths: Thrombosis

John Smith: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many death certificates which mentioned thrombosis have been issued in each of the last five years. [322541]

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 recent question asking how many death certificates which mentioned thrombosis have been issued in each of the last five years. (322541)

Internationally accepted guidance from the World Health Organisation requires only those conditions that contributed directly to death to be recorded on the death certificate. Medical practitioners and coroners are not supposed to record all of the diseases or conditions present at or before death. Whether a condition contributed is a matter for their clinical judgement.

The table attached provides the number of deaths where the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10) codes recorded indicate whether any of the following conditions were mentioned anywhere on the death certificate, either as the underlying cause or as a contributory factor, in England and Wales, for 2004 to 2008 (the latest year available).

- Myocardial infarction and coronary thrombosis
- Thrombotic strokes
- Pulmonary embolism and deep vein thrombosis
- Arterial embolism and thrombosis

It is not possible from death certificate data to separate thrombotic, embolic and atherosclerotic conditions affecting the arteries to the brain. Atherosclerosis of arteries in the neck and inside the skull can lead to strokes through thrombosis, embolism or sometimes haemorrhage. The table therefore includes a single category of deaths with mention of one or more ICD codes in the range that includes thrombotic, embolic and atherosclerotic cerebrovascular diseases. Pulmonary embolism and venous thrombosis have been combined, because when one is part of the sequence leading to death, the other nearly always is as well, whether it is mentioned on the certificate or not.

When interpreting the data in these tables, it is important to be aware that some deaths may have more than one of the requested conditions mentioned. Therefore, some deaths may be counted in more than one of the causes listed.

Table 1. Deaths where thrombosis was mentioned on the death certificate,¹ England and Wales,² 2004-08³

| Cause | Deaths (persons) | | | | |
|---|------------------|--------|--------|--------|--------|
| | 2004 | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
| Myocardial infarction and coronary thrombosis | 44,283 | 41,446 | 38,159 | 36,152 | 34,159 |
| Thrombotic strokes | 505 | 457 | 385 | 301 | 290 |
| Pulmonary embolism and deep vein thrombosis | 12,387 | 12,254 | 12,683 | 12,347 | 12,611 |
| Arterial embolism and thrombosis | 517 | 518 | 517 | 501 | 537 |

¹ Cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10). The specific causes of death categorised in Table 1, and their corresponding ICD-10 codes, are shown in the following box. Deaths were included where one of these causes was mentioned anywhere on the death certificate.

² Figures for England and Wales include deaths of non-residents.

³ Figures are for deaths registered in each calendar year.

Box 1. Causes of death codes used—International Classification of Diseases, Tenth Revision (ICD-10)

| Cause of death | ICD-10 code(s) |
|---|---|
| Myocardial infarction and coronary thrombosis | I21-I24.0 |
| Thrombotic Strokes | I63.0, I63.3, I63.6, I65-I66 |
| Pulmonary embolism and deep vein thrombosis | I80.1-I80.3, I80.9, I82.9, I26.0, I26.9 |
| Arterial embolism and thrombosis | I74 |

Employment: Graduates

Lembit Öpik: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many university graduates with a degree in (a) law, (b) engineering, (c) mathematics and (d) medicine have been in employment at any time since 2005. [322433]

Angela E. Smith: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply. The letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Public Sector Debt

Mr. Cash: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what estimate the Office for National Statistics has made of net (a) borrowing and (b) debt, including financial sector interventions, public sector pensions liabilities, private finance initiative liabilities, Network Rail liabilities, nuclear decommissioning liabilities and loans to banks, expressed as a percentage of gross domestic product in each year from 2008-09 to 2014-15. [323022]

Angela E. Smith: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply. A copy of the letter will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Unemployment: Glenrothes

Lindsay Roy: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what the level of unemployment in Glenrothes constituency was in each year since 1997. [322402]

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 what the level of unemployment in Glenrothes constituency was in each year since 1997. (322402)

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) compiles unemployment statistics for local areas from the Annual Population Survey and its predecessor the annual Labour Force Survey (LFS) following International Labour Organisation (ILO) definitions. However, due to small sample sizes estimates of unemployment for the Glenrothes constituency are unavailable.

As an alternative, in Table 1 we have provided the number of persons claiming Jobseeker's Allowance for the Glenrothes constituency for January 2010 and January of each year since 2005. Figures prior to this date are unavailable as Glenrothes only became a parliamentary constituency in the 2005 General Election.

National and local area estimates for many labour market statistics, including employment, unemployment and claimant count are available on the NOMIS website at

<http://www.nomisweb.co.uk>

Table 1. Number of persons resident in Glenrothes parliamentary constituency claiming jobseeker's allowance

| As at January each year | Number |
|-------------------------|--------|
| 2005 | 2,639 |
| 2006 | 2,616 |
| 2007 | 2,348 |
| 2008 | 1,922 |
| 2009 | 2,777 |
| 2010 | 3,322 |

Source:

Jobcentre Plus administrative system

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Agriculture: Subsidies

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the Rural Land Registry on the accuracy of the maps used to calculate acreage for payment purposes; and if he will make a statement. [321976]

Jim Fitzpatrick: I either meet, or discuss with the chief executive of the Rural Payments Agency (RPA) almost weekly to discuss agency progress on a range of issues including the Rural Land Register (RLR).

The RLR Mapping Update exercise currently in progress uses the most recent Ordnance Survey (OS) data available in conjunction with aerial photography to update the RLR maps. This includes improving the positional accuracy of our map data and reflecting any Real World Change and ineligible land recorded by OS and farmers. The acreage for each field is calculated in hectares after the farmer has agreed the boundaries and declared any further land which is ineligible for the SPS payment.

As of 12 March 2010, approximately half of the 107,000 farmers who were sent maps as part of the RLR Mapping Update had agreed with their maps and the remaining half had requested changes to be made. RPA has now completed the request and sent confirmatory maps to over 72 per cent. of these farmers. Of these, only 3 per cent. have requested further changes to be made, many of which are new and have not been requested previously.

Mr. Peter Robinson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether it is his policy to support (a) the provision of direct payments to farmers under Pillar One of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and (b) a CAP budget of at least equivalent monetary value following reforms of the CAP with effect from 2013. [322853]

Jim Fitzpatrick [holding answer 18 March 2010]: The UK Government's position on the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was set out in the joint DEFRA/Treasury CAP Vision published in 2005. We want to see the elimination of all Direct Payments under Pillar I of the CAP. Direct Payments are an expensive and inefficient mechanism and undermine the ability of farmers to be truly competitive. They do not help farmers to tackle the challenges of the future and our policy is therefore to see them phased out by a carefully managed transition by 2015-20. A sustainable CAP would comprise of EU spending on agriculture that would be based on the current Pillar II, allowing a considerable reduction in total spending by the EU on agriculture and bringing this into line with other sectors.

Animals: Smuggling

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the (a) country of export and (b) purpose of importation was of each importation of a species listed in CITES imported from outside the EU in each of the last three years. [322597]

Huw Irranca-Davies: The information available regarding the country of export and purpose of import for CITES listed species imported into the UK from outside the EU in each of the last three years has been placed in the Libraries of the House. The information given is for imports of live specimens of animals and plants.

Auditory Bird Scarers

Tim Farron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs whether his Department has plans to review the Code of Practice for farmers on the use of auditory bird scarers. [323435]

Jim Fitzpatrick: The National Farmers Union produced the code of practice on auditory bird scarers on which the Department was consulted. DEFRA do not currently have plans to carry out further research into the issue of auditory bird scarers.

Biodiversity

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much his

Department spent on biodiversity conservation in (a) England and (b) the UK Overseas Territories in each of the last five years. [322616]

Huw Irranca-Davies: Details of expenditure on biodiversity conservation in England are provided in the following table. These figures represent DEFRA programme spend and spend by the wider DEFRA network but do not include staff costs. They also include total agri-environment scheme expenditure, of which a major share is judged to be spent on biodiversity.

Estimated public expenditure by DEFRA network organisations on biodiversity conservation in England (figures are given in £ million)

| | 2004-05 | 2005-06 | 2006-07 | 2007-08 | 2008-09 |
|-------------------------------------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| DEFRA: Agri-environment schemes | 167.8 | 187.2 | 254.6 | 330.4 | 353 |
| Other DEFRA programme expenditure | 4.9 | 5.6 | 5.4 | 4.7 | 6.7 |
| Environment Agency | 5.9 | 10.5 | 11.6 | 7.3 | 23.5 |
| Forestry Commission | 14.7 | 17.7 | 22.8 | 28.1 | 33.3 |
| Natural England | 55.5 | 57.3 | 54.1 | 52.7 | 50.4 |
| Joint Nature Conservation Committee | 1.4 | 1.8 | 1.8 | 2.1 | 1.7 |
| DEFRA network total | 250.3 | 280.2 | 350.4 | 425.3 | 468.6 |

Note:

Totals may not add due to rounding

Details of spending commitments on biodiversity conservation in the UK Overseas Territories are provided in the following table. These include commitments under the Darwin Initiative and other additional support for projects to address invasive non-native species, in each of the last five financial years. They also include spend by the Joint Nature Conservation Committee. They do not include spend by others, for example the Governments of the Overseas Territories themselves, who are principally responsible for biodiversity conservation in their territories.

| | (£) |
|---------|---------|
| 2004-05 | 125,840 |
| 2005-06 | 226,970 |
| 2006-07 | 211,130 |
| 2007-08 | 152,379 |
| 2008-09 | 178,527 |

In addition, DEFRA spent approximately £19,000 and £10,000 on biodiversity conservation in the UK Overseas Territories through the Flagship Species Fund in the calendar years 2005 and 2008 respectively.

Biofuels

Graham Stringer: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what sustainability criteria will apply to the use of B30K oil in domestic boilers. [322831]

Jim Fitzpatrick: The Renewable Energy Directive, published in 2009, includes sustainability criteria that bioliquids used for heat and electricity generation must meet in order to receive financial support and to count towards the directive's renewable energy targets. The criteria include a requirement for a minimum greenhouse gas savings threshold of 35 per cent., rising to 50 per

cent. in 2017, and 60 per cent. in 2018 for new installations starting production from 2017; and controls over land use change to protect land important on biodiversity or carbon grounds, such as primary forest, wetlands and peatlands. In light of this, the Department of Energy and Climate Change will make an announcement later this month, setting out what actions the Government can take to introduce sustainability standards for biomass in the UK.

Bovine Tuberculosis

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cases of bovine tuberculosis were recorded in (a) West Cornwall and the Isles of Scilly, (b) Cornwall, (c) the South West and (d) England in each of the last 10 years. [322729]

Jim Fitzpatrick: We are unable to give data for areas smaller than county level due to data protection reasons. These reasons include identification of individual herds. We are therefore unable to provide data for West Cornwall. However, we can confirm that there have been no cases of bovine tuberculosis (bTB) in the Isles of Scilly during the last 10 years. The following table shows the number of cases of bTB in Cornwall, the South West, and England in each of the last 10 years.

| | <i>Cornwall</i> | <i>South-west (GO region)¹</i> | <i>England</i> |
|------|-----------------|---|----------------|
| 2009 | 475 | 2,070 | 3,350 |
| 2008 | 552 | 2,366 | 3,746 |
| 2007 | 416 | 2,038 | 3,183 |
| 2006 | 349 | 1,667 | 2,721 |
| 2005 | 429 | 1,920 | 2,904 |
| 2004 | 397 | 1,745 | 2,612 |
| 2003 | 371 | 1,679 | 2,516 |
| 2002 | 453 | 1,788 | 2,622 |
| 2001 | 97 | 374 | 583 |
| 2000 | 228 | 1,017 | 1,423 |

¹ The south-west Government office region includes; Avon, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, the Isles of Scilly, Somerset and Wiltshire.

Notes:

1. Data from VetNet are produced three months in arrears and the latest report available is for December 2009. Therefore data cannot be provided for the last three months.

2. Data from VetNet are provisional and subject to change as more data become available.

Source:

VetNet

Bovine Tuberculosis: Disease Control

Mr. Streeter: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps his Department is taking to tackle bovine tuberculosis in Devon. [323209]

Jim Fitzpatrick: This Government remain committed to working with industry to reduce bovine tuberculosis (bTB) in all parts of England, including Devon.

We have a package of measures in place to reduce the further spread and incidence of bovine bTB including regular testing of cattle, zero tolerance of overdue tests, pre-movement testing and extended use of gamma interferon. We are also continuing to make significant investment in vaccines. £20 million will be spent on

vaccine development during the current spending period. A Badger Vaccine Deployment Project will take place in six high incidence areas (each of 100km²) in England, two of which are in Devon. The aim is that the vaccination of badgers will commence this summer and continue for at least five years in each area.

Since November 2008, DEFRA has worked alongside the farming industry and veterinary profession through the Bovine TB Eradication Group for England to tackle bTB and move towards eradication. On 8 October 2009, the Group published a progress report including a number of recommendations now being implemented.

In November 2009 the EU Commission formally agreed to the UK's Eradication Plan and to provide funding of up to €10 million for 2010. This funding will be shared between DEFRA and the Welsh and Northern Irish administrations.

Cattle: Diseases

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many cattle have been culled as a result of contracting (a) bovine tuberculosis and (b) other diseases in (i) Cornwall, (ii) the South West and (iii) England in each of the last 10 years. [322728]

Jim Fitzpatrick: The following table displays the number of reactors slaughtered as a consequence of bovine tuberculosis in each of the last 10 years.

| | <i>Cornwall</i> | <i>South West Region (GO)¹</i> | <i>England</i> |
|------|-----------------|---|----------------|
| 2009 | 3,426 | 15,770 | 24,500 |
| 2008 | 3,585 | 16,570 | 26,038 |
| 2007 | 2,303 | 11,988 | 18,543 |
| 2006 | 1,662 | 9,209 | 14,585 |
| 2005 | 3,339 | 14,581 | 20,145 |
| 2004 | 2,338 | 10,466 | 15,093 |
| 2003 | 2,314 | 10,461 | 15,120 |
| 2002 | 2,616 | 10,608 | 15,482 |
| 2001 | 702 | 2,452 | 3,804 |
| 2000 | 1,105 | 4,529 | 7,073 |

¹ The South West Government Office region includes; Avon, Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire, the Isles of Scilly, Somerset and Wiltshire.

Notes:

1. Data from Vetnet is produced three months in arrears and the latest report available is for December 2009. Therefore data cannot be provided for the last three months.

2. Data from Vetnet is provisional and subject to change as more data becomes available.

Source:

Vetnet

The following table shows the number of cattle killed on suspicion of being affected with bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE) in England in each of the last 10 years.

| | <i>England</i> | <i>South West Region</i> | <i>Cornwall</i> |
|------|----------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| 2009 | 12 | 6 | 4 |
| 2008 | 28 | 14 | 3 |
| 2007 | 53 | 25 | 5 |
| 2006 | 96 | 38 | 6 |
| 2005 | 122 | 53 | 18 |
| 2004 | 258 | 96 | 22 |
| 2003 | 340 | 150 | 39 |

| | England | South West Region | Cornwall |
|------|---------|-------------------|----------|
| 2002 | 687 | 238 | 60 |
| 2001 | 1,009 | 333 | 64 |
| 2000 | 1,561 | 539 | 101 |

Source:

Veterinary Laboratories Agency's BSE Database

For the Foot and Mouth Disease (FMD) outbreak of 2001, the number of cattle culled as a result of contracting FMD during 2001 was 1,407 in Cornwall, 86,630 in the South West and 581,802 in England.

For the FMD outbreak of 2007, no cattle were culled in Cornwall or the South West during 2007 as a result of contracting the disease, but 982 cattle were culled in England.

For the Bluetongue outbreak of 2007, no cattle were culled in Cornwall or the South West during 2007 as a result of contracting the disease, but five cows were culled in England.

The above figures were sourced from Animal Health.

Departmental Energy

Dan Rogerson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps his Department plans to take to participate in the Earth Hour event on 27 March 2010. [319092]

Dan Norris: The Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs will be participating in the annual Earth Hour event on Saturday 27 March by switching off unnecessary lights at all headquarters properties within its estate.

The Department will also be promoting the event to its staff, encouraging personal participation.

Departmental Offices

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much his Department has spent on office refurbishments in each year since its inception. [320473]

Dan Norris: Since its inception in June 2001 the Department has spent £112,070,295 on office refurbishments within its estate portfolio. This figure includes works, professional fees and appropriate VAT.

The figure provided is for a single total cost. While our current systems could readily identify recent spend by year the costs required to provide a year by year position from inception would be disproportionate (in excess of £800).

Livestock: Waste Disposal

Mr. Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the effectiveness of the Fallen Stock Scheme in containing diseases; and if he will make a statement. [321973]

Jim Fitzpatrick: In October 2009 the National Fallen Stock Company (NFSCo), which runs the National Fallen Stock Scheme, was transferred from Government ownership to become a Community Interest Company. However, the scheme continues to provide an excellent

service, has a growing farmer membership, and ensures that strict biosecurity conditions are applied to the collection and disposal of fallen stock to help prevent the spread of disease.

Nature Conservation

Mr. David Anderson: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what steps he is taking in (a) this country and (b) international fora to curb illegal trade in endangered species. [322743]

Huw Irranca-Davies: Primary responsibility for enforcing wildlife legislation rests with the Police Service and the UK Border Agency. DEFRA actively supports their activities through the Partnership for Action Against Wildlife Crime (PAW).

DEFRA, together with the Home Office, is the main source of funding for the National Wildlife Crime Unit (NWCU). The UK is one of only a handful of countries having a specialist wildlife crime unit and is a world leader in this respect. The Unit spearheads national action to reduce wildlife crime and is the UK's focal point for international wildlife crime enquiries.

The UK has selected wildlife crime priorities for urgent action, either because of their impact on the conservation of certain species or because high levels of crime have been reported. The priorities include species covered by the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES).

Endangered species listed on annex A to CITES require licences in order to be traded within the UK. Animal Health operates a panel of wildlife inspectors who carry out inspections to ensure that the legislation is complied with; it also has an enforcement team which provides information from its records in support of prosecutions.

Internationally, the UK Government (through DEFRA) is the current chair of the Coalition Against Wildlife Trafficking (CAWT) - an international organisation which aims to focus public and political attention and resources on ending the illegal trade in wildlife and wildlife products.

Further international protection is offered by the UK's commitment to working with 174 other countries through our membership of CITES. Through CITES, member countries work to protect endangered species of plants, and animals by restricting and monitoring international trade in them.

Noise

Mr. Evennett: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent representations he has received on the Noise Policy Statement for England. [323474]

Jim Fitzpatrick: Since its publication on 15 March 2010, no representations have been received with regard to the Noise Policy Statement for England. In developing the Statement, DEFRA officials met with all of the relevant Government Departments, including a number of key external stakeholders, ranging in interests from industry to non-government organisations, who expressed broad support for it.

Pollution Control

Hywel Williams: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs on how many occasions a decision taken at an early stage by the Environment Agency on what constitutes best available techniques in respect of a staged application for pollution prevention and control permits has subsequently been (a) confirmed and (b) reversed in the last five years. [323496]

Jim Fitzpatrick: The Environment Agency has had only one staged application in the last five years but this has now been withdrawn.

Snow and Ice

Andrew Rosindell: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many members of his Department have taken authorised days of absence owing to severe weather in 2010. [322513]

Dan Norris: The Department does not keep central records of the number of staff who were unable to attend the office in 2010 due to severe weather conditions. We are therefore unable to provide this information without incurring a disproportionate cost.

Staff unable to travel to their normal place of work will have agreed individual arrangements with their line managers. Options available will have included working from home, taking annual leave, and adjusting their flexible working arrangements.

Trees

Tim Farron: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate he has made of the number of trees planted in England in each of the last 10 years. [317023]

Huw Irranca-Davies [*holding answer 22 February 2010*]: Tree planting is normally recorded on the basis of area planted, and this is made up of a combination of new woodland creation and replanting after the harvesting of timber from existing woodland.

The area of planting and restocking over the last ten years is given in the following table.

| Year ending 31 March | Hectares | | | |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|---------|------------------------------------|---------|
| | New woodland creation | | Replanting of existing woodland | |
| | Broad leaf | Conifer | Broadleaf | Conifer |
| 2000 | 5,200 | 700 | 1,400 | 2,500 |
| 2001 | 5,200 | 700 | 1,200 | 2,700 |
| 2002 | 4,700 | 700 | 800 | 2,600 |
| 2003 | 5,400 | 500 | 900 | 2,400 |
| 2004 | 4,400 | 200 | 900 | 2,300 |
| 2005 | 5,100 | 200 | 900 | 2,000 |
| 2006 | 3,600 | 100 | 1,100 | 2,100 |
| 2007 | 3,100 | 100 | 900 | 1,800 |
| 2008 | 2,500 | 100 | 1,500 | 2,000 |
| 2009 | 2,100 | Nil | 1,500 | 1,700 |

It is estimated that broad-leaved planting is at an average density of 1,500 trees per hectare, and conifer planting is at an average density of 2,200 trees per hectare, for both new woodland creation and replanting.

Waste Disposal: Research

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of the report on his Department's research project commissioned from the Central Science Laboratory with reference WM0317. [323148]

Dan Norris: The report of the Central Science Laboratory (now the Food and Environment Research Agency) on the use of analgesics and rodenticides (reference WM0317) has yet to be submitted to DEFRA and thus cannot yet be placed in the Library. Delay has arisen through unexpected additional priorities for specialist staff. We expect to receive the report soon and this will be placed in the Library after appropriate subsequent review.

Wind Power

Robert Neill: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what guidance his Department has issued on the erection of wind turbines on common land. [323149]

Huw Irranca-Davies: DEFRA has published guidance setting out its policy in relation to the determination of applications to the Secretary of State for consent under section 38 of the Commons Act 2006 to construct restricted works on common land in England, and under section 16(1) of the 2006 Act to deregister and exchange common land in England.

The guidance is published on the DEFRA website at:

www.defra.gov.uk/rural/protected/commonland/protect-consent.htm#guide

The guidance explains the Secretary of State's view, in relation to the erection of wind farms on registered common land, that:

"4.13 The Secretary of State wishes to promote sustainable energy generation in an appropriate setting, but equally, his policy is to ensure that the stock of commons is not diminished, that works on common land must maintain or improve the condition of the common, and the use must be consistent with its status as common land. To balance these issues our expectation is that applications for such infrastructure projects on common land are more likely to be successful under section 16 of the Act, so that an exchange of land is proposed and can be taken into account. An application for consent to such works under section 38 will rarely be granted unless there are convincing reasons why an application under section 16 cannot be pursued."

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Adult Education: Finance

Mr. Harper: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what activities will be funded under the Adult Learner Responsive sub-total for the Development Learning category in the Strategy Document, Skills Investment Strategy 2010-11, November 2009; and if he will make a statement. [323004]

Kevin Brennan: The Department routes funding through the Learning and Skills Council (LSC) for the provision of further education (FE) and skills training for adult learners aged 19 and over. This includes activity categorised as Developmental Learning through the demand-led Adult Learner Responsive funding stream (ALR).

Developmental Learning may be used to fund learning aims eligible for funding which are not otherwise funded through one of the priority qualification categories which are: Full Level 2, Full Level 3, Level 4, Foundation Learning and Skills for Life.

It can therefore include learning aims for learners with learning difficulties and disabilities not included in any other category, 19+ learners completing a 16 to 18 programme (learners who draw down entitlement funding), trade union studies and initial teacher training.

The actual mix and balance of this activity will depend on learner demand.

Mr. Harper: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment has been made of the level of support and resources the Skills Funding Agency will require for administering the provision of learning for learners with learning difficulties and/or disabilities in (a) 2009-10 and (b) 2010-11; and if he will make a statement. [323272]

Kevin Brennan: The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) are currently responsible for funding further education (FE) and training for adult learners aged 19 and over delivered by FE colleges and training organisations. The LSC do not deliver any provision directly.

In 2009/10 academic year the cost of provision for learners aged 19 or over with learning difficulties and/or disabilities (LDD) will be supported through the same adult budgets as those learners without LDD. Learners with LDD in mainstream provision can have their additional support needs met through Additional Learning Support Funding (ALS). For the 2009/10 academic year around £150 million was allocated to FE colleges and training organisations for this purpose. However it should be noted that ALS funding is not solely for learners with LDD and can also be used to meet the needs of other vulnerable groups.

Funding allocations for 2010/11 academic year are currently under way. It is therefore not possible to provide information on a funding amount at this stage.

Mr. Harper: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what criteria will be used to establish which learners will be covered by the provision of the Adult Learner Responsive sub-total for the Foundation Learning (excluding Skills for Life) category in the Strategy Document, Skills Investment Strategy 2010-11, November 2009; and if he will make a statement. [323273]

Kevin Brennan: The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) is responsible for the funding of further education (FE) and training for adult learners aged 19 and over.

Foundation learning (excluding Skills for Life) funded through the Adult Learner Responsive budget includes nationally accredited provision outside of Skills for Life at entry level and Level 1. Programmes funded through the ALR budget are delivered wholly on the FE college or training organisation's premises. The type of learners funded through this route will vary depending on the needs of learners within each local area.

Mr. Harper: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what type of provision will be provided by the Adult Learner Responsive sub-total for the Foundation Learning (excluding Skills for Life) category in the Strategy Document, Skills Investment Strategy 2010-11, November 2009; and if he will make a statement. [323274]

Kevin Brennan: The Foundation Learning Curriculum helps people currently learning at Entry Level and Level 1 to progress to Level 2.

The curriculum offers a skills combination designed to enhance employability, increase confidence in learning and, in the case of learners with learning difficulties or disabilities, lead to independent living. It comprises three elements: vocational training, functional skills in English, maths and ICT and personal and social development skills. Adult learners will not have to take all three elements, but will be able to tailor their learning, building up a personalised skills set to suit their individual needs and aspirations.

Apprentices

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many people completed an apprenticeship in each industry or service sector in each quarter of the last five years. [321688]

Kevin Brennan: Table 1 shows the number of Apprenticeship achievements by Sector Subject Area from 2004/05 to 2008/09. A copy will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Information on the number of Apprenticeship achievements by Sector Subject Area is published in a quarterly statistical first release (SFR). The latest SFR was published on 17 December:

<http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/sfrdec09>

Apprentices: Milton Keynes

Mr. Lancaster: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many people completed apprenticeships in Milton Keynes in each year since 1997. [321878]

Kevin Brennan: Table 1 shows apprenticeship achievements for Milton Keynes local authority from 2003/04 onwards, the earliest year for which comparable data are available.

Table 1: Apprenticeship framework achievements for Milton Keynes local authority, 2003/04 to 2008/09

| <i>Academic year</i> | <i>Number of framework achievements</i> |
|----------------------|---|
| 2003/04 | 200 |
| 2004/05 | 300 |
| 2005/06 | 400 |
| 2006/07 | 400 |
| 2007/08 | 500 |
| 2008/09 | 600 |

Notes:

1. Figures for Milton Keynes local authority are rounded to the nearest hundred.
2. Figures are based upon home postcode of the learner.
3. Figures include apprenticeships, advanced apprenticeships and higher level apprenticeships.
4. In order to be counted as a successful achievement, all elements of the framework must have been achieved.

Source:

Individualised Learner Record

Information on the number of apprenticeship achievements is published in a quarterly statistical first release (SFR). The latest SFR was published on 17 December:

<http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/sfrdec09>

Apprentices: York

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many people

have completed apprenticeships in York in each year since 1996-97. [321693]

Kevin Brennan: The following table shows Apprenticeship achievements for York local authority and City of York parliamentary constituency from 2003/04 onwards, the earliest year for which comparable data are available.

Apprenticeship framework achievements for York local authority and City of York parliamentary constituency, 2003/04 to 2008/09

| | 2003/04 | 2004/05 | 2005/06 | 2006/07 | 2007/08 | 2008/09 |
|---|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| York local authority | 200 | 200 | 300 | 500 | 400 | 600 |
| City of York parliamentary constituency | 90 | 120 | 210 | 280 | 230 | 380 |

Notes:

1. Figures for York local authority are rounded to the nearest hundred. Figures for City of York parliamentary constituency are rounded to the nearest ten.
2. Figures are based upon home postcode of the learner.
3. Figures include Apprenticeship, Advanced Apprenticeships and Higher Level Apprenticeships.
4. In order to be counted as a successful achievement, all elements of the framework must have been achieved.

Source:

Individualised Learner Record

Information on the number of Apprenticeship achievements is published in a quarterly statistical first release (SFR). The latest SFR was published on 17 December:

<http://www.thedataservice.org.uk/statistics/sfrdec09>

Broadband

Mr. Willis: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills whether he plans to require Ofcom to promote training in the telecommunications industry to support the rollout of and access to a universal broadband service. [323539]

Mr. Timms: This Department has no such plans at this stage.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills whether he plans to extend the general access fund for the roll-out of broadband services to mobile as well as fixed line operators; and when he expects the new arrangements to be operable. [323540]

Mr. Timms: Government is currently consulting on the proposals for the Next Generation Fund, which includes an explanation of the various technologies that may be used to deliver superfast broadband to 90 per cent. of UK households. Further decisions will be announced in due course.

Mr. Willis: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what plans he has to make access to 2Mbps minimum speeds for universal broadband access mandatory. [323573]

Mr. Timms: Both the Digital Britain Report and the 2009 Budget stated that

“The Government will pursue Universal Service in broadband, at a speed of 2 Megabits per second, by no later than 2012. This target will allow virtually everyone to experience the benefits of broadband, including the increasing delivery of public services online. We are currently working with the newly formed body Broadband Delivery UK (BDUK) to take this work forward.”

Broadband: Harrogate

Mr. Willis: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills which telecommunications exchanges in Harrogate and Knaresborough constituency will be enabled with superfast broadband fibre; and when he expects this work to be completed. [323538]

Mr. Timms: Decisions over where to provide superfast broadband are in the first instance commercial decisions for network operators. The Government announced the creation of Broadband Delivery UK on 5 March. This body will be responsible for supporting private sector investment to deliver superfast broadband to 90 per cent. of households by 2017.

Business: Preston

Mr. Hendrick: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps his Department and its predecessors have taken to support small businesses in Preston since 1997. [311131]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Northwest Development Agency (NWDA) established in 1999 has provided extensive support to small businesses across the region including Preston. The NWDA's main support for small businesses is through regionally available 'Solutions for Business' products in which the agency invested £92.75 million in 2008/09. The 'Solutions for Business' portfolio includes: business finance, improving innovation and efficiency, business start-up, advice on international trade, work force training, and sector development through regional cluster organisations. The primary access point is Business Link North West (BLNW) which provides companies with information, diagnostics and brokerage to specific types of support. Since 2007 BLNW has assisted 5,808 companies in Preston. In addition, NWDA has supported two Single Regeneration Budget (SRB) schemes in the Preston area, one supporting small businesses in Deepdale and the other a £20 million scheme at Avenham. The agency also supported managed workspace at the "Harris Business Centre" operated by UCLAN.

Chorley

Mr. Hoyle: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will set out, with statistical information as closely related to Chorley constituency as possible, the effect on that constituency of the policies of his Department and its predecessors since 1997. [314232]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Since 1997, the policies and actions of the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (and its predecessors) have focused on building a competitive economy and on delivering prosperity and sustainable economic growth. The implementation of BIS policy in Chorley has been taken forward primarily by the North West Development Agency and GONW, working in partnership with the local authority and other relevant bodies.

Caution must be exercised in seeking to attribute directly the effects of specific measures on local economic indicators. Nonetheless, examples of how BIS policies and actions have impacted on Chorley include:

Levels of skills have increased in the years for which data is available, between 2000 and 2008. Performance at level 2 has increased from 62.7 per cent. to 67.7 per cent., at level 3 from 41.6 per cent. to 48.3 per cent., and at level 4 from 22.3 per cent. to 27.3 per cent.¹

The stock of VAT registered businesses has increased from 2,880 businesses in 1997 to 3,365 businesses in 2007²;

The proportion of business registrations (including VAT and PAYE) per 10,000 resident population aged 16 and above (National Indicator 171) has increased from 49.7 in 2002 to 59.5 in 2008³; and

The percentage of small businesses showing growth in number of employees (National Indicator 172) has increased from 10.6 per cent. in 2003 to 14.5 per cent. in 2008⁴.

¹ Extracted from NOMIS “NVQ Qualifications time series for Chorley”.

² Extracted from NOMIS, source: BERR—vat registrations/deregistrations by industry.

³ Data produced by BIS and available on the BIS website: http://stats.berr.gov.uk/ed/national_indicators/index.htm

⁴ As above.

Credit

John Battle: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent representations he has received from (a) consumer bodies and (b) other organisations (i) in support of and (ii) against the introduction of a cap on charges in the home credit market; and if he will make a statement. [323173]

Kevin Brennan: With regard to contact with those supporting a cap on interest rates, I met with Damon Gibbons of Debt on your Doorstep and the right hon. Member for Makerfield (Mr. McCartney) in October 2009. Damon Gibbons also wrote to me in November 2009 and in January, Joanna Kennedy of the Zacchaeus 2000 Trust emailed my constituency office. With regard to contact with those against introducing a cap on interest rates, John Moulding of Provident Financial wrote to me in November 2009.

Government carefully considered the case for a cap on interest rates following research carried out by Policis in 2004. The research showed that imposing a cap on interest rates could result in lenders withdrawing from the riskier end of the market, including the home credit market, denying vulnerable consumers access to legitimate sources of credit and potentially forcing them to resort to illegal money lending. This was a view shared by

leading consumer groups including Citizens Advice, the Association of British Credit Unions, the Institute of Public Policy Research, Which? and Advice UK. The OFT is reviewing the high cost credit market, including the case for a rate cap, and will report shortly. Government will respond to the review when published.

Departmental Buildings

Mr. Philip Hammond: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how much his Department has spent on office refurbishments since its inception. [320474]

Mr. McFadden: Since its inception in June 2009, this Department has spent £5.42 million (inclusive of VAT) on office refurbishments to date. We are currently in the middle of refurbishing our main ministerial building 1 Victoria street.

This investment will allow us to vacate Kingsgate House, London when the lease expires in March 2012 which currently costs around £10 million per annum to run. We have also been able to vacate a property in Glasgow and move to vacant Government space saving £0.5 million per annum on running costs.

Departmental Surveys

Mr. Grieve: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will place in the Library a copy of the benchmark results of the Civil Service People Survey for his Department and its agencies. [322562]

Mr. McFadden: The 2009 People Survey results for BIS and its agencies will be placed in the Libraries of the House. These results are also available on the BIS website at “Related documents” under the heading “Who we are”:

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/About/who-we-are>

East of England Development Agency: Public Relations

Mr. Hurd: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what payments the East of England Development Agency has made to Fishburn Hedges in each of the last three years; for what purposes; and if he will place in the Library a copy of the contract under which such payments have been made. [302302]

Ms Rosie Winterton: Fishburn Hedges have provided support to EEDA with a wide range of communications and public relations support including specific public affairs services. This support includes high-level advice, legislative and policy updates, a parliamentary monitoring service, information, briefings and writing support, support on political visits and events, and parliamentary procedures. EEDA does not have sufficient capacity in house to manage all these areas of expertise. Total payments made to Fishburn Hedges in each of the last years are as follows:

| | £ |
|----------------|------------|
| 2007 | 222,570.74 |
| 2008 | 73,285.76 |
| 2009 (to date) | 90,942.28 |

Note:

These figures are inclusive of VAT.

| 2007 | | | |
|-------------------|-------------------|--|--|
| <i>Date</i> | <i>Amount (£)</i> | | <i>Purpose</i> |
| 2 January 2007 | 2,032.88 | | Destination Growth 2007 Planning and Development |
| 16 January 2007 | 2,321.72 | | Cut Your Carbon Campaign Development |
| 5 March 2007 | 25,819.39 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 5 April 2007 | 32,988.69 | Month Monitoring Service and Public Affairs Contract Consultancy | |
| 13 April 2007 | 3,429.36 | Month Monitoring Service and Public Affairs Contract Consultancy | |
| 16 April 2007 | 10,071.81 | | Public Affairs Strategy Development |
| 5 April 2007 | 24,866.33 | | Event |
| 5 April 2007 | 35,345.13 | | Essays—Development and Copywriting |
| 5 April 2007 | 42,122.86 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 4 June 2007 | 10,904.34 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 31 July 2007 | 5,461.86 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 17 July 2007 | 5,439.13 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 4 September 2007 | 5,421.61 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 24 September 2007 | 5,582.71 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 2 November 2007 | 5,422.78 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 17 December 2007 | 5,340.14 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 2008 | | | |
| <i>Date</i> | <i>Amount (£)</i> | | <i>Purpose</i> |
| 28 January 2008 | 5,324.90 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 29 February 2008 | 5,287.50 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 19 March 2008 | 5,287.50 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 28 March 2008 | 12,382.46 | Month Monitoring Service and Public Affairs Contract Consultancy | |
| 9 May 2008 | 5,455.78 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 16 June 2008 | 5,352.13 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 14 July 2008 | 5,304.36 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 6 August 2008 | 5,364.99 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 15 September 2008 | 5,449.85 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 20 November 2008 | 4,012.43 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 20 November 2008 | 14,063.86 | Month Monitoring Service and Public Affairs Contract Consultancy | |
| 2009 | | | |
| <i>Date</i> | <i>Amount (£)</i> | | <i>Purpose</i> |
| 16 February 2009 | 21,423.64 | Month Monitoring Service and Public Affairs Contract Consultancy | |
| 30 March 2009 | 10,940.92 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 28 April 2009 | 10,892.19 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 1 May 2009 | 11,891.00 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 8 July 2009 | 6,234.55 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 19 August 2009 | 11,853.07 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 3 September 2009 | 5,855.74 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 19 October 2009 | 5,879.79 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |
| 4 November 2009 | 5,971.38 | | Public Affairs Contract Consultancy |

Notes:

There have three contractual arrangements between the East of England Development Agency (EEDA) and Fishburn Hedges since 2006 (the period to which the question relates). The following documents will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Contract 2006062—Public Affairs contract

This contract was for the period 1 April 2006 to 31 August 2006. It was an extension of a previous arrangement, under contract reference number 04/57, which ran from November 2004 to March 2006.

This document has been modified only:

(a) to protect individuals' personal data; and

(b) to remove information relating to EEDA's internal processes.

This information is commercially sensitive, in that it relates to EEDA's general approach to procurement strategy and supplier selection, and disclosure would not be in the public interest, as it would undermine the ability of EEDA to effectively conduct future procurement activities, and to achieve effective use of public money.

Contract 2006079

This is the contract agreement for the multi-disciplinary marketing support call off contract that lasted for two years up to November 2008. This document has been amended to remove the specific daily rate referred to in paragraph 3. Please take the following into account:

The amount of the daily rate in offer letter has been removed because it is information that is still of commercial significance to the contractor and to which a duty of confidentiality applies.

The contractor's Proposal (Attachment 1) has not been supplied. This document contains:

- i. the personal data of individuals
- ii. information relating to projects carried out by third parties, and
- iii. information on the commercial and business method and interests of the contractor which retain commercial sensitivity and are subject to a duty of confidentiality

The list of key personnel (Appendix D) has not been supplied because it contains the personal data of individuals.

Contract 2006084—Public Affairs

This is a public affairs call-off contract.

Two documents relate to this contract.

The first is the original contract. It has been amended to remove the specific daily rate referred to in paragraph 3.

The amount of the daily rate in offer letter has been removed because it is information that is still of commercial significance to the contractor and to which a duty of confidentiality applies.

The contractor's Proposal (Attachment 1) has not been supplied. This document contains:

- i. the personal data of individuals
- ii. information relating to projects carried out by third parties, and
- iii. information on the commercial and business method and interests of the contractor which retain commercial sensitivity and are subject to a duty of confidentiality.

The list of Key Personnel (Appendix D) has not been supplied because it contains the personal data of individuals.

A second document extends the length of the contract noted above. It has not been modified.

Employment

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what percentage of people aged 24 years or under in (a) the City of York, (b) Yorkshire and the Humber and (c) England are in education, employment or training. [321728]

Kevin Brennan: Table 1 shows the number and percentage of people aged¹ 16 to 24 in education, employment or training in Yorkshire and Humber and England in quarter 4 2009. This information is from the Labour Force Survey (LFS).

Estimates for small geographies such as local authorities are available from the Annual Population Survey (APS), for which the latest data available relate to 2008. Estimates for York are given in table 2.

Please note that all of these estimates are subject to sampling variability, which is larger for smaller geographies, and should therefore be treated with caution and viewed in conjunction with their Confidence Intervals² (CIs), which indicate how accurate an estimate is. For example, a CI of +/-2.8 percentage points (pp) means that the true value is between 2.8pp above the estimate and 2.8pp below the estimate.

¹ Age used is respondents' academic age, which is defined as their age at the preceding 31 August.

² Those given are 95 per cent. confidence intervals

Table 1: People aged 16 to 24 in education, employment or training, Q4 2009

| | Number of 16 to 24-year-olds in EET | Percentage of all 16 to 24-year-olds in EET | Confidence Interval |
|------------------|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| England | 5,146,000 | 85.2 | +/- 0.7pp |
| Yorks and Humber | 572,000 | 83.4 | +/- 2.2pp |

Source:

Q4 2009 Labour Force Survey.

Table 2: People aged 16 to 24 in education, employment or training, 2008

| | Number of 16 to 24-year-olds in EET | Percentage of all 16 to 24-year-olds in EET | Confidence Interval |
|---------|-------------------------------------|---|---------------------|
| York LA | 30,000 | 95.7 | +/- 2.8pp |

Source:

2008 Annual Population Survey.

Estate Agents: Regulation

Grant Shapps: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the Office of Fair Trading's recent recommendation against the introduction of further regulation of estate agents. [323284]

Kevin Brennan: The Office of Fair Trading (OFT) published its market study report on "Home buying and selling" on 18 February 2010.

I am grateful to the OFT for its report. We will consider the recommendations which have been addressed to the Government and publish a response in due course.

Higher Education

Mr. Willis: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills whether the Higher Education Funding Council for England has instructed universities to cease to provide higher education courses through an education college since September 2009. [323024]

Mr. Lammy: I can confirm that the Higher Education Funding Council for England have not instructed universities to cease to provide higher education courses through an education college since September 2009.

Higher Education: Student Numbers

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many people resident in each (a) constituency and (b) local authority area (i) applied for and (ii) were accepted for a place at university in each of the last three years. [321697]

Mr. Lammy: The information will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

National Skills Academies

Mr. Hayes: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how many expressions of interest have been received to set up new National Skills Academies; and if he will make a statement. [321820]

Kevin Brennan: The Learning and Skills Council (LSC) received 12 Expressions of Interest (EoI) to set up new National Skills Academies (NSAs), in response to the NSA Fifth Round Prospectus. The bidding round is an independent process led and managed by the LSC and an announcement of the EoIs selected for further development is expected to be made very shortly.

National Skills Academies are successful in shaping skills provision in their sectors and in attracting employer commitment and investment in skills. This further expansion of the NSA network will build on that success, establishing NSAs as the leading employer-led skills delivery, and in taking us a step further towards the aspiration of having at least one NSA for every major sector of the economy as resources allow.

Non-Domestic Rates: Empty Property

Justine Greening: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what discussions his Department has had with the Department for Communities and Local Government on (a) empty property rates and (b) empty property relief since January 2007. [323164]

Mr. McFadden: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has regular discussions with other Government Departments on matters affecting business, including with Communities and Local Government on business rates and rate relief schemes.

Post Offices: Closures

Mr. Atkinson: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills (1) on how many occasions a sub-post office temporarily closed has been reclassified as a permanent closure since the first quarter of 2008; [321352]

(2) in what circumstances a post office classified as temporarily closed is reclassified as a permanent closure; [321353]

(3) how many sub-post offices which have temporarily closed in each quarter since the first quarter of 2008 remain closed; [321354]

(4) what the average time taken to provide a replacement branch in place of a sub-post office which had been temporarily closed was in each quarter since the first quarter of 2008; [321355]

(5) how many post offices classified as temporarily closed have been reintroduced as outreach services rather than re-opened; [321356]

(6) how many post offices temporarily closed have been replaced with the Post Office Essential Service. [321357]

Mr. McFadden: I have asked Alan Cook, managing director of Post Office Ltd., to respond directly to the Hon. Member and a copy of his reply will be placed in the Libraries of the House.

Regional Development Agencies: Trade Unions

Grant Shapps: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how much funding (a) his Department and its predecessors and (b) regional development agencies have given to support the regional union network. [311474]

Mr. McFadden: This Department does not provide funding directly in support of the regional union network.

Regional Development Agencies (RDA) fund initiatives through a variety of third party organisations to deliver projects to increase economic growth, such as on workforce

development and economic inclusion. The specific focus and priorities of such activities are set out in each region's Regional Economic Strategy and will differ according to the needs, opportunities and priorities for economic growth in each region.

The following table shows RDA funding to trade unions for 2003-09. The RDAs retain records of the last six years. To provide records before this period will incur disproportionate costs.

| <i>Total amount of RDA funding to trade unions 2003-09</i> | |
|--|-----------|
| | £ |
| Advantage West Midlands | 1,151,116 |
| East of England Development Agency | 189,000 |
| East Midlands Development Agency | 744,000 |
| London Development Agency | 911,000 |
| North West Development Agency | 801,957 |
| One North East | 472,569 |
| South East Development Agency | 561,460 |
| South West Development Agency | 2,112,592 |
| Yorkshire Forward | 446,816 |

Reemploy

Colin Burgon: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills how much was spent on consultants' advice in relation to Remploy in 2008-09; how much has been so spent in 2009-10 to date; which consultants have been engaged in each year; and how much each has been paid to date. [322790]

Mr. McFadden: The Department's accounting system does not separately identify how much has been spent on consultants' advice in relation to Remploy, or the names of the consultants that may have given such advice. An exercise to try and obtain such information could be undertaken only at disproportionate cost.

Telecommunications: EC Action

Peter Luff: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what plans his Department has to bring forward legislation to implement the provisions of the new EU Telecoms Directives; and what consultation will take place prior to implementation. [323230]

Mr. Timms: The Department is working with Ofcom, the Information Commissioners Office and relevant Government Departments to determine what legislative changes are required to implement the provisions of the new EU Telecoms Directives, and has begun informal discussions with consumer and industry parties affected by the changes.

We will consult widely over the summer with the intention of bringing forward secondary legislation under section 2.2 of the European Communities Act 1972 to implement the changes by 25 May 2011.

Peter Luff: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what discussions his Department has had with (a) Ofcom, (b) representatives of industry and (c) consumer groups on the implementation of the new number portability rights and obligations introduced by the EU Citizens' Rights Directive. [323231]

Mr. Timms: The Department have had regular contact with Ofcom to discuss the maintenance and application of the number portability regime in the UK in general. Additionally they have held discussions to consider specifically implementation of the electronic communications framework review and the implications this has for number portability in the UK. Ofcom plan to publish a statement and a further public consultation shortly on improving number portability in the UK and although this was work which was already under way it is consistent with the provisions of the new directives.

Ofcom's statement and public consultation will precede a fuller, separate, review of switching processes to take place later this year across the entire range of converging electronic communications sectors which will take into account the changes required by the EU Citizens' Rights Directive.

The Department will consult widely on implementation of the European Framework Review (including the Citizens' Rights Directive) over the summer with the intention of bringing forward secondary legislation under section 2.2 of the European Communities Act 1972 to implement the changes by 25 May 2011. Some informal discussions have already taken place with operators (e.g. with Hutchison, 3UK and Vodafone) on number portability. We have also had informal discussions with Consumer Focus.

More formal engagement on the detail of the new requirements is planned for the consultation and we are committed to engaging with Ofcom, industry and relevant consumer groups throughout the implementation period from now to end May 2011.

Peter Luff: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps his Department has taken to prepare for implementation of the new number portability rights and obligations introduced by the EU Citizens' Rights Directive. [323232]

Mr. Timms: The Department have had regular contact with Ofcom to discuss the maintenance and application of the number portability regime in the UK in general. Additionally they have held discussions to consider specifically implementation of the electronic communications framework review and the implications this has for number portability in the UK. Ofcom plan to publish a statement and a further public consultation shortly on improving number portability in the UK and although this was work which was already under way it is consistent with the provisions of the new directives.

Ofcom's statement and public consultation will precede a fuller, separate, review of switching processes to take place later this year across the entire range of converging electronic communications sectors which will take into account the changes required by the EU Citizens' Rights Directive.

At the same time the Department is working with Ofcom to determine what legislative changes are required

to implement the new provisions and have begun informal discussions with consumer and industry parties affected by the changes.

We will consult widely over the summer with the intention of bringing forward Secondary Legislation under Section 2.2 of the European Communities Act 1972 to implement the changes by 25 May 2011.

Peter Luff: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what discussions his Department has had with Ofcom on assisting business to meet the new number portability rights and obligations introduced by the EU Citizens' Rights Directive. [323233]

Mr. Timms: The Department are in regular contact with Ofcom to discuss the maintenance and application of the number portability regime for electronic communications in the UK. The Department have recently had discussions with Ofcom on their forthcoming statement and public consultation on improving number porting in the UK. This work was already under way and is consistent with the new directives.

The Department will consult widely on implementation of the European Framework Review over the summer with the intention of bringing forward secondary legislation under section 2.2 of the European Communities Act 1975 to implement the changes by 25 May 2011. Some informal discussions with operators have already taken place (e.g. with Hutchison, 3UK and Vodafone). More formal engagement on the detail of the new requirements is planned for the consultation and we are committed to engaging with Ofcom and industry throughout the implementation period from now to end May 2011.

Young People: Milton Keynes

Mr. Lancaster: To ask the Minister of State, Department for Business, Innovation and Skills what percentage of people aged 24 years or under in Milton Keynes are in education, employment or training. [321875]

Kevin Brennan: In 2008 it is estimated that 90.9 per cent. of 16 to 24-year-olds¹ in Milton Keynes local authority were in education, employment or training. These figures are the most recent available from the Annual Population Survey.

Please note that, because the sample sizes for local authority estimates are small, this estimate is subject to large sampling variability and should therefore be treated with caution and viewed in conjunction with its confidence interval² of 5.3 percentage points. This means that the true value is somewhere between 85.6 per cent. and 95.8 per cent.

¹ Age used is respondents academic age, which is defined as their age as at the preceding 31 August.

² Those given are 95 per cent. confidence intervals.

ORAL ANSWERS

Monday 22 March 2010

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