House of Commons

Wednesday 13 July 2011

The House met at half-past Eleven o’clock

PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER in the Chair]

BUSINESS BEFORE QUESTIONS

LONDON LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND TRANSPORT FOR LONDON (NO. 2) BILL [LORDS]

Motion made, That the Bill be now read a Second time.

Hon. Members: Object.

Bill to be read a Second time on Tuesday 6 September.

MULL OF KINTYRE REVIEW

Resolved,

That an Humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, That she will be graciously pleased to give directions that there be laid before this House a Return of the Report, dated 13 July 2011, of the Mull of Kintyre Review: An independent Review to examine all available evidence relating to the findings of the Board of Inquiry into the fatal accident at the Mull of Kintyre on 2 June 1994.—(Miss Chloe Smith.)

CONTINGENCIES FUND ACCOUNT 2010-11

Ordered,

That there be laid before this House an Account of the Contingencies Fund, 2010-11, showing—

(1) a Statement of Financial Position;
(2) a Statement of Cash Flows; and
(3) Notes to the Account; together with the Certificate and Report of the Comptroller and Auditor General thereon.—(Miss Chloe Smith.)

Oral Answers to Questions

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The Secretary of State was asked—

Smallholder Farmers (Climate Change)

1. Caroline Lucas (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): How much and what proportion of his Department’s funding for climate change adaptation and mitigation projects it has provided to smallholder farmers in the last 12 months. [65536]

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Stephen O’Brien): Smallholder farmers are particularly vulnerable to climate change. Fifty per cent. of the United Kingdom’s £1.5 billion fast-start commitment will help developing countries to adapt to it, and a significant share will benefit smallholder farmers. In Kenya, for instance, we support research on improved early warning so that farmers can adjust their cropping strategies to increase production.

2. Caroline Nokes (Romsey and Southampton North) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of his Department’s work in Burundi; and if he will make a statement. [65537]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Andrew Mitchell): From 2012, DFID’s work in Burundi will focus on supporting regional integration into the east African community through the British-led organisation TradeMark East Africa, which has opened an office in Burundi which DFID is funding. That is the right way for us to help the people of Burundi, rather
than aid being provided through a small, expensive and duplicatory bilateral programme.

Caroline Nokes: During a recent visit to Burundi, the vicar of Romsey and a group of parishioners found that one of the biggest problems was a critical lack of access to fresh water. Would the Secretary of State be prepared to meet them to discuss what they found, and how aid can be provided most effectively?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend has made a good point. I believe that I met the vicar during a visit at the time of the general election, but I, or one of my fellow Ministers, would be happy to meet him and some of my hon. Friend’s constituents to discuss this important matter.

Richard Burden (Birmingham, Northfield) (Lab): The Secretary of State did not say in his opening remarks that Britain is winding down its aid programme in Burundi, a country in which more than 80% of the population live on less than $1.25 a day. What specific assurances can he give that other donors will take up the programmes in which Britain has been involved in so far?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman will be aware that Germany, Belgium and France have much larger bilateral programmes in Burundi than Britain. We are providing only 3.6% of the funding through our bilateral programme, but we have to make tough decisions about how we spend our budget. It is, after all, hard-earned taxpayers’ money, and we do not think it provides good value for money to have such a small programme with such high administrative expenses. I can tell the hon. Gentleman, however, that through multilateral support over the next few years Britain will spend about double the sum of the old bilateral programme.

Bilateral Aid (India)

3. Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): What assessment has he made of the performance of his Department’s bilateral aid programmes with Indian states.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Andrew Mitchell): The bilateral aid review demonstrates that DFID’s programmes with Indian states yield strong development results with good value for money. The Independent Commission for Aid Impact will evaluate the India programme as part of its work in 2011.

Barry Gardiner: I welcome the Secretary of State’s response. He has recently been urged to discontinue aid to India, but does he agree that for as long as India continues to have a third of the world’s poor living within its borders, we will never achieve the millennium development goals unless that aid continues?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is right: India is a development paradox, as I have said before, and we are right to continue the programme for now. We have frozen the figure for the next four years, and we are moving to work only in the poorest states in India. As the hon. Gentleman has implied, there are more poor people in India than in the whole of sub-Saharan Africa.

Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): Will my right hon. Friend accept the International Development Committee recommendation to put more resources into sanitation and nutrition, as they have been shown to be the prime cause of poverty? Half the population of India has no access to sanitation and malnutrition rates among Indian children are among the worst in the world.

Mr Mitchell: My right hon. Friend is absolutely right. Half the children in the state of Bihar are suffering from malnutrition. His point about the programme is a good one. We are looking at increasing the amount we spend on water and sanitation, and all of us are extremely grateful for the strong all-party support his Committee gave to the Government policy on aid and development in India.

Gaza

4. Fiona Mactaggart (Slough) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the humanitarian needs of the people of Gaza; and if he will make a statement.

The Minister of State, Department for International Development (Mr Alan Duncan): The situation in Gaza is unacceptable and unsustainable. Perversely, the current access regime benefits Hamas and punishes the ordinary people of Gaza. In the last fortnight, I visited Israel and the west bank, as did the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), who also visited Gaza. We both urged Israeli Ministers to recognise that the restrictions are not in Israel’s interests and should be lifted.

Fiona Mactaggart: I thank the Minister for that reply. First, I am sure that my constituent, David Cole, who is currently in Gaza would like me to use this opportunity to thank those Government officials who eventually helped him to be able to get there. However, I know that he is concerned that the number of trucks going into Gaza is about a third less than the number that were able to go in before the blockade. I am glad the Minister has already made representations, but will he specifically ask the Israeli and Greek Governments why they will not allow unarmed humanitarian volunteers to deliver medical supplies to Gaza by boat, through the flotilla?

Mr Duncan: I thank the hon. Lady for her appreciative comments. It is the case that about 30 times more cement and 10 times more steel goes into Gaza through Hamas-controlled tunnels than through the crossings. At the current reconstruction rate, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency estimates it will take 78 years to rebuild Gaza. We put confidence in the conversations between Prime Minister Netanyahu and the Quartet representative Tony Blair, which took place in May, and hope they can have a more successful outcome than they have had so far.

Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): Is it not true that more people enter Gaza from Egypt than from the tunnels in Israel? What can the Government do to stem this humanitarian crisis?
Mr Duncan: My hon. Friend is in some sense right, although the tunnels are in Egypt, not at the normal crossings from Israel. The volume of goods and mostly people—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. I apologise for interrupting the Minister of State. I have been listening to the Minister of State for 20 years, and I want to carry on enjoying listening to him, and I want to be able to hear him.

Mr Duncan: Thank you, Mr Speaker; we are halfway there, perhaps.

My hon. Friend is right to say that much more comes in through the tunnels than through Israeli-approved access points. Perversely, that is assisting Hamas, which is something we would like to reverse.

Anas Sarwar (Glasgow Central) (Lab): Six months after the Arab spring, what discussions has the Minister had with the Egyptian authorities about relaxing the restrictions at the Rafah border crossing to ensure that essential humanitarian assistance can get into Gaza?

Mr Duncan: That is primarily a matter for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. I have not had any such discussions, but I have had discussions with Israeli Ministers. As I said a moment ago, I hope that the representations made by the Quartet representative, Tony Blair, to Prime Minister Netanyahu can ease many of the restrictions that the Israelis are currently imposing.

Tuberculosis

5. Annette Brooke (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): What recent assessment he has made of his Department’s performance in the prevention and treatment of tuberculosis in developing countries.

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Stephen O’Brien): The UK has contributed to significant global progress in reducing deaths and illness from tuberculosis. Globally, 41 million people have been successfully treated since 1995, saving 6 million lives. The UK reaffirmed its commitment to tackling TB, including co-infection TB-HIV, in “UK aid: Changing lives, delivering results” and in the UK’s position paper on HIV in the developing world. A paper on our broader approach to health, including TB, will be published later this year.

Annette Brooke: I thank the Minister for his answer and welcome the commitment to addressing TB-HIV co-infection. When will the future health paper be published? When will stakeholders be consulted on it? Will there be specific targets on the prevention, diagnosis and treatment of TB where patients are not co-infected with HIV?

Mr O’Brien: I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her question. It is very important to recognise that there has been no de-prioritisation of TB, as a huge amount of effort is being made to tackle it. That broader health context and the paper that will appear later this year will set out the priorities and how we will attempt to ensure that we are pushing on the right things to bring down the incidence of TB, which is falling globally. Most importantly, we need to recognise that this depends on the interrelationship with other workings of the health systems.

Cathy Jamieson (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (Lab/Co-op): Does the Minister agree that one of the ways in which we will deal with the problems of global TB is through the development of new treatments? Is he aware of the work being done at the university of Strathclyde? Will he ensure that representations are made to ensure that research into the development of new TB drugs is continued?

Mr O’Brien: I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for that. She is right to pinpoint the fact that one of the difficulties in tackling TB is the emergence of very resistant strains. We are well aware of the research being done at the university of Strathclyde and elsewhere, which has a close link with the very big research commissioning programme for which DFID is responsible. I will be more than happy to pursue that in more detail later on.

Official Development Assistance

6. Stephen Pound (Ealing North) (Lab): What timetable has set for the introduction of legislation to provide that 0.7% of gross national income is spent on official development assistance.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Andrew Mitchell): The coalition Government have set out in the comprehensive spending review how we will meet our commitment to spend 0.7% of national income as overseas aid from 2013. We have made it clear that we will enshrine that commitment in law as soon as the parliamentary timetable allows.

Stephen Pound: I thank the Secretary of State for that comprehensive answer, and I wish that all his Cabinet colleagues were quite as enthusiastic and as committed. But can he give us a firm date, as “in the fullness of time” simply is not good enough in these circumstances?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman, who is enormously experienced in the ways of Parliament, will know that that is not a matter for me as the Secretary of State for International Development; it is a matter for the business managers and the usual channels. I suggest that he refers his question, on an appropriate occasion, to one of them.

Philip Davies (Shipley) (Con): Any Government can spend as much money as they want on overseas aid if they want to do so. Lots of Departments have very important priorities, so why do we have to have a specific target in law for overseas aid and not for anything else? Is this not just ludicrous gesture politics, rather than anything that is actually meaningful?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend is right to this extent: we could spend this hard-earned budget twice over, because there is need that we could satisfactorily address. But the world, many years ago, settled on a figure of 0.7%, and all of us have made a promise to stand by that commitment and the Government are absolutely
right, even in these difficult economic circumstances, not to seek to balance the books on the backs of the poorest people in the world.

Mr Speaker: Order. Far too many noisy private conversations are taking place on both sides of the House. I want to hear Harriet Harman.

Ms Harriet Harman (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): I strongly support the Secretary of State on the points he made. Will he join me in making the point that our aid is vital in the terrible situation for the people in the horn of Africa, where there is suffering on a massive scale? Will he also join me in paying tribute to the generosity of the British people in response to the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal? I strongly welcome his rapid response on Ethiopia, but what steps is he taking to ensure that other countries play their part, too, and what help is he giving to the people suffering in Somalia and Kenya?

Mr Mitchell: I thank the right hon. and learned Lady for her support. We are looking very carefully at how we can assist in Somalia, particularly in the south-central region where there is a weight of people crossing the border into northern Kenya. I expect to visit the region shortly to see what additional assistance can be given. The right hon. and learned Lady is also right that although there has been strong British leadership in all this, it is essential that other countries that can help put their shoulders to the wheel, too. We spend a lot of our time ensuring that others do precisely that.

Horn of Africa

7. Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): What recent assessment he has made of the food situation in the horn of Africa; and if he will make a statement. [65542]

The Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Andrew Mitchell): Up to 10 million people need emergency relief, especially in south-east Ethiopia, southern central Somalia and northern Kenya. We are seeing acute malnutrition in all these places. The crisis is provoked by the failure of the rains for two consecutive years and is characterised by the loss of crops and livestock, exacerbated by high food prices. The situation is unlikely to improve before the October rains.

Peter Aldous: Will the Secretary of State set out the steps that his Department is taking to build long-term resilience in the national agricultural systems in the countries in the horn of Africa so as to reduce the impact of potential crises such as the one they face?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend is right to make it clear that food security over the longer term is the key way to tackle such disasters. It is also true, however, that it is no fault of the horn of Africa that there have been no rains for the past two years and that a serious situation has been exacerbated by that. I can tell him that there has been significant progress and over the past 20 years, for example, the incidence of acute malnutrition in Ethiopia has gone down by some 50%.

Ann Clwyd (Cynon Valley) (Lab): The Minister does not have to visit the region to know what the problem is. Every night on television we are seeing children dying, the elderly dying and livestock dying—it is obvious what is happening. The aid agencies are short of money and surely we can do more right now.

Mr Mitchell: I can reassure the right hon. Lady. We were the first people to make it clear that we would give strong support, helping 1.3 million people in Ethiopia and ensuring that mothers with babies and children—330,000 of them—would receive rapid support. The Disasters Emergency Committee appeal has kicked into play and we are considering additional support to that which we are already giving to take account of the situation that she described in southern Somalia and particularly in Dadaab, which is now the biggest refugee camp in the world.

Mr Edward Leigh (Gainsborough) (Con): The House is full, everybody is chattering, everybody is obsessed by Murdoch but millions of people are in danger of dying in the horn of Africa. Will my right hon. Friend assure me that this is an absolute priority for him and that all the bureaucratic restraints that stop help going in this uniquely challenging environment—usually useful things such as value for money and protecting our workers—will be laid aside and that he will go right in there and help those suffering people?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend has eloquently made the case for the world taking urgent action to ensure that what is currently a crisis does not develop into a disaster. He has my assurance that the British Government are doing everything they can to help and I will, as I say, be going to Dadaab at the weekend with the head of the Disasters Emergency Committee appeal. Together, we will look to see what additional work Britain and the international community can do to help.

Topical Questions

T1. [65551] Mr David Evenett (Bexleyheath and Crayford) (Con): If he will make a statement on his departmental responsibilities.

The Secretary of State for International Development (Mr Andrew Mitchell): We are delivering the results agenda through our 27 bilateral programmes and we are working to tackle the emergency unfolding in the horn of Africa. We are acting quickly and decisively, as I have said, to prevent this crisis from becoming a catastrophe. We are also continuing to co-ordinate Britain’s contribution to post-conflict stabilisation in Libya for the time when the fighting is over. Since our last Question Time, Britain has chaired and led the drive to fund the next stage of the Global Alliance for Vaccines and Immunisation for the poor world.

Mr Evenett: I thank the Secretary of State for his response. With a record number of countries applying for vaccine funding from GAVI, what results does he expect to be achieved following last month’s success at London’s pledging conference of Ministers, business leaders and charities?
Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend is right that the conference was an extraordinary success—exceeding the pledge target of $3.7 billion by some $600 million. As a result, the world will be able to vaccinate a quarter of a billion children over the next five years. Britain will vaccinate a child every two seconds and save a child’s life every two minutes as a result of this initiative.

Mark Lazarowicz (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab/Co-op): I am sure that all Members will join me in congratulating South Sudan on achieving independence at the weekend. The Government of South Sudan are now planning to review all their international oil contracts. Does the Minister agree that although our aid is important for desperately poor people in South Sudan, it is vital that global oil companies pay their fair share of their profits in tax in that country? Will he ensure that DFID uses its expertise to help South Sudan to get fair tax returns from the oil companies?

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Gentleman is right that this country has just been born and has $1.7 billion of revenues, and it is essential that the money is used transparently. Britain is a very strong leader on the extractive industries transparency initiative and my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer has made it clear that he expects the European Union to look at how it can develop its own version of the Dodd-Frank legislation that has been laid in the United States.

T6. [65556] Neil Carmichael (Stroud) (Con): Will my right hon. Friend update the House on the progress being made on developing resistance to malaria?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend will have had a chance to read the detailed plan that has been set out. Britain is committed, over the next five years, to ensuring that the prevalence of malaria in the most affected countries is reduced by 50%. We believe that tackling malaria, which kills so many children needlessly every day, should be towards the top of our list of initiatives.

T2. [65552] Lyn Brown (West Ham) (Lab): I was privileged to be part of a delegation that visited the Democratic Republic of the Congo and monitored the last election there and I was really moved when I talked to women there about their experiences of rape and sexual violence. I would be very grateful if the Secretary of State would tell me what support he is managing to offer to Margot Wallstrom, the UN Secretary-General’s special envoy on sexual violence in conflict.

Mr Mitchell: The hon. Lady is absolutely right. The tackling of sexual violence and violence against women is now embedded in all our bilateral programmes. In the DRC, the International Rescue Committee is doing outstanding work on this specific agenda, as I hope she will have seen during her visit. She has our commitment that the coalition Government have always said that putting girls and women at the forefront of our international development efforts is essential.

T7. [65557] Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): Following President Obama’s decision to cut $800 million of aid to Pakistan, can the Secretary of State allay the concerns of some of my constituents that the UK’s aid budget there is necessary and is being well spent?

Mr Mitchell: My hon. Friend is right. The $800 million is part of the US military budget. All of Britain’s aid that is spent in Pakistan, which is particularly focused on trying to get 4 million children, especially girls, into school, is not spent through the Government. We are very anxious to ensure that there is always accountability to the British public and that aid is transparently used. Those policies will continue.

PRIME MINISTER

The Prime Minister was asked—

Engagements

Q1. [65521] Duncan Hames (Chippenham) (LD): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 13 July.

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): This morning I had meetings with ministerial colleagues and others, and in addition to my duties in the House, I shall have further such meetings later today.

Duncan Hames: Secretly deleting voicemails left for a missing teenager, buying the silence of public figures who would incriminate your business, and publishing the confidential medical details of a disabled child who just happens to have a famous father: I ask the Prime Minister—are any of these the actions of a fit and proper person?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes an extremely powerful point in a powerful way. We have to be clear about what is happening here. There is a firestorm, if you like, that is engulfing parts of the media, parts of the police and, indeed, our political system’s ability to
respond. What we must do in the coming days and weeks is think above all of the victims, such as the Dowler family, who are watching this today, and make doubly sure that we get to the bottom of what happened and prosecute those who are guilty.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): Yesterday I met the family of Milly Dowler, who have shown incredible bravery and strength in speaking out about what happened to them, the hacking of their daughter’s phone, and their terrible treatment at the hands of the News of the World. I am sure the whole House will want to pay tribute to their courage and bravery. [HON. MEMBERS: “Hear, hear.”] Does the Prime Minister now agree with me that it is an insult to the family that Rebekah Brooks, who was editor of the News of the World at the time, is still in her post at News International?

The Prime Minister: I have made it very clear that she was right to resign and that that resignation should have been accepted. There needs to be root-and-branch change at this entire organisation. It has now become increasingly clear that while everybody, to start with, wanted in some way to separate what was happening at News International and what is happening with BSkyB, that is simply not possible. What has happened at this company is disgraceful. It has got to be addressed at every level and they should stop thinking about mergers when they have to sort out the mess they have created.

Edward Miliband: I thank the Prime Minister for that answer. He is right to take the position that Rebekah Brooks should go. When such a serious cloud hangs over News Corporation, and with the abuses and the systematic pattern of deceit that we have seen, does he agree with me—he clearly does—that it would be quite wrong for them to expand their stake in the British media? Does he further agree that if the House of Commons speaks with one voice today—I hope the Prime Minister will come to the debate—Rupert Murdoch agrees with me—he clearly does—that it would be quite disgraceful. It has got to be addressed at every level and they should stop thinking about mergers when they have to sort out the mess they have created.

The Prime Minister: I agree with what the right hon. Gentleman has said. It is good that the House of Commons is going to speak with one voice. As he knows, the Government have a job to do to act at all times within the law, and my right hon. Friend the Culture Secretary has to obey every aspect of the law—laws that were on the whole put in place by the last Government.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Or change the law.

The Prime Minister: And yes, as the hon. Gentleman says, we should look at amending the laws. We should make sure that the “fit and proper” test is right. We should make sure that the Competition Act 1998 and the Enterprise Act 2002 are right. It is perfectly acceptable, at one and the same time, to obey the law as a Government but to send a message from the House of Commons that this business has got to stop the business of mergers and get on with the business of cleaning its stables.

Edward Miliband: I look forward to debating these issues with the Leader of the House, who will be speaking for the Government later in the debate. I know the Prime Minister is to make a statement shortly about the inquiry, but can he confirm something that we agreed last night—that we need to make sure that we get to the bottom not just of what happened at our newspapers, but of the relationships between politicians and the press? Does he agree that if we expect editors and members of the press to give evidence under oath, so should current and past politicians?

The Prime Minister: I agree with that. First, on the issue of the debate, we are debating now, which is right, and we are going to have a statement in the House of Commons, and I will stand here and answer questions from as many Members of Parliament who want to ask them. I think we should focus on the substance.

As the Leader of the Opposition said, we had an excellent meeting last night. We discussed the nature of the inquiry that needs to take place. We discussed the terms of reference. I sent those terms of reference to his office this morning. We have had some amendments. We are happy to accept those amendments. They will still be draft terms of reference, and I want to hear what the Dowler family and others have to say so that we can move ahead in a way that takes the whole country with us as we deal with this problem.

I also think that if we are going to say to the police, “You must be more transparent and cut out corruption”, and if we are going to say to the media, “You must be more transparent and cut out this malpractice”, then yes, the relationship between politicians and the media must change and we must be more transparent, too, about meetings, particularly with executives, editors, proprietors and the rest of it, and I will be setting out some proposals for precisely that in a minute or two.

Edward Miliband: I want to thank the Prime Minister for those answers; they are answers the whole country will have wanted to hear. Can I also ask him to clear up one specific issue? It has now been confirmed that his chief of staff and his director of strategy were given specific information before the general election by The Guardian. The information showed that Andy Coulson, while editing the News of the World, had hired Jonathan Rees, a man jailed for seven years for a criminal conspiracy and who had made payments to police on behalf of the News of the World. Can the Prime Minister tell us what happened to that significant information that was given to his chief of staff?

The Prime Minister: I would like to answer this, if I may, Mr Speaker, in full, and I do need to give a very full answer. First, all these questions relate to the fact that I hired a tabloid editor. I did so on the basis of assurances he gave me that he did not know about the phone hacking and was not involved in criminality. He gave those self-same assurances to the police, to a Select Committee of this House and under oath to a court of law. If it turns out he lied, it will not be the fault of the Prime Minister: he should not have been in government; it will be that he should be prosecuted. But I do believe that we must stick to the principle that you are innocent until proven guilty.

Now, let me deal directly with the information given to my office by figures from The Guardian in February last year. First, this information was not passed on to me, but let me be clear that this was not some secret stash of information; almost all of it was published in
The Guardian in February 2010, at the same time my office was approached. It contained no allegations directly linking Andy Coulson to illegal behaviour and it did not shed any further light on the issue of phone hacking, so it was not drawn to my attention by my office.

What is more, Mr Speaker—let me just make this point—I met the editor of The Guardian the very next month and he did not raise it with me once. I met him a year later and he did not raise it then either. Indeed, if this information was so significant, why have I been asked not one question about it at a press conference or in this House? The reason is that it did not add anything to the assurances that I was given. Let me say once more that if I was lied to, if the police were lied to, or if the Select Committee was lied to, it would be a matter of deep regret and a matter for a criminal prosecution.

[Interuption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. Anybody might think that orchestrated noise is taking place—[Interuption.] Order. The House will come to order and these exchanges will continue in an orderly way.

Edward Miliband: The Prime Minister has just made a very important admission. He has admitted that his chief of staff was given information before the general election that Andy Coulson had hired a man who had been jailed for seven years for a criminal conspiracy and who made payments to the police on behalf of the News of the World. This evidence casts serious doubt on Mr Coulson’s assurances that the phone hacking over which he resigned was an isolated example of illegal activity. The Prime Minister says that his chief of staff did not pass on this very serious information. Can he now tell us what action he proposes to take against his chief of staff?

The Prime Minister: I have given, I think, the fullest possible answer I could to the right hon. Gentleman. Let me just say this. He can stand there and ask questions about Andy Coulson. I can stand here and ask questions about Tom Baldwin. He can ask questions about my private office. I can ask questions about Damian McBride. But do you know what, Mr Speaker? I think the public and the victims of this appalling scandal want us to rise above this and deal with the problems that this country faces.

Edward Miliband: He just doesn’t get it, Mr Speaker. I say this to the Prime Minister. He was warned by the Deputy Prime Minister about hiring Andy Coulson. He was warned by Lord Ashdown about hiring Andy Coulson. He has now admitted in the House of Commons today that his chief of staff was given complete evidence which contradicted Andy Coulson’s previous account. The Prime Minister must now publish the fullest account of all the information that was provided and what he did and why those warnings went unheeded. Most of all, he should apologise for the catastrophic error of judgment he made in hiring Andy Coulson.

The Prime Minister: I am afraid, Mr Speaker, that the person who is not getting it is the Leader of the Opposition. What the public want us to do is address this firestorm. They want us to sort out bad practices at the media. They want us to fix the corruption in the police. They want a proper public inquiry. And they are entitled to ask, when these problems went on for so long, for so many years, what was it that happened in the last decade? When was the police investigation that did not work? Where was the public inquiry over the last 10 years? We have now got a full-on police investigation that will see proper prosecutions and, I hope, proper convictions, and we will have a public inquiry run by a judge to get to the bottom of this issue. That is the leadership I am determined to provide. [Interuption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. Mr David—[Interuption.] Order. Mr David—[Interuption.] Order. I say to the Children’s Minister: try to calm down and behave like an adult, and if you cannot—if it is beyond you—leave the Chamber and we will manage without you. Mr David Ward.

Q2. [65522] Mr David Ward (Bradford East) (LD): Thank you, Mr Speaker. What a case of the—[Interuption.] Mr Speaker: Order. This is intolerable behaviour as far as the public—[Interuption.] No, it is not funny. Only in your mind, Mr Loughton, is it funny. It is not funny at all; it is disgraceful.

Mr Ward: What a case of the pot calling the kettle black, but perhaps we can just have a pantomime interval for a moment. Is the Prime Minister aware that there are now young people in Bradford being quoted, without convictions or claims, £53,000 to insure their first car? These ridiculous premiums are being driven by insurance companies selling fresh details to personal injury lawyers. What are we going to do to outlaw—

Mr Speaker: Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a very good point about the problem of referral fees that are driving up the cost of insurance for many people. The right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) has made some very powerful points about this. There was a report to the Government calling for referral fees to be banned. I am very sympathetic to this, and I know my right hon. and learned Friend the Justice Secretary is too, and we hope to make some progress.

Q3. [65523] Ian Lucas (Wrexham) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister, if asked, give evidence to the judge-led public inquiry that he is setting up today?

The Prime Minister: Of course. The point about the inquiry, which I will be announcing in a moment or two, is that it will be judge led, it will take its powers from the Inquiries Act 2005, and it will be able to call people under oath. I think this is absolutely vital. As I say, there are three pillars to this. There is the issue of police corruption, there is the issue of what happened at the media, and there are also questions for politicians past, present and future.

Q4. [65524] Matthew Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con): My constituents are increasingly concerned about the deepening problems in the eurozone. Will the Prime Minister reassure me that he is doing everything he can to keep us out of it and to urge the eurozone to act?
The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right that we have got to stay out of the eurozone. Being a member of the eurozone would take away the flexibility we currently have. We have to remember that 40% of our exports go to eurozone countries. We should therefore be making constructive suggestions about proper stress tests for their banks, backed up by recapitalisation; involving the private sector to make Greece’s debt burden more sustainable; and earning fiscal credibility through concrete action to reduce their excessive deficits. Basically, in my view eurozone countries have to recognise that they have to do more together and faster; they have to get ahead of the market rather than just respond to the next crisis.

Q5. [65525] Mrs Mary Glindon (North Tyneside) (Lab): Lord Ashdown says that he wanted No. 10 last year of the terrible damage that it would suffer if Andy Coulson was appointed. Can the Prime Minister say precisely how he reacted to that powerful warning?

The Prime Minister: I made this point some moments ago. Of course, the decision to employ a tabloid editor meant that there were a number of people who said that it was not a good idea, particularly when that tabloid editor had been at the News of the World when bad things had happened. The decision I made was to accept the assurances that he gave me. As I have said, those assurances were given to the police, a Select Committee and a court of law. If I was lied to and others were lied to, that would be a matter of deep regret. I could not be clearer about it than that. We must ensure that we judge people as innocent until proven guilty.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): This week I received another e-mail from a constituent regarding metal and cable theft. This time, it told of an elderly lady who had a fall at home and was unable to raise the alarm because the cables in the village had been stolen for the second time in about as many weeks. This is a growing problem across the country. The legislation relating to this matter dates back to 1964. Please can we have an urgent review to ensure that scrap metal dealers who accept stolen metal are prevented from doing so and prosecuted?

The Prime Minister: I have every sympathy with my hon. Friend. There was a case in my constituency where the lead from the Witney church roof was stolen. I have been trying to ensure that these crimes are taken seriously by the police, because they put massive costs on to voluntary bodies, churches, charities and businesses. We must ensure that they are not seen as second-order crimes, because the level of this crime is growing and it is very worrying.

Q6. [65526] Mr Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): The debate this afternoon will be vital, because it will show the House united in its revulsion at what was done to Milly Dowler’s family. May I ask the Prime Minister to make urgent inquiries into whether families of the victims of 9/11 were similarly targeted by the criminals at News International? If they were, will he raise it with his counterpart in the United States?

The Prime Minister: I will certainly look at that. In the statement I am about to make, I will give some figures for just how many people’s phones the Metropolitan police currently think were hacked and how many of them they have contacted so far. They have pledged to contact every single one. I met the Metropolitan Police Commissioner Paul Stephenson last night to seek further reassurances about the scale of the police operation that is under way. In what was—if we can put it this way—a mixed appearance by police officers at the Home Affairs Committee yesterday, I thought that Sue Akers, who is leading this investigation, acquitted herself extremely well. We should have confidence that the Metropolitan police will get to the bottom of this.

Q7. [65527] Dr Thérèse Coffey (Suffolk Coastal) (Con): With its ambition of being the greenest county, Suffolk is already committed to a low-carbon world with offshore wind farms, anaerobic digestion, nuclear power and a recycling rate of more than 60%. The Prime Minister is always welcome to visit. Will he give his backing to our local enterprise partnership’s ambition to enhance skills training to fill the new job opportunities that will be created locally?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right that we have an urgent review to ensure that scrap metal dealers who accept stolen metal are prevented from doing so and prosecuted?

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The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a good point. I congratulate her on branding Suffolk as “the green coast”. There is a big opportunity, particularly in the light of what my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change has said, in green jobs, renewable energy and new nuclear. A vital thing to encourage the inward investment that we want is to demonstrate that we will build up our skills base. That is where local enterprise partnerships can play such a valuable role.

Q8. [65528] Rushanara Ali (Bethnal Green and Bow) (Lab): Can the Prime Minister tell the House whether he had any conversations about phone hacking with Andy Coulson at the time of his resignation? Will he place in the Library a log of any meetings and phone calls between him and Andy Coulson following his resignation?

The Prime Minister: As I said, perhaps before the hon. Lady wrote her question—or had it written—of course I sought assurances from Andy Coulson and those assurances were given. [Interruption.] Yes, absolutely. Those assurances were given not just at the time to me but subsequently to the Select Committee and to a criminal case under oath. They were repeatedly given. Let me say again for the avoidance of any doubt that if those assurances turn out not to be true, the point is not just that he should not have worked in government, it is that he should, like others, face the full force of the law.

Q9. [65529] Mr David Burrows (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Can I raise with the Prime Minister a different case of hacking—the computer hacker Gary McKinnon? While I recognise that the Home Secretary has a legal process to follow, does the Prime Minister share the concern for my constituent’s nine-year nightmare? He feels that his life is literally hanging by a thread that is waiting to be cut by extradition.

The Prime Minister: I do recognise the seriousness of this case, and the Deputy Prime Minister and I actually raised it with President Obama when he visited. I think the point is that it is not so much about the alleged offence, which everyone knows is a very serious offence, and we can understand why the Americans feel so
strongly about it. The case is now in front of my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary, who has to consider reports about Gary McKinnon’s health and well-being. It is right that she does that in a proper and effective way—I am sorry to use the word again today—quasi-judicial way.

Mr Elfyn Llwyd (Dwyfor Meirionnydd) (PC): In these days of a rush to make savage cuts in public spending, the decimation of the police service and the hammering of individuals because of the withdrawal of legal aid, can I ask the Prime Minister to justify the following expenditure? At the beginning of last month, a serviceman from Northern Ireland asked for a non-urgent pair of boots costing £45. They were dispatched from defence base Bicester by private courier to Northern Ireland, at a cost of £714.80. Is it not time the Prime Minister got a grip of this?

The Prime Minister: I know that former Health Ministers wanted to hear the rattle of every bedpan, and maybe I need to see the order of every pair of boots in the military, but I recognise the point the right hon. Gentleman makes. One of the things we are trying to do in the Ministry of Defence is recognise that there is a huge amount of back-office and logistics costs, and we want to make that more efficient so that we can actually spend money on the front line. The example he gives is a good one, and I shall check it out and see if we can save some money.

Q10. [65530]Mr Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): Can the Prime Minister assure the House that all illegal press activity under the last Government will be investigated now, and that that will include the criminal conspiracy between the highest levels in that last Government and parts of the Murdoch empire, including the blagging of bank accounts of Lord Ashcroft in a bid to undermine him and his position as laid out in “Dirty politics, Dirty times”?

The Prime Minister: The point about the inquiry that we are shortly going to discuss is that it will look at the relationship between politicians and media groups, across the whole issue of that relationship including as it relates to media policy. I think that is extremely important. The inquiry will have the ability to call politicians—serving politicians and previous Prime Ministers—to get to the bottom of what happened and how unhealthy the relationship was. That is what needs to happen.

Margaret Hodge (Barking) (Lab): On Monday, the MOD permanent secretary told the Public Accounts Committee that the Prime Minister himself blocked the National Audit Office from accessing relevant National Security Council documents. The auditors considered them essential to assess whether the decisions on the aircraft carrier in the defence review represented value for money. That refusal is unprecedented. In the interests of full transparency and accountability to Parliament, will the Prime Minister now agree to immediately release the information that the NAO needs?

The Prime Minister: The short answer is that we were following precedent, but the long answer is that if the right hon. Lady wants me to come to her Committee and explain what an appalling set of decisions the last Government made on aircraft carriers, I will. The delay alone by the Government whom she worked for added £1.6 billion to the cost of the aircraft carriers. So if she wants me to turn up and not just tell her what we discussed in Cabinet but lay out the full detail of the waste that her Government were responsible for, name the day.

Q11. [65531]Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): Following a question from me to the Prime Minister’s predecessor three and a half years ago, the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown) set up pilot schemes to provide sign language support for deaf parents and their children in Devon and Merseyside. Those have now been completed, and they were a huge success. Will the Prime Minister meet a delegation of deaf parents, their children and their representatives to discuss how that sign language support can be extended to all children and their parents across the UK?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend makes a very good point. We do a lot to support different languages throughout the UK. Signing is an incredibly valuable language for many people in our country. Those pilot schemes were successful. I looked at what the previous Prime Minister said to him when he asked that question, and I will certainly arrange a meeting for him with the Department for Education to see how we can take this forward.

Mr Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry North West) (Lab): My question to the Prime Minister concerns the contract for the Thameslink rail programme. As he will be aware, that is of great concern throughout the House, and with 20,000 manufacturing jobs at risk, it is right that it should be. Will he confirm that no contract has yet been signed, and indeed that no contract can be let or signed until the funding package is determined? That is a complicated process.

This is the heart of my question to the Prime Minister: given that the funding package—[Interruption. / Twenty thousand jobs are at stake! Given that 20,000 jobs are at risk, will the Prime Minister look at holding the competition for that funding package with the Secretary of State for Trade—

Mr Speaker: Order. I think we have got it.

The Prime Minister: I know that the right hon. Gentleman cares deeply about this issue. Bombardier is a great company, and it has a great future in our country. We want to see it succeed, but I have to say that in this case, the procurement process was designed and initiated by the previous Government. This Government were bound by the criteria that they set, and therefore we have to continue with a decision that has been made according to those criteria. But we are now looking at all the EU rules and the procurement rules to see whether we can change and make better for future issues like that one.

Q12. [65532]Stephen Mosley (City of Chester) (Con): Will the Prime Minister join me in calling for the electrification of the Crewe to Chester railway line, which would provide a major and immediate boost to people in Chester and beyond in north Wales? That would also eventually link us to the much needed High Speed 2.
The Prime Minister: I am well aware of this campaign. I seem to remember spending a lot of time at Crewe station during the last Parliament, normally accompanied by people dressed in top hat and tails—some of my colleagues will remember that.

My hon. Friend’s suggestion is not in the current programme, but we will look sympathetically at it. We want to see more electrification of railway lines in our country.

Gavin Shuker (Luton South) (Lab/Co-op): The right hon. Gentleman’s Government said that university tuition fees would average £7,500, but in actual fact they average £8,400. How can he open the UK taxpayer to such a liability of £0.8 billion over this Parliament?

The Prime Minister: Let me give the hon. Gentleman some of the figures. Only nine universities are charging £9,000 for every student; 58 universities will not charge £9,000 for any of their courses; and 108 out of 124 further education colleges will charge less than £6,000 for all their courses. However, the point I would make is this: university degrees have not suddenly started by people dressed in top hat and tails—some of my colleagues will remember that.

The Prime Minister: The point I would make is this: university degrees have not suddenly started to cost £7,000, £8,000 or £9,000; they have always cost that. The question is this: do we ask graduates to pay—successful graduates who are earning more than £21,000—or do we ask the taxpayers to pay? The money does not grow on trees. We have made our choice, and the Labour party, which introduced tuition fees, must come up with its answer.

Q13. [65533] Mr James Clappison (Hertsmere) (Con): Amid the turmoil in other European economies caused by the euro, is not it essential that this country continues to take steps to reduce its debt, and that it steers clear of paying for any future EU bail-out, whatever advice to the contrary the Prime Minister receives from the Opposition?

The Prime Minister: The point I would make is this: the problem is not only the restrictions of the euro, but the building up of unsustainable levels of debt. Although we are out of the euro, that does not mean that we do not have to deal with our debts—we absolutely do. However, we have the opportunity of being quite a safe haven for people. We can actually see our market interest rates come down because of the action that this Government are taking. We must keep that up, but we must also recognise that the eurozone sorting out its own problems is in our interests, so we must be helpful and constructive with the work that needs to be done.

Q14. [65534] Yvonne Fovargue (Makerfield) (Lab): Last week, I was approached about a fee-paying debt management company that had advised its client to take out a remortgage for £50,000 to pay his debts. The company paid £11,000 to his creditors and went out of business, taking the rest of his money. I have many other examples like this. Self-regulation simply is not working in this industry. Will the Prime Minister urgently consider regulating the sector and provide the Office of Fair Trading with the resources necessary to take enforcement action swiftly so that vulnerable people do not continue to be ripped off?

The Prime Minister: I know that the hon. Lady has not just constituency experience of this but managed a citizens advice bureau, and so has huge experience of people with debt problems. Citizens Advice is probably the finest organisation in our country for helping people with debt. I will certainly consider her suggestion to consider whether the sector can be better regulated, what we can do to support citizens advice bureaux at this difficult time, and the issue of credit unions and how we can lead to their expansion.

Q15. [65535] Gavin Barwell (Croydon Central) (Con): The whole House will share the outrage that the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown) expressed this week about the publication of private medical information relating to his son. He also said that when he was Prime Minister he tried to set up a judicial inquiry into phone hacking. Will my right hon. Friend tell me what detailed preparatory work he inherited?

The Prime Minister: I have every sympathy with my predecessor, particularly over the blagging of his details by a newspaper, if that is what happened. In public life we are all subject to huge amounts of extra scrutiny, and that is fair, but it is not fair when laws are broken. We have all suffered from this, and the fact is that we have all been too silent about it. That is part of the problem. Your bins are gone through by some media organisation, but you hold back from dealing with it because you want good relations with the media. We need some honesty about this issue on a cross-party basis so that we can take on this problem.

I have to say that I did not inherit any work on a public inquiry, but I am determined that the one we will set up, with the support of the right hon. Gentleman the Leader of the Opposition, will get the job done.

Mr Michael McCann (East Kilbride, Strathaven and Lesmahagow) (Lab): The 45th international children’s games will come to the fair county of Lanarkshire at the start of August. Some 1,500 12 to 15-year-olds will participate in nine sports across the county. Will the Prime Minister congratulate two Labour local authorities—North Lanarkshire council and South Lanarkshire council—on their foresight in bidding for and hosting the games? Will he send a representative of the Government to the event?

The Prime Minister: I certainly congratulate the two local authorities. Tragically, there are not too many Conservative local authorities I can congratulate in Scotland. However, I am happy to congratulate the hon. Gentleman. It sounds like an excellent initiative, and I wish everyone taking part the very best of luck.

Zac Goldsmith (Richmond Park) (Con): Will the Prime Minister confirm that all witnesses to all aspects of the promised inquiry will be required to give evidence under oath?

The Prime Minister: As I will explain in a minute, there will be one inquiry but with two parts, and it will be led by a judge, who will be the one who will eventually agree the terms of reference, set out the way it will work and be responsible for calling people under oath.
Phone Hacking

12.33 pm

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): With permission, Mr Speaker, I would like to make a statement. In recent days, the whole country has been shocked by the revelations of the phone hacking scandal. What this country—and the House—has to confront is an episode that is, frankly, disgraceful: accusations of widespread lawbreaking by parts of our press: alleged corruption by some police officers; and, as we have just discussed, the failure of our political system over many, many years to tackle a problem that has been getting worse. We must at all times keep the real victims at the front and centre of this debate. Relatives of those who died at the hands of terrorism, war heroes and murder victims—people who have already suffered in a way that we can barely imagine—have been made to suffer all over again.

I believe that we all want the same thing: press, police and politicians who serve the public. Last night the Deputy Prime Minister and I met the Leader of the Opposition. I also met the Chairs of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, the Home Affairs Committee and the Justice Committee to discuss the best way forward. Following these consultations, I want to set out today how we intend to proceed: first, on the public inquiry; secondly, on the issues surrounding News International’s proposed takeover of BSkyB; and thirdly, on ethics in the police service and its relationship with the press.

Before I do that, I will update the House on the current criminal investigation into phone hacking. I met Sir Paul Stephenson last night. He assured me that the investigation is fully resourced. It is one of the largest currently under way in the country, and is being carried out by a completely different team from the one that carried out the original investigation. It is being led by Deputy Assistant Commissioner Sue Akers, who I believe impressed the Home Affairs Committee yesterday. Her team is looking through 11,000 pages containing 3,870 names, and around 4,000 mobile and 5,000 landline phone numbers. The team has contacted 170 people so far, and will contact every single person named in those documents. The commissioner’s office informed me this morning that the team has so far made eight arrests and undertaken numerous interviews.

Let me now turn to the action that the Government are taking. Last week in the House I set out our intention to establish an independent public inquiry into phone hacking and other illegal practices in the British press. We have looked carefully at what the nature of the inquiry should be. We want it to be one that is as robust as possible—one that can get to the truth fastest and also get to work the quickest, and, vitally, one that commands the full confidence of the public. Clearly there are two pieces of work that have to be done. First, we need a full investigation into wrongdoing in the press and the police, including the failure of the first police investigation. Secondly, we need a review of regulation of the press. We would like to get on with both those elements as quickly as possible, while being mindful of the ongoing criminal investigations. So, after listening carefully, we have decided that the best way to proceed is with one inquiry, but in two parts.

I can tell the House that the inquiry will be led by one of the most senior judges in the country, Lord Justice Leveson. He will report to both the Home Secretary and the Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport. The inquiry will be established under the Inquiries Act 2005, which means that it will have the power to summon witnesses, including newspaper reporters, management, proprietors, policemen and politicians of all parties, to give evidence under oath and in public.

Mr Ronnie Campbell (Blyth Valley) (Lab): Murdoch?

The Prime Minister: Proprietors were included in that list.

Starting as soon as possible, Lord Justice Leveson, assisted by a panel of senior independent figures with relevant expertise in media, broadcasting, regulation and government will inquire into the culture, practices and ethics of the press; its relationship with the police; the failure of the current system of regulation; the contacts made; and discussions had, between national newspapers and politicians; why previous warnings about press misconduct were not heeded; and the issue of cross-media ownership. He will make recommendations for a new, more effective way of regulating the press—one that supports its freedom, plurality and independence from Government, but which also demands the highest ethical and professional standards. He will also make recommendations about the future conduct of relations between politicians and the press. That part of the inquiry that we hope will report within 12 months.

The second part of the inquiry will examine the extent of unlawful or improper conduct at the News of the World and other newspapers, and the way in which management failures may have allowed it to happen. That part of the inquiry will also look into the original police investigation and the issue of corrupt payments to police officers, and will consider the implications for the relationships between newspapers and the police.

Lord Justice Leveson has agreed to these draft terms of reference. I am placing them in the Library today, and we will send them to the devolved Administrations. No one should be in any doubt of our intention to get to the bottom of the truth and learn the lessons for the future.

Next is the issue of News International’s bid to take over BSkyB. By the day, we are hearing shocking allegations: allegations that royal protection officers were in the pay of some newspapers; allegations that the former Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, had his personal details blagged by another News International title. As both the alleged nature of the malpractice and the scope of the newspapers involved widen, serious questions must be asked about News Corporation’s proposed takeover of BSkyB. Added to this, News Corporation has withdrawn its proposed undertakings in lieu of reference to the Competition Commission. That is why on Monday my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport referred the bid to the Competition Commission. The relevant independent authorities will now have the time to take an exhaustive look at all the relevant issues and come to a considered decision on whether the takeover should proceed. It will then be up to the Secretary of State to make the final decision, in his quasi-judicial capacity.
[The Prime Minister]

In every way we are following—and we must follow—the law with respect to News International’s proposed acquisition of BSkyB, but let me repeat what I said on Monday. In my view, this business should be focused not on mergers and takeovers, but on clearing up the mess and getting its house in order, and that is what the House will be voting on tonight. Let me also say this. The people involved, whether they were directly responsible for the wrongdoing, whether they sanctioned it or whether they covered it up, and however high or low they go, must not only be brought to justice; they must also have no future role in running a media company in our country.

Now let me turn to the issue of ethics in the police, and in particular their relationship with the press. Of course it is important that there is a good relationship between the media and the police. Police often use newspapers and other media to hunt down wanted criminals and to appeal for information. However, allegations have been made that some corrupt police officers may have taken payments from newspapers. And there are wider concerns that the relationship between the police and the press can also be too close.

When I spoke to Sir Paul Stephenson yesterday, he made it clear that he is as determined as I am that all aspects of the police relationship with the media should be beyond reproach. On the allegation concerning improper payments to police officers, I can assure the House that the Metropolitan police immediately referred the case to the Independent Police Complaints Commission. Since then, the IPCC’s most senior commissioner has been supervising the Met’s work to identify the officers who may have taken these payments. As soon as any officers are identified, the commission has publicly made it clear that it will move to a full independent investigation drawing on all the available expertise necessary so that the public are reassured.

My right hon. Friend the Home Secretary has been assured by the commission that it has both the powers and the resources needed to see this through. It will go wherever the evidence leads it, and it will have full powers to investigate fully any police wrongdoing that it might uncover. The Home Secretary has also today commissioned a report from the IPCC on its experience of investigating corruption in the police service and any lessons that can be learned. The initial findings of this will be delivered to her by the end of the summer. I can also tell the House that in addition to the work of the judicial inquiry on the wider relationship between the police and the press, Sir Paul Stephenson is looking to invite a senior public figure to advise him on the ethics that should underpin that relationship for his own force, the Metropolitan police. In particular, this figure will advise him on how to ensure maximum transparency and public confidence in how the arrangements are working.

As we discussed a few moments ago, if we are calling for greater transparency from the police, I think it is only right that we provide it in Government, too. After all, as I have said, one of the reasons why we got into this situation is because, over the decades, politicians and the press have spent time courting support, not confronting the problems. So I will be consulting the Cabinet Secretary on an amendment to the ministerial code to require Ministers to record all meetings with newspaper and other media proprietors, senior editors and executives, regardless of the nature of the meeting. Permanent secretaries and special advisers will also be required to record such meetings. This information should be published quarterly. It is a first for our country, and alongside the other steps we are taking, will help to make the UK Government one of the most transparent in the world. I will also be discussing this with the Opposition, and perhaps we can adopt it on a cross-party basis.

After this statement I will be meeting the family of Milly Dowler. None of us can imagine what they have gone through, but I do know that they, like everyone else in this country, want their politicians—all of us—to bring this ugly chapter to a close, and ensure that nothing like it can ever happen again. It is in that spirit that I commend this statement to the House.

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): I start by thanking the Prime Minister for his statement, and for the meeting last night. The revelations of the past week have shocked the whole country, and the public now rightly expect those of us in this House, who represent them, to provide not just an echo of that shock but the leadership necessary to start putting things right. That is why it is in the interests of the whole House and the country that we move forward swiftly, comprehensively and, wherever possible, on an agreed basis.

Let me ask the Prime Minister first about the timing, nature and scope of the inquiry. I welcome the establishment of the inquiry today. Can he confirm that it will be staffed and up and running before the recess? Can he also confirm that, from the moment the judge is appointed today, it will be an offence for anyone to destroy documents related to the issues of the inquiry? And can the Prime Minister tell us what steps he will be taking to preserve documents in Downing street that might be relevant to the judge’s inquiry?

Turning to how the inquiry will operate, we welcome a number of aspects of today’s announcement that clearly build on the way forward that we have been calling for. It is right that there should be a single judge-led inquiry; we have made it clear that it must be judge led if it is to get to the bottom of what happened and when. Can the Prime Minister confirm that it is being set up under the Inquiries Act 2005, and that it will have the power to compel witnesses? Will he explain how he envisages the judge and the panel that he mentioned operating together?

As for the scope of the inquiry, in his press conference last Friday the Prime Minister set out a number of areas that he envisaged being covered, and he has gone further today. I think it is right that the Government have now decided to follow our advice, and the clear views of the Hacked Off campaign and the Dowler family, in opting for a far broader inquiry.

Does the Prime Minister agree with me that yesterday’s important sitting of the Home Affairs Select Committee made it very clear that questions about the relationship between the media and the police run far wider than what was covered by the first investigation? We must take the steps necessary to restore the public’s faith in the police’s ability to hold to account all those who have broken the law.
Similarly, it can only be right that the inquiry has been broadened to include the relationship between politicians and the press. On the specifics of that—the relationship between politicians and the press, and the relationship between the police and the press—can the Prime Minister assure the House that these aspects of the inquiry will be very much judge led, and that those who appear as witnesses to the inquiry will be under oath? [HON. MEMBERS: “He said that!”] If that is the case, I welcome it.

Alongside these important questions about behaviour in Britain’s newsrooms, the police and the relationship between politicians and the press, a number of additional issues need consideration. On the issue of media regulation, does he agree that our instinct should continue to be for self-regulation; but does he further agree that it needs to be proved that self-regulation can be made to work? Will he comment on the work being done on privacy issues and explain whether he sees that as being part of this investigation?

I welcome the decision to make cross-media ownership part of the inquiry. Does he agree with me that abuses of power are more likely to happen where there are excessive concentrations of power? Will he confirm that the recommendations made under this inquiry can be legislated for in the Government’s forthcoming communications Act? May I suggest that it would be wise for him to bring that Act forward from its currently planned date of 2015?

Finally, I welcome the Prime Minister’s proposals about transparency. I hope and expect he will ensure that that proposal is implemented in a retrospective way about transparency. I hope and expect he will ensure that Act forward from its currently planned date of 2015?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for the helpful meeting we had last night and for the constructive attitude that he is showing in trying to get the terms of reference right and to get the inquiry under way in an agreed format. I will try to answer his questions as directly as I can.

The inquiry will start at once, in the sense of getting the terms of reference published: they will have to be consulted on and sent to the devolved institutions; we have to draw up the names for the panel—but we are not going to waste any time with that. We will get on with it. On the issue of destroying evidence, let me be clear that once a criminal investigation is under way it is a crime to destroy any evidence that could possibly relate to it—and everyone needs to bear that in mind.

Yes, this inquiry will be established under the Inquiries Act. As for the relationship between the judge and the panel, that is an important point. The panel, whose members have not yet been approached and appointed, must have a range of expertise available to it, including specialised understanding of newspaper media, but also wider than that. Those panel members will assist the judge in the work he does. As I said to the right hon. Gentleman last night, we would welcome suggestions of names of people who could bring expertise to bear.

Yes, the inquiry is now a broad one, as the right hon. Gentleman said. I think that is right, but we need to make sure that we put quite a tight time frame on it, as we need to see results. It is right to look at issues such as cross-media ownership, but it is possible to spend far too much time on it and not getting on with the media regulation that we need to have.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend speaks very good sense about this matter. Ultimately, we want not just a free press, but a free and vigorous press, which can
make our lives miserable a lot of the time. That is absolutely vital. There will be those in the press who will be made nervous of a judge-led inquiry covering all the aspects of this matter, and I stress the importance of the panel in assisting the judge to ensure that the changes proposed are based on evidence of what matters and what works.

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): Given what the Prime Minister has said, will he now publish details of all the discussions that he and the Culture Secretary have had with News Corporation representatives since he entered Downing street? A week ago, when I asked the Prime Minister why the Government did not refer the BSkyB bid to the Competition Commission when Labour recommended it, he said:

“You would look pretty for a day, but useless for a week.”—[Official Report, 6 July 2011; Vol. 530, c. 1510.]

Does he regret that answer?

The Prime Minister: What has happened here is a massive firestorm of allegations that have got worse and worse. On both sides of the House, all of us started from the proposition that we had to keep separate the investigations that were taking place and the inquiry into BSkyB. I believe that we are now getting it right, and if the right hon. Gentleman has played a role by pushing and asking questions, I pay tribute to him. He, too, was a Culture Secretary, and knows about these issues. Just as I say to him, “Well done for pushing.” I suspect that he should also be saying to himself, “Why did we miss this for so long?”

Simon Hughes (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): I thank the Prime Minister for his decisive announcement and for the work that he and the Deputy Prime Minister have done to ensure that the concerns that my colleagues have been expressing for 17 years, and the calls for an inquiry that we have been making for two years, have at last been accepted.

Will the inquiry look into the Information Commissioner’s reports of 2006, and why his confirmation that 31 media titles and 305 journalists were involved in illegal activities in relation to personal information were not the subject of implementation of recommendations by the Labour party in government, whose leadership continued, even as late as last December, to accuse my right hon. Friend the Business Secretary of being too critical of Murdoch?

The Prime Minister: To be fair to my right hon. Friend, the issue of the Information Commissioner’s reports—particularly the two reports he mentions—really is a rebuke not just to the previous Government but to the then Opposition. We too should have made more of those reports, which included some very important detail about what was going wrong in data handling, data theft and the rest of it. We must ensure that the inquiry asks the question, “Why were they ignored, and what are we going to do about it now?”

Mr Jack Straw (Blackburn) (Lab): May I commend the Prime Minister on the appointment of Lord Justice Leveson, who, as I am sure the Justice Secretary will confirm, is a man of the highest intelligence and integrity, and extremely well equipped to take on the job? On the future regulation of the press, I urge the Prime Minister not to fall into the trap that some in the press are setting, by asserting that any degree of statutory regulation is bound to lead to an end of self-regulation. Given that Express Newspapers has withdrawn from the Press Complaints Commission, as it did in January, will he acknowledge that some measures may have to be imposed by statute so that there is a stronger system of self-regulation?

The Prime Minister: The right hon. Gentleman speaks some very wise words. There are ways of setting up a regulatory system that is effectively independent, that is non-statutory, that does not have the Government’s fingertips all over it, as it were, and that can do a good and trusted job, as we see in the case of advertising standards. In any case, this matter will not now be for us, but for the inquiry, and it is important that the inquiry should look into it carefully.

Nicola Blackwood (Oxford West and Abingdon) (Con): I welcome the Prime Minister’s statement and the terms of the public inquiry that he set out, but will the public inquiry consider the role that mobile phone companies have played in the scandal, and will there also be consideration of the responsibilities that they may have to their clients, to protect their privacy?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a good point. It takes, as it were, two to blag—someone to ask, and someone to give. We do need to consider the matter. The inquiry will have a huge amount of evidence to go through, and it will need to ensure that it has proper technical expertise to get to the bottom of the matter.

Keith Vaz (Leicester East) (Lab): May I also welcome the inquiry and thank the Prime Minister for consulting the Home Affairs Committee on the terms of reference? He seems to have included our suggestions in his statement today. He is right to say that the Committee was concerned by some of the evidence that we received yesterday, but we were very impressed by Deputy Assistant Commissioner Sue Akers, who is going through the list at the rate of 30 victims a month, and has about 12,000 telephone numbers to go through. If the Met requires further resources, is the Prime Minister able to give it what it needs?

The Prime Minister: I thank the right hon. Gentleman for his approach and the constructive suggestions that he made last night, many of which we have put into the terms of reference. We will also consider some of his thoughts on the membership of the panel. Obviously, it is for the Met to decide how it distributes its resources. Sue Akers has two inquiries going on: one into the phone hacking at News of the World and elsewhere, and one into corruption within the Met—and that inquiry is now reporting to the Independent Police Complaints Commission, which might take over part of it, although of course the police must have operational independence.

Nicky Morgan (Loughborough) (Con): The Prime Minister is absolutely right to concentrate on wider issues than the BSkyB takeover. Is it not the case, however, that over the past few years, all those whom the public expect to behave—bankers, MPs, journalists, the police—have shown, or at least some of them have
shown, that they are not capable of meeting that trust. Regulation plays a part, but is it not the case that all those who have positions of responsibility must examine their consciences and work out how best to behave in future to maintain public trust?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a good point. No regulatory system in the world can protect against all bad practice, and a sense of social and moral responsibility is vital, whether one is a banker, an MP or a journalist. I am sure that we can do better than the current system, because on the evidence of what has happened over the past 10 years and the warnings that have been ignored, it is clear that the Press Complaints Commission is not set up in the right way, and has not worked.

Bridget Phillipson (Houghton and Sunderland South) (Lab): There has been serious disquiet about whether it was appropriate for former senior public servants to take up roles with News International. One example is Andy Hayman, who took a job with News International very soon after leaving the Metropolitan police; another is the former Director of Public Prosecutions, Lord Macdonald. Will the inquiry be able to consider the appropriateness of that, given the damage that it does to public confidence?

The Prime Minister: As the hon. Lady knows, in politics we have huge levels of transparency in relation to jobs that former Ministers can go into, and we also have a committee dealing with appointments to ensure that there is an appropriate gap. However, she has made a good point, and I am sure that the committee of inquiry will want to consider it.

Sir Menzies Campbell (North East Fife) (LD): The inquiry announced by my right hon. Friend involves a very wide set of responsibilities. Can he be satisfied that the proper balance will be struck in the conduct of that inquiry—that, for example, we will not allow justifiable annoyance about the activities of tabloid newspapers to obscure the fact that the behaviour, competence and integrity of the Metropolitan police is of equal importance, not least because it extends to many other areas of activity in the country?

The Prime Minister: Perhaps it is worth my explaining why we decided, in the end, to have one inquiry rather than two. I think that the problem with the original concept of two inquiries is that the one that was going to be judge-led and investigating the wrongdoing would not really have been able to get under way until much of the criminal prosecution was finished, so the second inquiry—the media inquiry—would race away with conclusions. That was not going to work and be sustainable, and I do not think it would have resulted in such a positive outcome as the one that I think we will see. Nevertheless, my right hon. and learned Friend has made a good point. If we have a broad inquiry, we must ensure that it gets its priorities right within the terms of reference, and I am sure that the judge whom we have appointed will do just that.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Yesterday afternoon we heard that the man who is in charge of counter-terrorism in the Metropolitan police is 99% certain that his phone was hacked. An hour later, I was shown a piece of kit that costs about £1,500 and is readily available on the internet. It effectively sets up an illegal mobile phone mast through which it is possible to listen to any conversation held by anyone on a mobile phone within three miles.

As I have said, that device is publicly available. It is illegal to use it, but private investigators are using it all the time. Is it not vital for the inquiry also to examine the role of private investigators, and the shocking fact that there is absolutely no regulation of them?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman has made a good point. One of the features of an inquiry such as this is that the terms of reference are set out and we can agree them and refine them, but in the end the judge will determine where to go on the basis of where the evidence leads. If the judge concludes that that is an important point, he or she can go absolutely down that track.

Mr David Ruffley (Bury St Edmunds) (Con): In 2003, the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport asked for an investigation of the practice by journalists of making illegal payments to the police. Does the Prime Minister agree that those in charge of the inquiry should interview former Labour Ministers to discover why they appear to have taken absolutely no action at the time?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend has made a good point, but I think that if we are to try to get this right, we must all put our hands up and say, “Yes, of course the last Government should have done more to respond to the Richard Thomas reports and the DCMS reports, but we must also ask why the Opposition did not press them more to do so.” We shall all have to answer questions on that basis, and look through the reports and see what was suggested, what was the evidence, and what more could have been done. We will never solve this if we try to do it on a party basis; we must try to do it on a cross-party basis.

Mr Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): I believe that if these measures are carried out, some good will come out of evil. I find myself in the slightly embarrassing position of being able to commend all three party leaders on coming together to ensure that that happens, and I thank them for doing so.

May I ask the Prime Minister whether he would allow Lord Justice Leveson access to the intelligence services as well? At the murky ends of this scandal, there are allegations that rogue elements of those services have very close dealings with executives at News International, and we need to get to the bottom of that.

The Prime Minister: Let me say to the hon. Gentleman that the judge can take the inquiry in any direction in which the evidence leads it. He, like others, is free to make submissions to the inquiry, point out evidence, point out conclusions from that evidence, and ask the inquiry to follow that. As well as wanting a broad, independent and tough inquiry, we want some early conclusions. That was not going to work and be sustainable, and I do not think it would have resulted in such a positive outcome as the one that I think we will see.

Mr Robert Buckland (South Swindon) (Con): Will the ambit of the judicial inquiry focus on the need to enable ordinary members of the public, such as bereaved families of service personnel who have given their lives for this country, to seek and achieve legitimate
redress of grievances through proper complaints against the media and their agents when they are guilty of malpractice?

The Prime Minister: That is a good point. We must keep the public, and the victims of what has now emerged, front and centre at all times. Of course we all, as politicians, have strong views about what has gone wrong, what might have happened to all of us and the rest of it, but, although some people have said that there is an element of “revenge for expenses”, this has to be about the public and the victims. Politicians must be very careful. Yes, we want a good and robust system of self-regulation, but we must also be absolutely clear about wanting a strong, free, independent press that is able to challenge and to uncover wrongdoing, as it has done in this case.

Dr William McCrea (South Antrim) (DUP): Given the Prime Minister’s acknowledgment that a cross-party consensus is essential, why has there been no consultation with the minority parties in the House? Do we just get the conclusions when they are arrived at? May I also ask whether the inquiry will extend to newsrooms in Northern Ireland as well as the other regions of the United Kingdom?

The Prime Minister: I apologise to the hon. Gentleman. That consultation simply was not possible in the time that was available to us. Let me stress, however, that these are draft terms of reference. In the end the judge must be comfortable with them and agree to them, but if the hon. Gentleman wishes to raise devolved issues with the Government and the judge, I am sure that we can ensure that that happens.

Daniel Kawczynski (Shrewsbury and Atcham) (Con): Some people find it difficult to sue newspapers that have lied about them because of the complexity and cost that that would involve. I hope the Prime Minister can assure me that the inquiry will look into how people on low incomes can be supported so that they can sue newspapers when they have been lied about.

The Prime Minister: Obviously one of the things that the inquiry will have to look into is how people can obtain redress from newspapers when they have been wronged. That has been looked into for many years, but the problem is that Governments have not acted. I believe that part of the solution is an effective regulatory system. If people end up having to sue a newspaper, things have gone too far. It ought to be possible to obtain proper redress through a regulatory system that has not just the confidence of the press but the confidence of the public: I think that is the key.

Barry Gardiner (Brent North) (Lab): Can the Prime Minister tell the House whether he had any conversations about phone-hacking with Andy Coulson at the time of Mr Coulson’s resignation—not his appointment—and will he place in the Library a log of any meetings and phone calls that have taken place between him and Andy Coulson since Mr Coulson’s resignation?

The Prime Minister: Of course, all the time during Andy Coulson’s employment, when articles were appearing and there was a storm of allegations, I had that conversation with him many times, because I had employed him. I had accepted his assurances: assurances which, as I have said, were given to many others. In the end, the reason for his resignation, the reason for his giving up on the second chance, was that he just felt that he could not go on doing the job, a job that he did well—no one denies that he did the job well—because of all the allegations. As for contacts, I have said what I have said about transparency, and I think that that is right.

Dr Julian Huppert (Cambridge) (LD): Yesterday I met representatives of Hacked Off, who have been campaigning for a full inquiry on behalf of victims from the Dowlers to Hugh Grant. They have a range of requirements for what they would consider to be a sufficiently full inquiry. Has the Prime Minister met them, and does he believe that his current proposals will meet their demands?

The Prime Minister: I shall be meeting representatives of Hacked Off this afternoon. I have looked carefully at the briefing notes that they have issued, and I also listened carefully to what was said by the hon. Gentleman’s former colleague Evan Harris on the radio this morning. I think that we have reflected many of their concerns, and indeed some of their language, in the terms of reference, but I look forward to hearing what they have to say today. These are draft terms of reference, and, if they can be improved, we shall try to improve them.

Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab): Before the inquiries have been completed, if News Corporation does not heed the mood of the British public and does not heed the voice of the House of Commons this afternoon, will the Prime Minister be prepared to present a short Bill amending cross-media ownership rules, and also addressing the absence of limits to ownership of United Kingdom broadcasters by non-EU companies and non-EU nationals? There is not such an unfettered free market in the United States, for example.

The Prime Minister: I think it is difficult to bring forward specific legislation for a specific company; we have got to be a Government under the law. The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but it is worth reminding Labour Members that a US-based company is able to purchase all of a UK broadcaster because of an Act that their Government passed.

Oliver Heald (North East Hertfordshire) (Con): I welcome the Leveson inquiry and agree very much with the Prime Minister that our focus should be on the innocent victims whom we have heard about recently, but he will be aware that there were concerns in the House that the hacking of telephones has impeded MPs in their work and interfered with freedom of expression, which is one of the most deeply felt and important aspects of our work. The Standards and Privileges Committee produced a report—its 14th report—on this subject. Will the Prime Minister ensure that it is fed into the inquiry and fully considered?

The Prime Minister: I will, of course, do that. This inquiry gives us an opportunity to look at some reports that a lot of work has gone into, but, sadly, that have gathered dust, rather than having been taken as seriously as perhaps they should have been.
Mr Dennis Skinner (Bolsover) (Lab): Everybody is aware that the reason why Murdoch had such tremendous power was that he had more than 40% of the print media, with television stations thrown in. It was not because of his amazing personality that politicians of all parties were in his pocket; it was because he had such power through the newspapers. In answer to the recent question of my hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme (Paul Farrelly), the Prime Minister said he did not want to strip Murdoch or anybody else of their titles. Will he therefore include in the inquiry’s terms of reference that the judge can, if he so wishes, say that nobody should have more than one title or one television station? Will the Prime Minister agree to that, because without it this cancer on the body politic—Murdoch—will remain?

The Prime Minister: Of course, the inquiry can go where it wants to go; it can follow the evidence where it leads. I am sure the judge will want to produce an inquiry under the current law. That is what we have to do; we have to be a Government of the law. I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman that we cannot have a responsible company owning a television or radio licence and also a newspaper, but we do need rules about plurality. That is why the media have not only a competition policy that they have to obey, but also some rules about plurality so we can make sure there is a decent share of voice—a number of different voices in our media. The hon. Gentleman shakes his head, but I am afraid that not enough was done over the last 10 years to make that happen.

Andrew Selous (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): We do not want anybody to be arrested in secret, but neither is it right that individual police officers should immediately contact their favourite journalist to let them know when someone is being arrested. Will the Prime Minister look at having a transparent and standard way of it being made public when someone has been arrested, so that this cannot happen in future?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend correctly identifies this as a problem, but I am not sure that I agree with his solution, although I will certainly look at it. It seems to me that it would be much better to try to have the same sort of transparency between the police and the media that we want between politicians and the media, because, in the end, I think transparency about media contacts would help to prevent the culture of leaking and briefing that has grown up in some parts of the police.

Helen Goodman (Bishop Auckland) (Lab): The Prime Minister’s statement was a bit complex, but it sounds as if the decision on the takeover would be made before the end of the judicial inquiry and the police inquiries. Is that correct, but surely it is not right?

The Prime Minister: The problem we face is that we have a set of rules concerning competition policy, plurality and “fit and proper” tests that are all laid down in the law and have to be carried out by Ofcom, the competition authorities and, indeed, the Secretary of State. He has to obey the law—and these laws were, largely, put in place by the previous Government. The Competition Commission will look at this; it will take its time, but it cannot take for ever in making its recommendation. Then there will be a decision for the Secretary of State.

We cannot do anything but obey the law, but what we are doing today—what the leaders of the Labour party and the Liberal Democrats and I are all doing—is making a clear statement about our opinion by saying to this business, “You can’t go on pursuing a merger when you ought to be dealing with the mess you’ve got in your own business”, and I think that is the best thing to do.

Tony Baldry (Banbury) (Con): Is blagging already a criminal offence, and if it is not, will it be made a criminal offence?

The Prime Minister: Unlike my hon. Friend, I am not a lawyer, but I believe it is a criminal offence, because someone who obtains information falsely is breaking the law. This is another aspect that I am sure the inquiry can look at, however.

Mr David Winnick (Walsall North) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister agree that some of the evidence given to the Home Affairs Committee yesterday must have come as a shock and a surprise? For instance, how can it be justified for the police to dine with the very people whom they are investigating, and is that not all the more reason why this inquiry is so necessary?

The Prime Minister: I agree. I watched some of the evidence, and that was very striking. Let us be frank about transparency: MPs have had to go through this over expenses and meetings and other things, and it is time for the police to address it, too. Transparency is the best answer. There are bound to be relationships between senior police leaders and senior media executives, not least because the police have to explain what they are trying to do, but if those relationships are transparent, people can know what is going on.

Mr Brian Binley (Northampton South) (Con): I welcome the Prime Minister’s statement, and may I say that it is good to see him on the front foot? May I also remind him of a sentence in the statement? He stated that “Sir Paul Stephenson is looking to invite a senior public figure to advise him on the ethics that should underpin that relationship for his own force, the Metropolitan police.” May I suggest that there is a wider need throughout the nation for such ethics to be applied, and may I ask the Prime Minister to take action to ensure that other forces are involved in this process?

The Prime Minister: Of course, relationships that have become unhealthy between some police officers and some media organisations are not just a problem in the Met, but as the Met is our premium and biggest force, I think that if it starts the process of not only transparency, but also the culture change that is necessary, that would set a good example to others.

Geraint Davies (Swansea West) (Lab/Co-op): In light of the information available to the Prime Minister on phone hacking, what techniques does he anticipate will be used to pressurise Ofcom over its decision as to whether Rupert and James Murdoch are fit and proper persons to run News International and BSkyB, and what action will he take to prevent any such intimidation?

The Prime Minister: The “fit and proper” test is a matter for Ofcom; it has to carry that out. It is right in this country that we do not ask individual politicians to make those individual decisions about who is fit and
[The Prime Minister]

proper. We have also asked the Competition Commission to look at this issue. There is a separate issue, too: we need to allow Ofcom to make a “fit and proper” test at the point of full acquisition. That is a particular detail that we need to look at for the future.

Mr Graham Stuart (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): For the first time ever, I think, I agree with the hon. Member for Bolsover (Mr Skinner). What is most disturbing and murkiest about this whole situation is the relationship between politicians and the media. From the moment when Tony Blair flew to Australia back in the 1990s, that relationship has meant that successive leaders of major parties have felt it necessary to cosy-up to media moguls. May we have a situation in future in which party leaders do not go to the birthday parties of these people, and instead keep them at arm’s length, so that the whole country can be assured that it is the public interest, not any media interest, that has power in the land?

The Prime Minister: The relationship did get unhealthy. It was too close and, as I have put it, too much time was spent courting the media and not enough time confronting the problems, but let us be honest, we are not suddenly all going to become monks and live in a monastery. We have to have relationships so that politicians can try to persuade media organisations that they are trying to do the right thing. We have a duty to explain our policies and what we are doing for the country. Democracy is government by explanation, so we have to explain ourselves to the media, but I hope that this whole process will end up delivering a healthier relationship where we can do that explaining, but also confront the problems at the same time.

Mr David Lammy (Tottenham) (Lab): Given what the Prime Minister has said about the police’s performance yesterday, was it wise of the Home Secretary to describe John Yates as doing a good job, and of Boris Johnson, when chair of the Metropolitan Police Authority, to describe this as a song and dance and a load of codswallop?

The Prime Minister: Let me deal specifically with the issue of John Yates, because this is important. He does an extremely important job for the country in terms of counter-terrorism policing. I have watched him and the job that he does at close hand. We have to have a situation where the police are operationally independent, and if we put our trust in Paul Stephenson to run his team, we must allow him to do that. I ask the right hon. Gentleman to think about this: it would be quite dangerous, would it not, if politicians were able to point at individual police officers, particularly those who were leading investigations into other politicians? So there are some dangers here. I think that John Yates is doing a good job on counter-terrorism. Clearly, as he said himself, he has some questions to answer about what went wrong with the initial investigation, and I hope that he will welcome this inquiry, which will get to the bottom of what went wrong.

Tessa Munt (Wells) (LD): In the light of and under the pressure of this inquiry it seems possible that serving police officers will go off on sick leave because of stress. Will the Prime Minister guarantee that in no circumstances will the taxpayer be asked to fund any pension of any police officer, either serving or now retired, who is found to be corrupt, as that would be the final insult?

The Prime Minister: I will have to look at the point that the hon. Lady makes. It sounds perfectly sensible but we have to obey the rules of the pension schemes and all the rest of it. However, people should not be rewarded in the way that she says.

Yasmin Qureshi (Bolton South East) (Lab): The Prime Minister talks about independent regulation. May I ask that the inquiry considers possible remedies in respect of applying pecuniary damages where wrongdoing is found and, more importantly, ensuring that an equal amount of time and space is given to printing a retraction as is spent on vilifying people?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady makes a very good point. I have worked in a regulated industry, in television, where you could be fined if you got something wrong—the company I worked for was fined a lot of money once—and there is no doubt that that has a huge effect on the business. But it is not for us to say what the rules should be; it is for this inquiry to do that and it should be properly advised by experts who understand how the media works.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): May I congratulate the Prime Minister and the Leader of the Opposition, and you, Mr Speaker, on granting the Standing Order No. 24 debate in order to put Parliament at the heart of this matter? There is a danger in all this. In the scandal involving MPs, most MPs were of the highest integrity and were working hard in public service. Likewise, most journalists, including those at News International, are hard working and are of the highest integrity. Will the Prime Minister just mention that fact?

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a good point. The British press has a lot to be proud of in terms of its record of investigative journalism, of uncovering the truth, of providing information and entertainment, and of holding the powerful to account. The point I would make to the sceptics in the press who will worry about this inquiry is: we cannot go on as we are, and we need to do something to stop this firestorm, to protect what is good in the media and to ensure its freedom for the future, and also to deal with the abuse that we clearly see in front of us.

Mr Adrian Bailey (West Bromwich West) (Lab/Co-op): Earlier, in his responses during Prime Minister’s questions, the Prime Minister alluded to alleged lying to Select Committees. Given that misleading a Select Committee or refusing to turn up as a witness for a Select Committee is contempt of Parliament but that the last time criminal sanctions were invoked against anybody for that was in 1666, will he undertake to introduce emergency legislation to make contempt of Parliament a criminal offence at the earliest opportunity?

The Prime Minister: I will have to look closely at the issue that the hon. Gentleman raises. Perhaps it is something on which the Leader of the House, who does not quite go back to 1666 but goes some way further towards it than I do, will be able to give him some satisfaction.


Conor Burns (Bournemouth West) (Con): With the number of individuals and organisations with questions to answer growing by the day, will the Prime Minister assure me that, should there be further dramatic developments in the coming weeks he would not hesitate to add his voice to the call for a recall of this place from our summer recess so that they could be debated on the Floor of the House?

The Prime Minister: There is never normally any shortage of people calling for Parliament to be recalled—indeed, I remember that a recent recess had not even started when someone called for Parliament to be recalled. I may not be the first out of the traps, if I may put it that way.

Mr Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): I welcome the Prime Minister’s repeated emphasis on transparency. In that respect, does he think it would be useful if freedom of information legislation was extended to public and private bodies that operate fully in the public sphere, notably all the media ones?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that that is something the inquiry can look at. I do not share Tony Blair’s regret on freedom of information; I think that it has actually been a good thing. What we are seeking here is more transparency, so that people can see who is meeting and who is doing, rather than having to have a process of discovery. What this Government are bringing, across quite a range of areas, is that original transparency to reduce the need for often quite expensive discovery.

Dr Philip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): I very much welcome the Prime Minister’s plans to change the ministerial code in respect of meetings with members of the media. May I press him on the definition of “media”? In a world where people increasingly search for their news via Google and so on, and they share their news on Facebook and the like, I suggest that those organisations and meetings with them should also be in the public domain.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend raises a very good point, because “media” now encompasses such a wide range of things. That is one of the reasons why I think it is necessary to consult briefly on this change to the ministerial code before we introduce it, because I want to make sure that we do it in a way that is clear and works well.

Jack Dromey (Birmingham, Erdington) (Lab): An outraged public demand action and expect leadership in the public interest. At every stage, the Prime Minister has been slow to act. Does he agree that Rupert Murdoch is not a fit and proper person? Given that we now know that Lord Ashdown warned the Prime Minister not to appoint Andy Coulson, does he have any regrets about appointing somebody who was clearly not a fit and proper person?

The Prime Minister: The point I would make is that in government you are not just making speeches; you have got to make decisions and you have got to get it right. You have got to make sure the terms of reference are right, you have got to make sure the inquiry is right, you have got to find the judge, you need to appoint the panel, you need to work out how you are going to be transparent and how to amend the ministerial code. It is not just about saying things; it is about doing things. Of course it takes time to get these things right when you have this enormous firestorm going on, but I think that we have taken some major steps forward that will make a big difference. On the “fit and proper” test, that is a matter for Ofcom. We must not get into a situation where the Prime Minister or the Leader of the Opposition is pointing a finger and making a particular point about a particular person—that is Ofcom’s role. As for the other question, I think that I answered it in full.

Mr Don Foster (Bath) (LD): On that very point, does the Prime Minister agree that if there are any legal restrictions preventing the regulators from judging now on the fitness of News Corporation as an organisation—not the individuals—to own existing shares in BSkyB, those regulations should be swept away immediately?

The Prime Minister: As I said earlier, we are looking at that specific issue. We have asked Ofcom and the Competition Commission to look at it, and we are going to hear what they have to say.

Paul Flynn (Newport West) (Lab): In the cash for honours inquiry, the Met judged all suspects to be innocent until they were proved to be Labour. Does the Prime Minister agree that the best-trusted news in the country and the best investigative journalism comes from those broadcasters who already have a statutory duty to balance their news? Instead of having a half solution, would not the ultimate solution be to spread the obligation to provide balanced political reporting to all media?

The Prime Minister: That is a matter for the inquiry. I think there are difficulties here. The reason for the statutory regulation of television is that you are dealing with a previously limited spectrum that was a privilege to own and statutory regulation came with it. The reason for not having the statutory regulation of newspapers is that in a free society you should be free to set up a newspaper, to distribute opinions and information. Even if it is the Morning Star, as someone said. It is important that we hold on to that. I do want the newspapers to understand that neither the Government nor the Opposition want to leap into statutory regulation. That is not the intention; we want to improve on what we have now.

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): I commend the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister for working with the Opposition in dealing with this very serious issue. The Prime Minister will be sharing sensitive information with the Leader of the Opposition, so can I ask him to seek assurances that Tom Baldwin, an ex-News International employee, will not be privy to such sensitive information?

The Prime Minister: We all have to answer for the people who work for us and the accusations that are made against them. I am sure the Leader of the Opposition will want to do that.

Margaret Curran (Glasgow East) (Lab): May I emphasise to the Prime Minister that the feelings of revulsion being expressed against these practices are particularly...
strong in Scotland? Will he therefore meet the First Minister soon so that we can understand the full extent of phone hacking in Scotland and what needs to be done to tackle it?

The Prime Minister: I have regular conversations with the First Minister. In this case, the best thing is to ensure that the devolved Administrations are happy with the terms of reference and to work out how the inquiry will relate to those Administrations. Any evidence can be put straight into the inquiry in the way I have suggested.

Jo Swinson (East Dunbartonshire) (LD): Even if private medical details are obtained without breaking the law, it does not mean that it is right to publish them, especially when they relate to a child and no possible public interest case can be made. Will the Prime Minister confirm that the inquiry will consider and recommend what meaningful sanctions can be imposed in cases where media outlets might not have acted against the law but have certainly acted against common standards of decency and ethics?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady makes a good point. I am sure the inquiry will look at that, but let me repeat something I said earlier: whatever regulatory system we have, we must still have people at the top of newspapers and media organisations who take responsibility and recognise that it is not right to reveal that someone is pregnant, for instance, when there is no certainty that they will keep that baby. These are important things that are about common sense and decency, and whatever regulatory system we come up with, we must ensure that we keep hold of that thought, too.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): Why did his chief of staff not pass on to him what he found out from The Guardian?

The Prime Minister: I think I have answered this question in some detail. The fact is that the information was not passed on but the lion’s share of it was included in a published article in The Guardian about which I gave a very extensive answer about an hour ago.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. I would like to accommodate a few more colleagues, but to do so I require brevity. I call Mr William Cash.

Mr William Cash (Stone) (Con): Thank you for that, Mr Speaker.

The Prime Minister has referred repeatedly to media organisations and media executives and he has noted the fact that the word “media” covers a wide range. Does he agree that to be fully comprehensive the terms of reference should also be extended to sound and visual media? It is not impossible, given the uncertainty and unexpected turns of events, that that side of things might be involved, too.

The Prime Minister: As I said, whatever terms of reference are agreed with a judge they are free to pursue the evidence. If it takes them to different places, they can follow it and I am sure they will consider carefully what my hon. Friend says.

Angela Smith (Penistone and Stocksbridge) (Lab): In his statement, the Prime Minister said that Judge Leveson and his panel will inquire into “the contacts made, and discussions had, between national newspapers and politicians”. May I take it, therefore, that he will submit to the inquiry details of all meetings held between him and senior figures at News International, including the names of the individuals who attended such meetings, even if one of them was his ex-chief of staff, Andy Coulson?

The Prime Minister: I will be happy to go along to the inquiry and answer any questions it wants to put to me about any contacts I have had with any media organisation at any time, as long as I still have the memory of when it happened. I am very happy to do that.

Mark Reckless (Rochester and Strood) (Con): Is the Prime Minister aware that the Home Affairs Committee hearing yesterday was not a one-off but the conclusion of a nine-month inquiry, pursued throughout on a cross-party basis? That raised serious concerns about the role not just of the police but of the Crown Prosecution Service in curtailing the original investigation.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend makes a good point. Clearly, one thing that the second part of the inquiry will consider, as well as the first police investigation, what went wrong and why it was insufficient, is the review of that investigation and why it did not result in further action. Those are difficult questions and it is right that an inquiry should consider them.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): Has the Prime Minister satisfied himself that the proposed double-barrelled inquiry will be proofed against the possible chicanage of legal challenges to its conduct and scope that it could face from various interests? Has he also anticipated the various calls, a few of them valid, for legal representation at the inquiry? Will Ministers or former Ministers, when they are giving or preparing evidence, do so with the support and assistance of Law Officers?

The Prime Minister: That is a very good question. I have found, doing this job, that almost nothing is chicaned, as he put it, from legal inquiry. We think we are doing this in the right way under the Inquiries Act 2005 and all the things that flow from that, but I can perhaps consider the detail of his question about preparation for Ministers.

Stephen Barclay (North East Cambridgeshire) (Con): Will the Prime Minister confirm that the police investigation will include payments made to connected parties, such as relatives of police officers, including payments not made in cash, such as electronic transfers to shell companies, vouchers or travellers cheques? In due course, will it also consider others who provide stories, such as paramedics, accident and emergency doctors and prison governors, and who might also be subject to corruption?

The Prime Minister: The inquiry must follow the evidence wherever it leads and if it finds malpractice in any of the services my hon. Friend mentioned, it must clearly investigate.

Pamela Nash (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab): In recent days, it has become clear that a number of the alleged crimes that will be covered by the inquiry took place in Scotland. The Prime Minister said earlier that he has
regular discussions with the First Minister. Has the Prime Minister received reassurances from the Scottish Government that the inquiry will have the full co-operation of the Scottish Government and all the relevant authorities?

**The Prime Minister:** One reason we need to consult about the terms of reference is to ensure that we consult with devolved Administrations, including the First Minister, to see what they have to say.

**Mr Adrian Sanders** (Torbay) (LD): I congratulate the Prime Minister on grasping the nettle. Let me repeat the point made by the hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey) about the history of Select Committees not being able to compel people to attend. That must be considered as there is a process, but it is very long-winded. Can the question of whether there is any way of ensuring that people can be brought to a Select Committee when they are asked to give evidence be considered?

**The Prime Minister:** That is a repeated call to the one made by the hon. Member for West Bromwich West (Mr Bailey). I think it is an issue for the Leader of the House to address; perhaps he can say something about it tomorrow at business questions. We want people to attend Select Committees. Obviously, we want to ensure that we do not ask people to do things that are desperately inconvenient, but if people give us the endless run-around, there should perhaps be some way through that.

**Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): Just to be absolutely clear, the Prime Minister said earlier that proprietors could be called to the inquiry. Will he confirm that if those proprietors are foreign citizens, they could be compelled to attend and give evidence, unlike with Select Committees?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman raises a good issue. I do not see why the answer to that should be no. If you own media in this country, then you should be able to be called under oath.

**Dan Byles** (North Warwickshire) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree that it would be a mistake if, at the end of this process, we saw the death of good investigative journalism? He has alluded to the investigation into MPs expenses, for example, and it would be wrong if we ended up with such a scandal not coming to light.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. We should celebrate good journalism and social responsibility in journalism and media organisations. Let me put it on the record that many media organisations do some brilliant things in our country to build up what I call the big society. We must not damn all media because of what is happening and what has happened in some organisations. As well as a good regulatory system, we need a culture that is, yes, about getting to the truth but, no, not about breaking the law.

**Nick Smith** (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): Given the point made earlier by the Chair of the Select Committee on Home Affairs that the Metropolitan police’s small team will take many months to go through all the names and phone numbers that they have to go through, may I press the Prime Minister to make sure that they have enough police officers to do the job in good time?

**The Prime Minister:** As I said in my statement, this is one of the biggest police investigations currently ongoing in Britain. In defence of the Metropolitan police, next year is the Olympics and we have an enormous security challenge to get right in this country. The Metropolitan police has to meet a huge number of objectives—it is for the police authority to help to set those—so I do think it is putting adequate resources into this. As I have said, it is one of the biggest operations in Britain today.

**Eric Ollerenshaw** (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Con): May I for one congratulate the Prime Minister and other party leaders on the speed and scope of all this? I particularly want to follow up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Northampton South (Mr Binley) about why the issue of police ethics is being dealt with only in relation to the Metropolitan police. It seems to some of us that there is a kind of cultural tradition across all police forces of having a tight relationship with favoured journalists. Perhaps in the short term my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary could talk to chief constables about starting their own procedures.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes a good point. First, the inquiry will make recommendations across all police forces from the lessons it learns about phone hacking. If evidence is destroyed that breaks the law, that investigation is happening right now. As regards setting up the inquiry, the terms of reference are now in the Library for the hon. Gentleman to see. If he has suggestions and ideas he can make them known, but I sent the terms of reference to his right hon. Friend the Leader of the Opposition this morning for comments from the Labour party and we have incorporated those comments in full.

**Matthew Hancock** (West Suffolk) (Con): May I push the Prime Minister a little more on the culture of journalism? As with the bankers crisis and the MPs’ expenses crisis, changing the culture and self-responsibility of the industry is important. What will he do to take a lead on that?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. We should celebrate good journalism and social responsibility in journalism and media organisations. Let me put it on the record that many media organisations do some brilliant things in our country to build up what I call the big society. We must not damn all media because of what is happening and what has happened in some organisations. As well as a good regulatory system, we need a culture that is, yes, about getting to the truth but, no, not about breaking the law.
Grahame M. Morris (Easington) (Lab): The Prime Minister has said on several occasions that we should follow the evidence trail wherever it leads. If that includes the proprietors of News International or other media groups, should we not be hardening the terms of evidence? Is it the Prime Minister’s view that Rupert Murdoch should be required to give evidence to the judge-led inquiry?

The Prime Minister: The point about the judge-led inquiry is that it must choose who it wants to speak to and it must then call them under oath and make sure that they answer questions accurately. Clearly, it is going to want to talk to editors, proprietors and those who are responsible right across the media. That is going to be the work it does.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree that we will never be able to stop criminals who are intent on phone-tapping but that whatever we do and whatever steps we take we have to try to minimise the possibility of that?

The Prime Minister: That is right; we will never stop all law-breaking through a regulatory system, just as we will never stop all law-breaking through a policing system. Clearly, with the media we want to have a free, independent media that do not feel the heavy hand of statutory regulation, so we need a change of law but we also need a change of culture.

Mr Dave Watts (St Helens North) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister agree that the general public will find it amazing that anyone is suggesting that the press should have self-regulation? Is it not a No. 1 priority that we should have regulation that is independent?

The Prime Minister: I like the word “independent” rather than “self”, which sounds as though newspapers will be regulating themselves rather than being regulated by someone more independent, although not reliant on the Government—that would be worrying—who can take a strong view.

Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con): Will the inquiry be able to take evidence from Mr Lance Price who used to work at Downing street and who said in 2006 that when he worked there he sometimes felt as though Rupert Murdoch was the 24th member of the Cabinet?

The Prime Minister: I am sure that Lance Price will be available. I have to say that the book he wrote about the last Government was one of the most depressing things I have ever read.

Ian Murray (Edinburgh South) (Lab): If the will of the House this evening is carried and News International simply withdraws its bid for BSkyB, what steps will the Prime Minister take to ensure that the will of the House is carried and what steps will he take to persuade Rupert Murdoch to do the decent thing?

The Prime Minister: As I have tried to explain, the Government have a responsibility to act within the law. We have to deal with each merger, acquisition and process as the law dictates and that is what my right hon. Friend the Culture Secretary has to do. Tonight, the House of Commons is going to express a very strong opinion and I hope that opinion will be heeded.

David Rutley (Macclesfield) (Con): I welcome my right hon. Friend’s statement. Can he tell the House whether other national Governments have been in contact to express their concerns about the activities of News International and whether US authorities are planning to investigate the company for possible breaches under the Foreign Corrupt Practices Act?

The Prime Minister: I have not had any contact with any US politicians about this issue.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): In the fire storm that has hit the country, thousands of families have been thrown back to the trauma of a loved one’s death. Will the Prime Minister ensure that he has conversations with the Press Complaints Commission so that it can start talking to the editors of national newspapers about not regurgitating stories that will increase that trauma to families? Can we also ensure that when police officers approach families, if they need to tell them that their phone calls have been hacked, they provide them with help and guidance as well as information about desist notices so that those families’ trauma can be reduced rather than their grief being added to?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Lady makes a very good and sensitive point. It is not just for the PCC but for newspapers themselves to understand the trauma that is being caused and the need to be more sensitive.

George Eustice (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): Does the Prime Minister agree that one of the key weaknesses of the PCC is that the public interest defence in the code has, frankly, been used and abused over the years? That is why it is so important to have independent regulation going forward and why those who continue to cling to the idea of self-regulation are wrong.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend did an excellent job as my press secretary for many years before taking the sensible view that he belonged on these Benches. There is a problem, which the inquiry will have to look at: we want the press to take action in the national interests, but we have to have a system in which they are not breaking the law. That has to be resolved.

Nic Dakin (Scunthorpe) (Lab): Will the Prime Minister explain further the practical difference between self-regulation and independent regulation?

The Prime Minister: I do not want to get into theological debate about this, but I think the problem with the phrase “self-regulation” is that it implies too much of a continuation of a scheme under which the press have effectively been regulating themselves. This will be a matter for the judge and his panel, but what we are looking for is something more independent—not statutory regulation with the heavy hand of the state, but independent regulation that means we are able to make sure that proper standards are followed. I gave some examples of how that works elsewhere and I think it can be done.
Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I welcome the Prime Minister’s statement and the leadership he has shown on this matter. Will he clarify a point about the inquiry, given that in recent months and years certain inquiries have held evidence sessions behind closed doors? What will be done to ensure that all the evidence is taken in public so that the public can see what has been done and what is being done to correct it?

The Prime Minister: This is an independent public inquiry led by a judge, with evidence being taken under oath and being held in public. That is the whole point. Obviously, if it suddenly decided it was inquiring into deep national security issues it might have to have a different session, but it is a public inquiry.

Jonathan Edwards (Carmarthen East and Dinefwr) (PC): The Prime Minister says that he wants a cross-party approach to this issue, so when will he meet the leaders of the Welsh, Scottish and Northern Irish parties in the House? In 2006, the Information Commissioner reported up to 3,000 breaches of privacy. Will the inquiry that the Prime Minister is announcing today look into those cases?

The Prime Minister: I hope the inquiry will look at what happened with the Information Commissioner’s report, because that was one of the wake-up calls when, frankly, the politicians did not wake up. In terms of taking into account the views of the other parties in the House, I am going to discuss that with my right hon. Friend the Culture Secretary and see what is the best way forward.

David Morris (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): May I ask the Prime Minister, given the group feeling in the House, whether we could put the full vetting authorities of the Government to the assistance of the Leader of the Opposition so that he can find out more about his director of communications?

The Prime Minister: We all have to answer questions about the people we employ and the activities they might have undertaken. I am sure that the Leader of the Opposition will be doing just that.

Sheila Gilmore (Edinburgh East) (Lab): At the turn of the year, when Opposition Members were urging the Culture Secretary to refer the BSkyB bid to the Competition Commission, we were given to understand that, even if it was referred, the terms of reference would be very limited. On Monday, the Culture Secretary indicated to the House that there would be fairly wide terms of reference. Are the terms of reference that have apparently already been sent this week going to be made available to the House?

The Prime Minister: My right hon. Friend the Culture Secretary can answer this question in the debate later. The point is that the Competition Commission has been asked to look at plurality grounds and also to look at the “fit and proper” issue. We have to do these things under the law though: we cannot suddenly invent new grounds. We can only use the legal instruments and tests that are there.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): May I welcome the Prime Minister’s reaffirmation that sunlight is the best disinfectant? If we are really going to sort things out on a cross-party basis, surely it is not good enough for this to involve only Government Ministers and special advisers—surely it should involve shadow Ministers and their special advisers as well.

The Prime Minister: I think that is right. The point about the relationship between politicians and the press, and where that has gone wrong, is, as I said, that we have been courting support rather than confronting problems. That has been the case for Oppositions. I freely admit that as Leader of the Opposition, you spend quite a lot of time trying to persuade newspapers and others to support you, because you want to explain your policies, your vision and what you are doing for the country. That will not stop. We are not all going to go and live in a monastery and never talk to journalists ever again, wonderful though that might seem by moments. We must have a healthy relationship where we can have those meetings and discussions, but at the same time confront the difficulties that we have. That is what the commission will do.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): I am not a legal expert, but I am deeply concerned about the suggestion that there is a non-disclosure agreement between News International and Glenn Mulcaire, the man at the centre of hacking. If a non-disclosure agreement exists, it must have been put in place between News International and him in 2005 or 2006, at the time that Andy Coulson was at the News of the World. I have a deep concern about who negotiated that and the implications. Will the Prime Minister look into the matter personally, and will it be part of the inquiry?

The Prime Minister: That needs to be part of the police inquiry, never mind the inquiry that is about to start under Judge Leveson. There is a police inquiry now into what went wrong at the News of the World, how much hacking took place, who was hacked and who knew. All those questions need to be answered by the police, and it is a full-on police inquiry, not the rather thin inquiry that happened before.

Gavin Barwell (Croydon Central) (Con): On the issue of transparency about meetings between politicians and media proprietors and executives, will my right hon. Friend go further than the Leader of the Opposition suggested and go back not just to the last election, but to the previous Government, so that my constituents can see what people on both sides of the House have been up to in the past?

The Prime Minister: We will look at the issue of transparency and how best to put it into the ministerial code, and consider what is right and fair. The inquiry will be able to look at contacts over a period to try to see what went wrong in the relationship.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): Will the meetings of the inquiry be open to the general public? In other words, will we all know what is happening, and will the general public know as well?

The Prime Minister: Yes, this is a public inquiry held in public.
Tom Brake (Carshalton and Wallington) (LD): Does the Prime Minister believe that once a healthier relationship is established between politicians and the media, it will be easier for Governments to adopt evidence-based policy in relation to, for instance, tackling drugs, community sentences, or immigration and asylum?

The Prime Minister: That is a lovely idea. As I say, the inquiry will not mean no contact between politicians and the media. There are difficult issues—the hon. Gentleman mentioned a couple of them—where we need to try to explain and take people with us when we are taking difficult decisions. We cannot do that ourselves through direct communications. We need a lively and questioning media to help us do that, but perhaps a healthy relationship will make what he wants more possible.

Naomi Long (Belfast East) (Alliance): I have been listening carefully to the Prime Minister’s answers. Does he accept that there is a significant difference between explaining Government policy or the Opposition’s position to the media, and courting their support, and that it is that culture of courting the support of the media that needs to be tackled not by inquiry, but by the Members of the House?

The Prime Minister: I agree. There is nothing wrong with meeting editors or proprietors and trying to explain why your vision is the right one for the country. People expect you to do that. Where it can go wrong, and where it has gone wrong, is where politicians start doing things, perhaps influenced by those media companies, that they would not otherwise do. I well remember standing at the Opposition Dispatch Box opposing 42-day detention, which I do not think for a minute most of those on the—sorry—then Government Front Bench believed in. I think they were doing it because of the pressure that they felt from some parts of the press. It is profoundly wrong, and the sort of thing that we must stop in the future.

Sajid Javid (Bromsgrove) (Con): I welcome the Prime Minister’s statement. Does he agree that the Press Complaints Commission as currently constituted is clearly not fit for purpose, and that it would have been most helpful if its reform had been initiated back in 2007, when the phone hacking inquiry at that time failed?

The Prime Minister: Many people on the Press Complaints Commission have tried to make it work. I would argue that it has made improvements in recent years from when it was originally established, but when we look at what has happened and the trail of reports, problems and the rest of it, the conclusion we must come to is that the PCC did not do enough to pick that up. Reform is therefore needed. That is one of the starting points for the inquiry.

Alun Cairns (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con): Does the Prime Minister regret the Opposition’s inaction over such serious and grave issues over a number of years? If they are now to succeed and maintain public support, they need to be above party politics, and political opportunism should be shunned and ignored.

The Prime Minister: My hon. Friend is right. We need an all-party approach, as far as possible. Sometimes all-party approaches can become a bit of a conspiracy, so we have to make sure that that is not the case. A basic level of agreement exists about the inquiry, the terms of reference, and the need to change the regulatory system. If we can push forward in that way, there will not be too much regulatory arbitrage, so to speak, which is a danger in such a situation. I propose to keep in close touch with the leader of the Labour party about this.

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con): Does my right hon. Friend agree with a senior commentator in the Twittersphere who says that people in glass houses should not throw stones?

The Prime Minister: I long ago learned my lesson about not saying anything about the Twittersphere for fear of getting the wrong vowel in the wrong place.

Duncan Hames (Chippenham) (LD): Media regulation, like the inquiry, goes well beyond simple law-breaking. How can we be sure that it can act in a timely fashion on known wrongdoing where that is sufficient, without waiting for the conclusion of numerous criminal investigations and the prosecutions that follow them?

The Prime Minister: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The part of the inquiry which is, for instance, investigating allegations of police corruption or investigating the hacking at the News of the World, must wait for the police investigations to be carried out, for prosecutions to be carried out and, as I understand it, for any appeals to be lodged. That is one for the reasons for having one inquiry with two parts, rather than two inquiries, otherwise the one doing that part would take a very long time indeed before it got going.

Mr Speaker: I thank the Prime Minister and colleagues for their succinctness, which enabled all 78 Back Benchers who wanted to contribute to do so.
Mull of Kintyre Review

1.56 pm

The Secretary of State for Defence (Dr Liam Fox): I wish to announce the publication today of the Mull of Kintyre review, the report of the independent review of the evidence relating to the findings of the board of inquiry into the fatal accident of an RAF Chinook helicopter at the Mull of Kintyre on 2 June 1994. It is right that I should begin this statement by paying tribute to the 29 people who died in that accident, one of the worst in the history of the Royal Air Force. As is well known, the passengers were members of the Northern Ireland security and intelligence community who were travelling to a meeting in Inverness, and their deaths were a huge blow to the security of this country. They were also a human tragedy for each of the 29 families who were devastated by the loss of their loved ones.

I pledged when in opposition that I would set up a review, because I had worries that an injustice might have been done. The official conclusion that the accident was caused by the negligence to a gross degree of the two pilots on duty that day, Flight Lieutenants Jonathan Tapper and Richard Cook, had been criticised almost since the day it was reached. Doubt had been cast on the findings in different ways by the fatal accident review held in 1995, by the Defence Committee and the Public Accounts Committee of the House in 1998 and 2000, and by the Select Committee appointed in another place in 2002.

A number of Members of the House have continued to voice their doubts over the findings of gross negligence, and I wish to acknowledge the unflagging interest in the case shown by my right hon. and learned Friends the Members for North East Fife (Sir Menzies Campbell) and for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind), my right hon. Friend the Member for North West Norfolk (Mr Bellingham) and for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis), the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for Kensington (Sir Malcolm Rifkind), my right hon. Friend for the House of the Scottish Parliament (Mr Milne), and many others, and also by Sir John Major. I know that the Ministry of Defence considered those reports carefully, taking independent and specialist advice, but given the weight and breadth of the comments, I thought it only right to ask an independent figure to check whether justice had been done.

I announced the establishment of the review—the first independent review of the evidence relating to the accident set up by the Government themselves—to the House on 16 September last year. It was my intention that its report, whatever its findings might be, should draw a line under this matter. It has been carried out by the distinguished former Scottish judge, Lord Philip, with the advice and support of a panel of three fellow Privy Counsellors, my noble Friend Lord Forsyth, Baroness Liddell and my right hon. Friend the Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce). I am extremely grateful to all for their thorough and painstaking approach to the task and for the clarity with which they have presented their recommendations, which are unanimous. I hold them all in high regard before, and hold them in higher regard now.

Lord Philip and his colleagues have concluded that the finding that the pilots were negligent to a gross degree should be set aside and that the Ministry of Defence should consider offering an apology to the families of Flight Lieutenants Tapper and Cook. I can tell the House that I have accepted these recommendations. At a specially convened meeting of the Defence Council on Monday it was decided that:

“the Reviewing Officers’ conclusions that Flight Lieutenants Tapper and Cook were negligent to a gross degree are no longer sustainable...”

I have written to the widows of the two pilots, to the father of Jonathan Tapper and to the brother of Richard Cook to express the Ministry of Defence’s apology for the distress caused by the findings of negligence. I also wish to express that apology publicly in the House today.

Lord Philip’s analysis is very clear. To put it as briefly as I can, he identifies the central point as being that, according to the regulations in force at the time, a finding of negligence should have been made against anyone who had been killed in an accident only if there was “absolutely no doubt whatsoever” about the matter. Although the two air chief marshals who acted as reviewing officers for the board of inquiry and made the findings had no doubts on the matter, Lord Philip is clear that that is not enough. The question that should have been asked is whether there was any scope for doubt in anyone’s mind. In this case, other competent persons did have doubts, which is sufficient to warrant the conclusion that the findings should not stand.

I would like briefly to make four further points. First, the report does not purport to tell us exactly why Chinook ZD576 crashed. It is central to Lord Philip’s report that the exact cause will never be established, and I am convinced that pursuing the matter further would serve only to increase the distress of the families and friends of those who died in the accident. But those who allege that there has been a long-running conspiracy to cover up technical shortcomings in the aircraft will find no support here. The Chinook has had an excellent safety record since the disaster on the Mull. It has been a mainstay of our operations in successive theatres of war and has the full confidence of those who fly it. However, the report reveals that on this occasion the pilot expressed concerns that he felt unprepared to fly the aircraft.

Secondly, I want to emphasise that the air chief marshals who made the decision, Sir John Day and Sir William Wratten, who are now retired, were and are highly respected and experienced airmen who acted at all times with full conviction on what was the right and proper course and in good faith. They did not reach their decision lightly and they asked for legal advice. Regrettably, that legal advice, although subsequently endorsed by independent Queen’s counsel, has now proved to be incorrect. I attach no personal blame to these distinguished officers and their advisers.

Thirdly, the procedures for investigating air and other military accidents were changed some years ago, with the result that it is no longer the practice for boards of inquiry, now called service inquiries, to ascribe blame to those involved, whether or not they survived the accident. This is because sometimes the business of ascribing blame can get in the way of finding out what actually happened and, more importantly, preventing any recurrence.
Fourthly, the report makes one further recommendation: that the Ministry of Defence should reconsider its policy and procedures for the transport of personnel whose responsibilities are vital to national security. I accept that recommendation as well. It has implications for land and sea transport as well as air transport. I have directed my officials to ensure that the policy and procedures in place across all three services ensure that we do not unnecessarily risk so many individuals who are vital to national security in one vehicle. It is worth noting that Flight Lieutenant Tapper had asked for the passengers on the Chinook to be split between more than one helicopter.

This has been an unhappy affair that has caused much reflection within the RAF and anguish for the families of those who died, particularly the families of those who were wrongly found officially to have been negligent to a gross degree. I hope that this report and the action I have taken in response to it will bring to an end this sad chapter by removing the stain on the reputations of the two pilots.

Mr Jim Murphy (East Renfrewshire) (Lab): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement, join him in his moving tribute to the 29 people who died in this terrible incident and add our continuing condolences to their families. I also join him in offering our support to this unanimous report and the work carried out by Lord Philip, Lord Forsyth, the right hon. Member for Gordon (Malcolm Bruce) and my noble Friend Baroness Liddell of Coatdyke.

It is over such tragic and controversial events that the whole House should unite to ensure that the right outcome is found in the interests of service personnel, past and present, and their families. It is in our collective interest to establish as much as we can about what happened on 2 June 1994, to learn the right lessons for the Ministry of Defence and the RAF and to come to a settled view for the families of all of those who perished on the Mull of Kintyre. The Secretary of State has my full support in his work towards these objectives.

Successive Secretaries of State, initially Conservative and then Labour, decided to follow the findings of gross negligence produced by the two senior air marshals, Air Chief Marshal Sir William Wratten and Air Vice-Marshal Sir John Day. Their view, as the Secretary of State has suggested, overturned the original opinion of the RAF board of inquiry, which had found no evidence to suggest that either pilot was negligent. For gross negligence to be proven, the Queen's regulations for the RAF state that

"only in cases in which there is absolutely no doubt whatsoever should deceased air crew be found negligent".

It is a remarkably clear definition, and the contents of today's report reveal that that test has not been met at any point since 1994.

No one doubts that all those involved in the inquiry acted in good faith, but it is now clear that the two air marshals initially sought, and were given, inadequate legal assistance in their interpretation of the standard of proof. I do not enjoy saying this, but it now also appears that Secretaries of State of both Governments were kept in the dark on differences between the board and the reviewing officers and that Ministers were deprived of the ability to reach a properly informed view. Investigations by the Public Accounts Committee in November 2000 and by a House of Lords Select Committee in November 2001 found that the reviewing officers of the board of inquiry were not justified in attributing gross negligence to the Chinook pilots because the findings did not satisfy the burden of proof required. It is important that in 2001 the board of inquiry rules were changed to ensure that no deceased pilot could ever be found negligent in this way again.

Let me turn to the wider lessons and ask the Secretary of State five specific questions arising from his welcome statement. First, he said that "the report reveals that...the pilot expressed concerns that he felt unprepared to fly the aircraft". Will he tell the House how this matter was dealt with at the time by officers involved? Secondly, what issues surrounding compensation for the families of the deceased arise from the report? Thirdly, and I put this gently, the content of today's announcement was trailed in the media at the weekend, days before Parliament had a chance to see it. Does the Secretary of State intend to carry out any inquiry on the possible leak of some of the contents of today's report? Fourthly, and more substantially, did Lord Philip's review find fault with the board of inquiry's process, and should the make-up of boards of inquiry be changed to remove the perceived conflict of interest identified by the Public Accounts Committee in its previous report? Fifthly, the Secretary of State rightly said that he had written to the relatives of the two pilots, but have the contents of the report been shared with the families of the others who perished on the Mull of Kintyre?

In conclusion, I have said before at the Dispatch Box, and will continue to do so, that when the Government do the right thing they will rightly enjoy our support. Today, in the interests of all the families involved, the right thing is being done and lessons have to be learnt. We fully support what the Secretary of State has said today.

Dr Fox: I am extremely grateful for what the shadow Secretary of State has said and the tone in which he presented it to the House.

When we look at the experience under previous Secretaries of State, we see that the inquiries that took place were perhaps not quite focusing on the correct point. In Lord Philip's inquiry, he very quickly, with his team, went to the point of the matter on a legal basis—that is, as the shadow Secretary of State has said, they grasped that attributing gross negligence could be done only if there was no doubt. This was not about establishing something beyond a reasonable doubt, which is the test that most of us would expect normally to be applied—it was an absolutely objective test. Perhaps in previous inquiries we were looking into the details and missing the main point.

The right hon. Gentleman asked a number of very reasonable questions. In answer to his specific question about how the matter was handled at the time, I refer him to paragraph 7.2.2 of the report, which says:

"We were told that Flt Lt Tapper telephoned his Deputy Flight Commander on the evening before the delivery of ZDS76 to Northern Ireland expressing concern that some time had passed since his conversion training. He felt unprepared to fly the aircraft. He had attempted to persuade the tasking authority to spread the load between more than one aircraft, but his request had been refused."
On compensation, yes, there will be questions of compensation arising. I spoke to some of the families involved today, but I did not feel that today was the appropriate time to be talking about money when there are very serious points of principle and we are opening up a very difficult emotional period for the families. However, we will undoubtedly take this forward in the usual way with those families.

As regards details appearing in the media, the right hon. Gentleman will recognise that very many of those were completely wrong. I suspect that people were making educated guesses that turned out to be not so educated.

Finally, neither Lord Philip nor his team criticised the initial board of inquiry. The problem came with the reviewing officers who attributed gross negligence when the board of inquiry had not come to a specific conclusion about who or what was to blame for the crash.

Sir Malcolm Rifkind (Kensington) (Con): As Secretary of State for Defence at the time of the Chinook accident, and having given evidence to the Philip inquiry, may I say that I am delighted and relieved that this decision has been announced by the Secretary of State? It is a decision that is right, that is necessary, and that is long overdue. As the Royal Air Force decided some years ago that it was not going to continue to try to assess questions of negligence in its own internal inquiries because that was much more appropriately a matter for the courts of law, is it not very sad that the RAF and, indeed, the Ministry of Defence, despite changing their own procedures and despite the mounting evidence from many authoritative inquiries, have chosen to resist for 16 long years the annulment of this injustice, which arose out of these very procedures?

Dr Fox: I am grateful to my right hon. and learned Friend for his thanks for the decision that has been made. It is right, I think, that the RAF took the decision that questions of negligence and blame should be set aside in order to try to get to the truth of the cause of any particular accidents. It is very regrettable that it has taken such a long time to get to the situation today. However, it is none the less a tribute to many Members in this House who have felt that an injustice was being done. It shows the House of Commons at its best when pressure from the House of Commons can cause an injustice to be overturned.

Mr Frank Field (Birkenhead) (Lab): May I congratulate the Secretary of State on showing the guts to get his Department’s public stance to where justice demanded it should have been for many a year? While he has naturally concentrated on the families of the two pilots, 27 other families are also involved. Will he think of ways in which the views of this House might be conveyed to them as well?

Dr Fox: The right hon. Gentleman makes a very important point. We have tried to share some of this process with those families. I understand that for many of them this will have been a difficult reopening of a sad and painful process. I hope, however, that although it has been reopened, we have, with the conclusions that we have come to today, given them proper closure by reaching a just and equitable verdict.

Mr James Arbuthnot (North East Hampshire) (Con): May I congratulate and thank my right hon. Friend and Lord Philip and his team for putting right an injustice that has lasted for far too long? May I add that the air marshals who did the reviewing and who overruled the original finding, while they were quite wrong in their decision, are nevertheless wholly honourable men who were doing what they believed was right on the basis of the legal advice that they were given? Will my right hon. Friend acknowledge that a massive contribution to this famous victory was made by people such as Brian Dixon and Tony Collins of Computer Weekly and David Harrison of Channel 4, the noble Lord O’Neill, and people from both sides of this House and of another place in contributing to the notion that justice should finally be done and closure should arrive?

Dr Fox: I entirely agree that the air marshals concerned did what they believed to be right. They followed their consciences. They are fine, decent and honourable men. They were, in my view, not correctly informed about the law and the rules that applied at the time. Given that there were, I imagine, a number of legal personnel who took a contrary view, it is a shame that it has taken so long for that view to be brought to light, and I am grateful to Lord Philip for achieving that. I entirely agree with my right hon. Friend. That there are many beyond this House who have sought resolution in this case for a very long time. They played an important part in keeping the issue alive for long enough for justice to be done. It does not matter how long it takes; it matters that it is done in the end.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. This is a hugely important and sensitive matter both for the families concerned and for the country as a whole, but I must remind the House that there is heavy pressure on time. I appeal to colleagues to ask short questions, and I know that the Secretary of State will provide characteristically short replies.

Angus Robertson (Moray) (SNP): I give an unqualified welcome to the inquiry conclusions and hope that this finally provides natural justice to the Cook and Tapper families. Will the Secretary of State confirm that the inquiry had available to it all relevant documents, including the Chinook airworthiness review team report? May I pay tribute to the Secretary of State, who said in opposition that he would seek to right this wrong? He has done just that, and he deserves praise and recognition for doing so.

Dr Fox: I am grateful for that. On a day when so many elements of public life are being torn down, it is perhaps useful that we have an example of where the House can come together and where, when we say one thing in opposition, it actually happens in government.

I confirm to the hon. Gentleman that all the documents that Lord Philip and his team asked to see were made available. In fact, when the report was presented to me I checked again that they had been given access to any material that they had sought and were able to speak to any individuals they had wanted to see. I understand that the report that he mentions refers to the Mark 1, not the Mark 2, and so it would have been less relevant in this case, but none the less it was released and made available to the inquiry.
Malcolm Bruce (Gordon) (LD): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement and his unqualified apology to the House. Having been a member of the team, I also thank Lord Philip for the way in which he conducted the inquiry, for the advice that he gave, and for the fact that we had a collective but unanimous decision. The standard of proof was designed for a layman and is clear beyond any doubt whatsoever, and yet the legal advice given to the air marshals was that it meant whatever the RAF wished it to mean, which is not a standard of legal advice that anyone in this House would recognise. Will the Secretary of State conclude that we will never know what happened on the Chinook, but the families should now have comfort that the matter can be put to rest?

Dr Fox: I reiterate my great thanks to my right hon. Friend for the work that he has done. The conclusions that he has stated are correct. All I would say is that in producing this report we seem to have created a crack team, and I am sure that Governments with inquiries in future will take note of that.

Mr Jim Hood (Lanark and Hamilton East) (Lab): May I equally thank the Secretary of State and compliment him on correcting this wrong?

I have to say that my recollection, having sat on the Select Committee along with my friend the right hon. and learned Member for North East Fife (Sir Menzies Campbell), is not as kind towards the air marshals as what has been said today. The truth is that they did not have any evidence on which to come up with the decision that they did, and they laid their decision on legal advice. The families of those two pilots were right to expect that two air marshals would know better and not rely on a decision by lawyers. The two pilots have been scapegoated for all these years, and respective Defence Ministers and the officials in the Ministry of Defence have run away from this for all these years. The House is indebted to the Secretary of State for having corrected this wrong, but we cannot correct the wrong without pointing out that the two air marshals were a serious part of the problem.

Dr Fox: In fairness, the board of inquiry said that the most likely cause of the crash was pilot error, but it did not attribute blame. The air marshals used their experience and intuition to make a judgment based on the board of inquiry’s findings. Lord Philip and his team found that they were not able to do that based on the level of evidence required to attribute negligence in the way that they did.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. As I look for a single-sentence question, I feel sure that the test will be met by the right hon. Member for Haltemprice and Howden (Mr Davis).

Mr David Davis (Haltemprice and Howden) (Con): I am not sure that I can meet that expectation, Mr Speaker, but I will do my best. Part of the problem arises from the clash between the demands for justice and for a solution that prevents an accident from happening again. The Secretary of State appears to have solved the justice problem for the future with a change to the rules on the attribution of blame. One of the problems was that there was no black box in this aircraft. Will he ensure that all RAF aircraft will in future have black boxes so that we will know the cause of any crash?

Dr Fox: Yes. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for his support and long-standing campaigning on this issue. I have checked that we are now fitting black boxes routinely on all Chinooks. I can confirm that to my right hon. Friend.

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): I pay tribute to the Secretary of State for his personal dedication to and interest in this matter, and to his party and his coalition partners for putting the issue in their manifestos. Does this not send out a message to anyone who is fighting injustice that if they persevere and continue to push their case, they will eventually, if they are right, see justice?

Dr Fox: I of course agree with the hon. Lady. There are a lot of downsides to being a Member of Parliament, but one upside is the ability to see justice done and a wrong righted.

Sir Menzies Campbell (North East Fife) (LD): If Parliament exists for the redress of grievance, today is a most eloquent illustration of that principle. My right hon. Friend deserves great credit for taking the decision that he has announced, and for the nature of the apology he has offered to the families, with whom I have been in contact over many years in relation to this campaign. I have always been impressed by their steadfast determination and dignity. Does my right hon. Friend understand that satisfaction at the outcome today is tempered by dismay that the original decision turned on legal advice that was palpably and self-evidently wrong?

Dr Fox: What I find somewhat difficult, having looked back at the various inquiries, is that nobody seemed to focus on the quality of the legal advice given at the time to the reviewing officers. There was a lot of focus on what happened on the ground and on the condition of the aircraft. Nobody seemed to focus on this essential point, which seems to be where the injustice emanated from.

Lady Hermon (North Down) (Ind): The Chinook helicopter crash in the Mull of Kintyre in 1994 was, as the Secretary of State said in his statement, one of the worst in the history of the Royal Air Force. Of course, it was also the worst accident in the history of the Royal Ulster Constabulary, with 10 of its noble officers being killed. May I take this opportunity to say to the Secretary of State, his colleagues and the House that the widows of those RUC officers will be absolutely delighted and hugely relieved that the terrible stigma of gross negligence is today lifted from those two brave and courageous young pilots?

Dr Fox: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Lady. I entirely echo her sentiments about the RUC.

Dr Julian Lewis (New Forest East) (Con): Does the Secretary of State agree that this is a modern day version of the famous Archer-Shee case, which involved the Royal Navy and the theft of a postal order, and which became the basis of a famous play in which the service would not admit that it was wrong? Will he add to his list of people who should be thanked the right
hon. Lord Chalfont, who more than a decade ago instituted a debate that focused on the very point that the Secretary of State has emphasised today? Finally, does he share my regret that some close family members of the pilots are no longer alive to get the vindication that they deserved more than a decade ago?

Dr Fox: This may well be a modern version of “The Winslow Boy”. It is not the size of the injustice that matters, but the fact that it is an injustice. I commend Lord Chalfont for what he did on this matter, just as I thank many colleagues in the other place who have done so much to keep this case alive.

Ian Paisley (North Antrim) (DUP): I would like to add my thanks to the Secretary of State for overturning in such a contrite and decent way what was a personal slight on the lives of two pilots and a slight on the entire system. He mentioned in his statement that the Ministry of Defence should reconsider its transport arrangements for senior intelligence personnel. We lost 10 gallant officers that evening on the Mull of Kintyre who could have changed the face of the troubles, and indeed shortened the troubles by up to 10 years. That human intelligence source was lost. That must not happen again because of travel arrangements. The Secretary of State is reconsidering the policy. Can he assure us that it will be changed forthwith?

Dr Fox: I have made it very clear that I accept the recommendation and that change will follow. We will review all current procedures. There is no doubt that that procedure was dangerous and wrong, to the detriment of this country’s security. We saw a similar phenomenon recently with the Polish Government. It does not make sense for any country to allow that amount of its national investment to be in any one vehicle, be it on the ground or in the air.

Dr Andrew Murrison (South West Wiltshire) (Con): The military covenant was betrayed in this case, and I congratulate my right hon. Friend for bringing some redress. What will he do to ensure that the quality of legal advice, which is still relevant in Iraq and Afghanistan where there have been issues over such advice, is improved so that we do not see a repeat of this sort of thing?

Dr Fox: It is impossible to guarantee that the advice from any one human being will be perfect. We therefore need to look constantly at the quality of advice and at the sources of that advice, and to ensure that it is spread widely enough to minimise the inevitable risk of human error.

Sandra Osborne (Ayr, Carrick and Cumnock) (Lab): I, too, welcome the Secretary of State’s statement. I hope that it will bring comfort to all the families concerned. Surely it should have been common sense after the accident that there should have been no repetition of vital personnel being transported in such a way. Is the Secretary of State aware of instances where that recurred after the accident and where personnel vital to our national security were carried as one group?

Dr Fox: I am not aware of a specific instance. I think that this tragedy brought home the risk of doing that. Whether or not it has happened in the past, it will not happen in the future.

Bob Stewart (Beckenham) (Con): Three of the colonels on board the Chinook that day were friends of mine. One of them, Lieutenant-Colonel Richard Gregory-Smith, a commander of intelligence in Northern Ireland, was the godfather of my first son. Does the Secretary of State agree that the families have shown huge dignity and great courage in the years since 1994?

Dr Fox: I think that the families have shown calmness, dignity, great strength and great courage. I hope they feel today that all of that has been vindicated.

Ms Margaret Ritchie (South Down) (SDLP): I thank the Secretary of State for his statement. I sympathise with and convey my condolences to the 29 families who lost loved ones on 2 June 1994. That was some three months before the first IRA ceasefire. Will the Secretary of State undertake to write to all the families to convey the information in today’s report, which has been accepted by himself and the Government? Will he also indicate why the 1992 inquiry into the effectiveness of Chinooks was not taken into consideration?

Dr Fox: As I said, all documents were made available to the inquiry by Lord Philip and his team. They were able to take into account anything that they wanted. The documents were all made available to them, and they subsequently had a look at the document to which the hon. Lady refers. I will certainly ensure that all the families of the deceased get not only a full copy of the report but a copy of what has been said in the House today, which I am sure they will find extremely reassuring.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD): I welcome the Ministry of Defence’s apology today, which is absolutely right, and I pay tribute to the families and the many campaigners, including my right hon. and learned Friend the Member for North East Fife (Sir Menzies Campbell), who have campaigned for it. However, it is well over a decade since the erroneous advice was given to the air marshals. What can the Government now do to ensure that it never takes so long again to overturn something that has turned out to be palpably incorrect?

Dr Fox: I think we need to begin such a process by dealing with any such issue with a clean sheet of paper and a clear mind. The advantage of what Lord Philip and his team have done is that they were hugely objective. They had no preconceived view, nor did they have any knowledge in detail of the events that they were looking into. That in itself was a huge advantage in allowing them to see the details that needed to be seen that had perhaps been overlooked before.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Today’s statement represents the successful persistence of many right hon. and hon. Members. It also represents the success of common sense over legal advice—but to be longer lasting, it must represent a new chapter in how we conduct such inquiries in future. Can we have a statement from the Secretary of State confirming that new standards and new ways of conducting such inquiries will be in place for the future?

Dr Fox: The hon. Lady raises a very interesting point, and it is one that I raised with Lord Philip and his team. Given that I think there is wide acceptance in the House that they came to a conclusion that had been missed too often by previous inquiries, the question is: why? I have
[Dr Fox]

asked Lord Philip whether he would mind setting out why he thought this particular inquiry had worked, and, from his perspective and that of his team, why they thought they were able to get at the kernel of truth that was missed so many times in the past. Looking at their methods, and how they went about drawing up their report, would be hugely instructive and helpful as a template for similar inquiries in the future.

Stephen Phillips (Sleaford and North Hykeham) (Con): May I add my tributes to those given by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State and other hon. Members? I want to return, if I may, to the legal advice that forms the basis of the report. It appears that the conclusions of the original legal advice were obviously and palpably wrong. I quite understand that my right hon. Friend cannot give assurances about the quality of future advice, but there appears to have been a culture within the Department of seeking to defend the indefensible on the basis of something that was absolutely and obviously wrong, and he can give assurances about that culture. Will he assure the House that he will investigate that culture, see whether it existed and deal with it?

Dr Fox: I hope that we have shown by our very approach to this subject that we are willing to do so. I was not willing to accept an assurance that everything had been checked and everything was fine, which was why we set up this inquiry in the first place. Too many experienced people in the House had spoken to me as we all discussed the matter and said that they felt intuitively unhappy and worried that an injustice had happened. It says a lot for Members of Parliament that when they intuitively felt that uncomfortable, we did not simply accept what had gone before but sought to take an independent and rigorous view of how it should be addressed.

Thomas Docherty (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): Does the Secretary of State propose to review not just the methodology of transportation but the purpose of moving such a large number of personnel?

Dr Fox: It is of course perfectly reasonable to have large collections of those with the appropriate expertise when necessary, but it is also incumbent upon those who organise such events to ask whether they really need to have so many personnel with that level of knowledge in one place, especially with modern electronic communication capabilities.

Mr Peter Bone (Wellingborough) (Con): I know personally that RAF Chinook pilots are highly skilled, highly professional and of the highest integrity. In Afghanistan today, Chinook pilots will be putting their lives at risk, and the Secretary of State’s statement today will be widely welcomed by them.

Dr Fox: I am especially grateful to my hon. Friend, as he is the father of one such brave Chinook pilot, who deserves praise as one of the very large number on whom so much of our national security depends.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): I thank the Minister for his statement and for the report. I have had the occasion over the years to meet some of the families who lost loved ones. We certainly sympathise greatly with them, and I agree with his sentiments about them. Can the Secretary of State confirm that each of the families who have lost loved ones, who have waited for so long—17 years—for a conclusion to this saga and this tragedy will have all the conclusions and recommendations of the report made available directly to them, so that they can in some way have some closure?

Dr Fox: As I said, I intend that not only a full copy of the report, with all its recommendations, but a copy of what has been said in the House today will be available to all those families, so that they can see the redress of the injustice, what we have done to investigate the issue fully and the warm and welcome words of Members on both sides of the House.

Mr Alan Reid (Argyll and Bute) (LD): This was a terrible tragedy that took place in my constituency, and it was made all the worse for the relatives by their long 17-year wait for the announcement that we have heard today. I congratulate my right hon. Friend on establishing the review board, and I congratulate its members and all those who have campaigned for so many years to overturn the unjust verdict. What procedures are in place so that if in future a verdict is subject to so much challenge, including by a fatal accident inquiry, it can be reviewed much more quickly?

Dr Fox: As I said in reply to the hon. Member for Bridgend (Mrs Moon), we set up a mechanism that seemed to be effective, that was relatively quick and that was able to identify the weakness that previous inquiries had failed to identify. As a House, we should look to see why it was effective when others were not, and learn from that procedure.

Naomi Long (Belfast East) (Alliance): I welcome the outcome of the inquiry and commend the Secretary of State and the Government for the actions that they have taken in bringing long-awaited vindication to the families concerned. The Secretary of State has said that we will never know the cause of the disaster. However, he also said that two requests were made by Flight Lieutenant Tapper and refused. Is he satisfied that such requests are, and indeed were, given full consideration, and would be in future?

Dr Fox: It is impossible for me to say how much consideration was given to a particular request so many years ago, but I would hope that if a pilot expressed worry about his lack, or perceived lack, of experience in such a mission, that would be dealt with sympathetically by those in command.

May I say finally that I am sure the families themselves, whom I met before the statement today, will be very grateful to all Members for their warm words and for the way in which they have welcomed this report today?
Point of Order

2.38 pm

Luciana Berger (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. I rise to seek your guidance further to the serious concerns raised yesterday by my hon. Friend the Member for Plymouth, Moor View (Alison Seabeck). During my Westminster Hall debate on housing market renewal scheme cancellation, the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Andrew Stunell), described representations by hon. Members on behalf of constituents who are living in the most appalling conditions as “sob stories”.

However, when we consulted Hansard after the debate, the word “sob” had been removed. When I checked Hansard again this morning, I found that the phrase “sob stories” had been replaced with “different stories”. Having watched back the video, it is absolutely clear that the Minister used the phrase “sob stories”, which vulnerable people trapped in tragic circumstances will find a deeply offensive way to refer to their plight. Is there any way, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you or your good offices could look again at this issue? The record is an inaccurate representation of what was said during the debate.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): My understanding is that this was raised yesterday with Mr Speaker, who has promised to look into it and is going to come back on the matter. I am sure the Editor of Hansard will have heard what the hon. Lady has to say and will look into the matter as a matter of urgency.

Youth Employment

Motion for leave to bring in a Bill (Standing Order No. 23)

2.39 pm

Steve McCabe (Birmingham, Selly Oak) (Lab): I beg to move, That leave be given to bring in a Bill to establish a programme to provide training and employment opportunities for unemployed young people between the ages of 16 and 25; to establish a comprehensive careers guidance service for young people seeking to enter the job market; to enable Apprenticeship Training Agencies to assist small businesses in employing apprentices; to provide small businesses with a National Insurance contributions holiday; to make provision for grants towards the wage costs of apprentices employed by small businesses; to make provision for a mechanism through which banks and other providers of financial services are required to allocate part of their bonus payment budget to support these measures; and for connected purposes.

Obviously, I welcome the small reduction in the figures announced today, but the truth is that we do not really know how high youth unemployment is in this country. The Prince’s Trust, which does such fantastic work with young people, claims that there are enough unemployed young people to fill every football stadium in the premier league, with almost 200,000 left queuing outside. It is true that youth unemployment is now much higher than it was in the second quarter of 2010. About 1,300 young people in my Selly Oak constituency are known to be unemployed. We also know that we now have the highest youth unemployment since 1992, and that one in five young people are unemployed.

John Philpott, the chief economic adviser of the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, argues that the best way to understand the full impact of unemployment on young people is to look at those not in education, employment or training. Helpfully, the Department for Education publishes those figures quarterly, and we can see from its statistics that youth unemployment is hovering around the 1 million mark. That is too high for a civilised society and a modern economy. How can we be optimistic about the future if we are prepared to subject our young people to a life of worklessness? How can parents have faith in a Government who are willing to let this happen? I witnessed it happen to a generation in the 1980s, and I do not want to see it happen again. That is why I am arguing that we need a fresh initiative to tackle the problem.

I want us to create a training and employment programme for those aged 16 to 25, because I believe that is the only realistic way to tackle a problem of that size. That kind of unemployment can have long-term damaging effects. It is estimated that a period of unemployment at the beginning of someone’s career can have a significant scarring effect through their entire working life. Bell and Blanchflower argue that unemployment when young, especially for a lengthy period, causes permanent scars. It raises the probability of being unemployed in later years and institutionalises a wage penalty over the course of a lifetime.

Those effects are much greater for younger people than for older people. Gregg and Tominey used the national child development study to argue that youth unemployment imposes an impact on individuals’ wages of 12% to 15% by the age of 42. Inactive young people are also more likely to be involved in crime, and significantly more likely to be unemployed later in life, as well as
having a higher propensity for physical and mental health problems, and drug and alcohol abuse. We owe it to our young people to do everything we can to prevent that scar of unemployment.

We need an employment programme that offers hope and opportunity, and we need training designed to address the structural gaps in our system. There needs to be more focus on science, technology, engineering and maths to help to reduce some of the mismatches between young people and employers. STEM skills are essential in sectors that are key to the future of UK competitiveness, such as IT, pharmaceuticals and high-value manufacturing, yet two fifths of employers report difficulties in recruiting STEM-skilled staff.

As part of a sustained programme to tackle youth unemployment, we also need to sort out the mess that has developed in careers advice and support for young people, especially the vulnerable and those whom we describe as NEETs. This is exactly the wrong time for the confusion and doubt sweeping the country as the Connexions organisation reels under the weight of local government cuts. We were told that cuts in the Department for Education area grant would have a limited impact, but we now see careers advice across the country decimated. In Birmingham the jobs of 200 Connexions staff are in doubt, and in some parts of the country provision is already being reduced to little more than online advice and a telephone help service. Barnardo’s, which specialises in work with vulnerable young people, says that it is extremely concerned that the closure of Connexions centres will leave many young people without advice and support this summer.

When the Tory party talked about an “all-age careers service” in its pre-coalition, pre-election manifesto—we should remember that that is what people thought they were voting for—I wonder how many realised that that was code for transferring specialised support to Jobcentre Plus advisers. I am sure that those advisers do a good job, but they do not have specialised skills in working with young people, and of course they can work only with the 16 and 17-year-olds who receive jobseeker’s allowance, which means they will not be helping the vulnerable, such as the NEETs, and those who too easily slip through the net.

The Federation of Small Businesses, whose knowledge and experience of small businesses we should listen to, is calling for a nationwide effort to encourage apprenticeship training agencies to act as host employers for small businesses. It points out that only 8% of small businesses have taken on an apprentice in the past year, but that 14% would be encouraged to do so if a separate organisation dealt with matters such as training, administration and employment.

The FSB is urging the National Apprenticeship Service in England to promote the benefits of apprenticeship training agencies to small and micro-businesses. It is also calling for a national insurance contributions holiday to help small businesses to give our youngsters a chance. The current national insurance holiday helps only start-ups that employ up to 10 people. It may come as a surprise to hon. Members, but start-ups employing 10 people are not common—the FSB says that most of its 205,000 members actually employ five or fewer staff.

Government data suggest that about 3,000 businesses are benefiting from the current scheme, but the Government promised that 300,000 businesses would be set up as a result of it. That suggests that money is available to help micro-businesses that employ five or fewer staff. Ultimately, the Treasury would benefit from extending a national insurance holiday, because more people would pay tax.

Youth unemployment costs more than £23 million in benefits every week, and lost productivity costs about £10 million a day: £600 million pounds would be enough to fund 100,000 young people directly, and perhaps more, in a proper Government work and training programme. It could also be used to stimulate businesses, which could mean that 10,000 more youngsters were given a chance.

The public are ahead of us on this matter, because they know that we should fund such a programme from a levy on the money set aside for unearned bonuses for wealthy bankers, who are continuing to pay themselves money that they have not earned while the rest of the country suffers as a result. I commend the Bill to the House.

2.50 pm

John McDonnell (Hayes and Harlington) (Lab): It is with deep regret that I oppose this Bill, and my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham, Selly Oak (Steve McCabe). I realise that his plan is well intentioned, but it contains several serious weaknesses, and in one instance a literally fatal flaw.

The first of my concerns are relatively minor, but they still need to be addressed. My hon. Friend proposes to re-establish the careers service scrapped by the previous Government—the Connexions service—but regrettably the proposals are not specific about the scale or location of that service. They do not explain who would be responsible, how it would be paid for or how many members of staff would be employed. They are too general on those matters. They also propose the establishment of apprenticeship training agencies to assist small business—but, to be frank, it is not small businesses that will provide apprenticeships. The bigger gains will come from large employers, which are not pulling their weight at the moment in developing apprenticeships. I regret therefore that my hon. Friend’s proposals do not focus on the large employers.

The outline proposals also say that there will be an inducement to small firms in the form of national insurance cuts and grants to small businesses. I have some anxieties about that, because in the three most recent Finance Bills both the previous Government and the present Government have significantly reduced corporation tax for small businesses and increased capital allowances. My hon. Friend also said that his proposals would be funded by bonus payments to banks and the financial services, which would subsidise the development of apprenticeships. I fully agree with part of that, although it would have been better had he supported my amendment to the Finance Bill on the Robin Hood tax—but perhaps he succumbed to pressure from the shadow Chancellor, as did other Members.

My main concern about the proposals for the Bill, however, is about the lack of reference to a key question about apprenticeships: how can they be made safe on the shop floor? That was one of the key issues addressed...
by the previous Government, so I regret that my hon.
Friend made no reference to it in either his outline
proposals or his speech. The previous Government
promoted apprenticeships from 1997 onwards, and in
the early 2000s the numbers expanded greatly. We all
supported that—it was supported across the House—but
one element was not put in place: the implementation of
health and safety measures when apprenticeships went
on to the shop floor.

In 2003 nine apprentices died as a result of a lack of
health and safety measures in the companies in which
they were placed. As a result, my hon. Friend the
Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis), who was then the
skills Minister, rightly brought in the civil servants,
identified the problem and allocated resources—under
legislation and with duties attached—to the Learning
and Skills Council, which were then inherited by the
Skills Funding Agency. A team of staff were appointed
to go into firms where apprentices were placed and
carry out a health and safety assessment. In that way,
we reduced nine fatalities a year to none. However, that
problem is not addressed in my hon. Friend’s proposals.

Since securing health and safety protection for apprentices
we have maintained an excellent record, but there is a
tragedy waiting to happen. The very staff whom the
previous Government appointed—a small unit of 25 in
the Skills Funding Agency—are to be sacked in September.
Regrettably, the Bill does not address that issue. I would
have expected my hon. Friend to include in his proposals
a further statutory duty for any proposed apprenticeship
training agency to ensure that health and safety are
respected and promoted.

It is a matter of regret that these members of staff,
who came to meet us yesterday, are to be sacked in
September. None of them will be available for the
implementation of the Bill. There will be no inspections
of workshops, factories or offices, or wherever else
apprentices are to be placed. As a result, I predict that
there would be a return of injuries and fatalities, and I
believe that the House would have some responsibility
for those deaths. I would therefore expect my hon.
Friend to insert into his Bill a clause giving any Government
seeking to develop apprenticeship schemes a further
legal duty to ensure that whenever an apprentice is
recruited there is a duty of care to ensure that wherever
the apprentice is placed complies with health and safety
legislation.

The argument that the Government have put, and
which might be made in the debate on the Bill, is that
the job of the Health and Safety Executive is to ensure
that a health and safety regime exits in such companies.
I am afraid that that is no longer the case. As a result of
the cuts that the Government are implementing, the
reduction in staffing for health and safety and the threat
from the recent White Paper, health and safety inspections
no longer take place on the same scale. That means that
when apprentices recruited under this legislation entered
the workplace, they would be at serious risk. I would
therefore expect any legislation promoting the recruitment
of apprentices—I fully agree with apprenticeships, because
they ensure that people get a decent training—at least
to establish a duty to ensure that those apprentices are
safe.

In 2003, when nine youngsters died, my hon. Friend
the Member for Bury South took advice from a range
of experts—we can offer the correspondence to the
Minister for Further Education, Skills and Lifelong
Learning—and that advice was very straightforward:
we needed to take additional responsibility to protect
the health and safety of apprentices going out to work.
These people are not experienced workers and are therefore
even more at risk than those who have been in the
workplace before, so we have a special responsibility.
Legislation is being promoted that we hope the Government
will accept, which would vastly expand the recruitment
of apprentices and opportunities for young people—
particularly, as my hon. Friend the Member for
Birmingham, Selly Oak mentioned, for those not in
education, employment or training, who are the people
most desperately in need of work and apprenticeships
of this sort. If we undertake an expansion on that scale,
we have a responsibility to ensure that those youngsters
are safe.

The ten-minute rule Bill unfortunately does not address
that issue. I hope that this debate will enable my hon.
Friend to reconsider the matter and propose a more
appropriate Bill that addresses this issue. More importantly,
I hope that the Government are listening. In less than
12 weeks, the health and safety team in the Skills
Funding Agency will be sacked. As a result, youngsters
will be put at risk. I urge the Government to think again
on this matter, because as a result of that action we
could revert to 2003, and I remember the nine fatalities
that occurred as a result of inappropriate protection for
those youngsters, as we expanded the apprenticeship
scheme at that time.

I say to my hon. Friend the Member for Birmingham,
Selly Oak that although this Bill is well intentioned,
even more at risk than those who have been in the
workplace before, so we have a special responsibility.
Legislation is being promoted that we hope the Government
will accept, which would vastly expand the recruitment
of apprentices and opportunities for young people—
particularly, as my hon. Friend the Member for
Birmingham, Selly Oak mentioned, for those not in
education, employment or training, who are the people
most desperately in need of work and apprenticeships
of this sort. If we undertake an expansion on that scale,
we have a responsibility to ensure that those youngsters
are safe.

The House divided: Ayes 241, Noes 35.

Division No. 325]  [2.59 pm

AYES

Abbott, Ms Diane  Beith, rh Sir Alan
Abrahams, Debbie  Bell, Sir Stuart
Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob  Benton, Mr Joe
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas  Berger, Luciana
Alexander, Heidi  Betts, Mr Clive
Ali, Rushanara  Bingham, Andrew
Andrew, Stuart  Binley, Mr Brian
Ashworth, Jon  Blackman, Bob
Bailey, Mr Adrian  Blackman-Woods, Roberta
Bain, Mr William  Blears, rh Hazel
Balls, rh Ed  Blomfield, Paul
Banks, Gordon  Bone, Mr Peter
Beckett, rh Margaret  Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Begg, Dame Anne  Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Mr Gordon
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas
Brown, Mr Russell
Bruce, rh Malcolm
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, rh Andy
Burt, Lorely
Campbell, Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Chapman, Mrs Jenny
Clark, Katy
Clarke, rh Mr Tom
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Rosie
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Tony
Curran, Margaret
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
David, Mr Wayne
Davidson, rh Mr Ian
Davies, David T. C.
(Monmouth)
Davies, Geraint
De Piero, Gloria
Demark, rh Mr John
Dobbin, Jim
Dochtery, Thomas
Donaldson, rh Mr Jeffrey M.
Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
Doran, Mr Frank
Doyle, Gemma
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Durkan, Mark
Eagle, Ms Angela
Edwards, Jonathan
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Evans, Chris
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Flint, rh Caroline
Fovargue, Yvonne
Francis, Dr Hywel
Fuller, Richard
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Garnier, Mark
George, Andrew
Gilmore, Sheila
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Goodman, Helen
Gray, Mr James
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hain, rh Mr Peter
Hamilton, Mr David
Hamilton, Fabian
Hancock, Mr Mike
Hanson, rh Mr David
Havard, Mr Dai
Hemming, John
Hendrick, Mark
Hermon, Lady
Hillig, Julie
Hodge, rh Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Horwood, Martin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Huppert, Dr Julian
Irarrana-Davies, Huw
James, Mrs Siân C.
Janisiews, Cathy
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Susan Elan
Joyce, Eric
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, rh Sadiq
Knight, rh Mr Greg
Lammy, rh Mr David
Laws, rh Mr David
Lazarouwiz, Mark
Leadsom, Andrea
Leech, Mr John
Leslie, Chris
Lloyd, Tony
Llywd, rh Mr Elfyn
Long, Naomi
Love, rh Mr Andrew
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian
Lumley, Karen
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
MacShane, rh Mr Denis
MacTaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahmood, Shabana
Mann, John
Marsden, Mr Gordon
McCabe, Steve
McCann, rh Mr Michael
McCarthy, Kerry
McCartney, Karl
McClaymont, Gregg
McCrea, Dr William
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McGovern, Jim
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenzie, Mr Iain
McKinnell, Catherine
Meale, Sir Alan
Mearns, Ian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morrice, Graeme (Livingston)
Morris, Grahame M. (Easington)
Mudie, Mr George
Munn, Mag
Munt, Tessa
Murphy, rh Paul
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Nash, Pamela
O’Donnell, Fiona
Onwurah, Chi
Owen, Albert
Paisley, Ian
Percy, Andrew
Perkins, Toby
Phillips, Stephen
Pound, Stephen
Queeshi, Yasmin
Raynsford, rh Mr Nick
Reckless, Mark
Reevel, Simon
Reeves, Rachel
Reynolds, Jonathan
Riordan, Mrs Linda
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, Angus
Robinson, rh Mr Geoffrey
Roosindell, Andrew
Rotheram, Steve
Roy, Lindsay
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, rh Joan
Sarwar, Anas
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Shiridan, Jim
Shuker, Gavin
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaughter, Mr Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela
Bone, Mr Peter
Bruce, Fiona
Cairns, Alun
Carmichael, Neil
Coffee, Dr Thérèse
Colville, Oliver
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, Philip
Ellis, Michael
Evans, Graham
Evans, Jonathan
Flynn, Paul
Glen, John
Griffiths, Andrew
Hafon, Robert
Hollobone, rh Philip
Johnson, Gareth
Latham, Pauline
Lee, Dr Phillip
Lilley, rh Mr Peter

Smith, Nick
Smith, Owen
Smith, Sir Robert
Spellar, rh Mr John
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Straw, rh Mr Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Timms, rh Stephen
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Umnuna, Mr Chuka
Vickers, Martin
Walker, Mr Robin
Wall, Joanne
Watts, Mr Dave
Weir, Mr Mike
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Wicks, rh Malcolm
Williams, Mr Mark
Williams, Roger
Williamson, Chris
Williamson, Gavin
Willott, Jenny
Wilson, Phil
Wilson, Sammy
Winnick, Mr David
Winterton, rh Ms Rosie
Wishart, Pete
Wright, David
Wright, Mr Iain

Tellers for the Ayes:
Valerie Vaz and Karl Turner

NOES

Lord, Jonathan
McCarty, Karl
Mitchell, Austin
Morley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Nuttall, Mr David
Percy, Andrew
Phillips, Stephen
Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Russell, Bob
Tomlinson, Justin
Turner, Mr Andrew
Walker, Mr Charles
Wharton, James
Whittaker, Craig

Tellers for the Noes:
Kelvin Hopkins and Jeremy Corbyn

Question accordingly agreed to.

Ordered.

That Steve McCabe, Mr Jim Cunningham, Valerie Vaz, Ms Gisela Stuart, Ms Margaret Ritchie, Siobhain McDonagh, Kate Hoey, Mr Frank Field, Richard Burden Kate Green, Jim Sheridan and Mr Iain Wright present the Bill.

Steve McCabe accordingly presented the Bill.

Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 25 November, and to be printed (Bill 219).
Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83A(7))

That the following provisions shall apply to the Fixed-term Parliaments Bill for the purpose of supplementing the Orders of 13 September and 24 November 2010 (Fixed-term Parliaments Bill (Programme) and Fixed-term Parliaments Bill (Programme) (No. 2):

Consideration of Lords Amendments

1. Proceedings on consideration of Lords Amendments shall (so far as not previously concluded) be brought to a conclusion two hours after their commencement at today’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.—(James Duddridge.)

Question agreed to.

Consideration of Lords amendments.

Clause 1

POLLING DAYS FOR PARLIAMENTARY GENERAL ELECTIONS

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr Mark Harper): I beg to move, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 1.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): With this we may take Lords amendments 2 and 9.

Mr Harper: I should like to make it clear that I am proposing that the House disagrees with their lordships on amendments 1, 2 and 9, and I shall set out the reasons for that. For the benefit of Members who have not had the chance to study the amendments in detail, they provide that the provisions in this excellent Bill be subject to a sunset clause after the next general election. Each subsequent Parliament would have the choice of whether to be a fixed-term Parliament or not. The Government want to oppose the amendments because we think that they fundamentally undermine the purpose of the Bill, which was welcomed by, among others, the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee of this House. I see a member of the Committee, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) sort of agreeing with me on the Opposition Benches.

In bringing forward the Bill, we are seeking to put in place a provision that we hope will become an established part of our constitutional arrangements—namely, that fixed-term Parliaments for this UK Parliament become the norm, just as they are for local government, for the devolved legislatures and for the European Parliament. Two of the most important things in the Bill—in the form that the Government would like it to take—are, first, the proposal for an ability to deny the Executive the ability to choose a date for a general election to suit their own ends and to ensure that the Prime Minister gives up that power for the first time, and, secondly, to deliver certainty on how long a Parliament will last, which will benefit not only parliamentarians but the public.

3.15 pm

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): Was the Minister disappointed, as I was, that their lordships on amendments 1, 2 and 9, and I shall set out the reasons for that. For the benefit of Members who have not had the chance to study the amendments in detail, they provide that the provisions in this excellent Bill be subject to a sunset clause after the next general election. Each subsequent Parliament would have the choice of whether to be a fixed-term Parliament or not. The Government want to oppose the amendments because we think that they fundamentally undermine the purpose of the Bill, which was welcomed by, among others, the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee of this House. I see a member of the Committee, the hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central (Tristram Hunt) sort of agreeing with me on the Opposition Benches.

In bringing forward the Bill, we are seeking to put in place a provision that we hope will become an established part of our constitutional arrangements—namely, that fixed-term Parliaments for this UK Parliament become the norm, just as they are for local government, for the devolved legislatures and for the European Parliament. Two of the most important things in the Bill—in the form that the Government would like it to take—are, first, the proposal for an ability to deny the Executive the ability to choose a date for a general election to suit their own ends and to ensure that the Prime Minister gives up that power for the first time, and, secondly, to deliver certainty on how long a Parliament will last, which will benefit not only parliamentarians but the public.

3.15 pm

Tristram Hunt (Stoke-on-Trent Central) (Lab): Was the Minister disappointed, as I was, that their lordships did not seek to alter the limit for the fixed-term Parliament from five years to four years, which seems to be what the majority of the British public would like?

Mr Harper: I was not in the slightest disappointed that this House and the House of Lords—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. We must stick to the amendments.

Mr Harper: Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker. My short answer is that I was not disappointed.

Mr Charles Walker (Broxbourne) (Con) rose—
Mr William Cash (Stone) (Con) rose—

Mr Harper: I will give way in a moment.

If the Lords amendments were accepted, the electorate would have no certainty as to how long the Parliament that they will elect on 7 May 2015 would last. Such certainty, and the principle behind the Bill, have been welcomed by many electoral administrators and by members of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee.

Mr Walker: Will the Minister tell the House where that desire for public certainty in relation to a five-year Parliament comes from? Does he think that there would be huge upset in 2015 if people were suddenly to discover that the Parliament might run for only four years—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle): Order. It would be helpful if the hon. Gentleman could let us know which part of the amendment he is referring to.

Mr Harper: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for his intervention. The polling that has been carried out suggests that the public support fixed-term Parliaments. Indeed, if we think back to the previous Parliament, there was a general sense, both in the House and among the public and commentators, that the “will he, won’t he” debate about whether the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown) would call an election on becoming Prime Minister was not helpful to good Government or to good democratic accountability. It will be helpful to have greater certainty, as that will benefit us all. Let us ask ourselves this question: if the Bill became law, and fixed-term Parliaments became the norm, would any Minister realistically be able to come to the Dispatch Box and suggest with a straight face that we should change the position and give the power back to the Prime Minister to hold an election at a time of his choosing to suit his political party? Would anyone take that proposition seriously? I suggest that they would not.

Mr Cash: Has it occurred to the Minister that part of the problem with this wretched Bill is that it is trying to organise things to suit the requirements of this coalition? Decisions on the future should actually be down to the public at large, and if they want to get rid of a Parliament, they will do so in their own way. That is where the question of a confidence motion starts to kick in.

Mr Deputy Speaker: Order. We are not dealing with the whole Bill; we are dealing with the amendments. I am sure that the Minister will take that into account in his answer.

Mr Harper: To be fair to my hon. Friend, Mr Deputy Speaker, he was speaking to the amendments that we are discussing. He made the assertion that our proposals would suit this particular Government during this particular Parliament, but that is simply not the case. If the Prime Minister wanted to ensure that this Parliament ran for the full five years and that the general election took place on 7 May 2015, he would need to do only one thing—namely, not approach Her Majesty the Queen to seek a Dissolution before that date. We could thereby achieve a five-year Parliament for this Parliament, but we want to make a change to our constitutional processes—I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr Cash) does not agree with it—to remove from Prime Ministers the ability to choose the date of a general election.

The second part of my hon. Friend’s question effectively suggested that a sunset provision would be a good thing. Under our democratic system, the public elect Members of Parliament for a term. At the moment, they do not have a choice about when the general election will be: the sole decision about that sits with the Prime Minister. The Bill seeks to give that power to Members of this democratically elected House. I would have thought that my hon. Friend, as a champion of parliamentary control of the Executive, would welcome that proposition.

Mr Cash: I can assure my hon. Friend that the real question is not whether the Prime Minister wants to call a general election, but what the state of the country is and whether there is a sense of urgency among the public at large. That can force a general election, irrespective of whether a Prime Minister wants to pull the plug.

Mr Harper: I am afraid that my hon. Friend is simply not right. That is not the current constitutional position. The current position is that for a period of time during which a Government have the confidence of this House, the only person who decides whether there should be a general election—assuming that we have not reached the end of the Parliament—is the Prime Minister, who seeks a Dissolution from Her Majesty the Queen. Members of Parliament, unless they vote down the Government on a vote of confidence, do not have that power. The general public certainly do not have that power.

Mr Richard Shepherd (Aldridge-Brownhills) (Con): The Minister’s proposition was a much disputed one. It was thought at one stage that Mr Major, when Prime Minister, was prepared to call a general election during the difficulties surrounding Maastricht. The argument put by people like Robert Rhodes James was that it was a matter for the Cabinet as a whole to give the Prime Minister the authority to go to the Queen—a more collective approach. The coarse person, the Back Bencher on the streets—or rather the Benches here—would argue that the Cabinet at the time would have thrown themselves in front of John Major’s car if he went to Buckingham palace, as the last thing the Conservative party could bear at that juncture was a general election. It is a process; that is what my hon. Friend the Member for Stone is talking about. The Prime Minister is not the only person who can determine a general election. That is the ebb and flow of real politics, which is what this House is about. That is why, as I am sure the Minister will understand, there is opposition to some of the propositions in the Bill.

Mr Harper: I am not sure that I want to conjure up visions of Cabinet Ministers throwing themselves in front of prime ministerial cars, which is not a happy thought.—[Interruption.] Some of the comments from Opposition Members are unworthy of them. Let me explain what I do not understand about my hon. Friend’s point. He is arguing, I think, for decisions about the timing of general elections to be a more collegiate effort, rather than just the choice of the Prime Minister—but that is exactly what the Bill does. It takes away from the Prime Minister the power to call a general election by
asking the Queen for a Dissolution and gives that power to Members. Two thirds of them can choose to have an early election for any reason, including general concerns about the state of the country, which deals with the point raised by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone. Having this Bill in place would allow that to happen, which cannot be done today. The other way of bringing about an election is the Government losing a vote of confidence. That is why the Government believe that the Bill should be in place; it should not be up to each individual Parliament to decide whether the Bill should remain in force. That is why we oppose these sunset clauses.

We think that the real threat presented by the amendments is that they could create a scenario in which political parties, and specifically the Government party, could choose in each Parliament, even at its beginning, whether that Parliament should be a fixed-term one. As the Bill is currently drafted, both Houses would have to vote in favour of the Fixed-term Parliament Bill kicking into place at any time during the Parliament. I simply do not think that that is a very sensible proposition. It would mean that Governments would have a way of manipulating the timetable. We should think it through. If both Houses have to vote in favour of a motion for a fixed-term Parliament to be in place, a Government with a majority could simply refuse to pass that motion—and we would effectively have given back to the Prime Minister the ability to call an election. That would not be a positive step forward.

It is important to note that when this House and the other place were legislating for the fixed terms of the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly, it was not thought appropriate to have sunset clauses. We did not give those legislatures the opportunity to pick and choose each time how long their terms of office should be. I do not believe that doing so makes sense now.

Mr Cash: When it comes to these Assemblies and other devolved organisations, we respect them, but the analogy the Minister is making could just as well be applied to a parish council.

Mr Harper: That is not an analogy I would make with the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly. When this House made decisions about setting up those bodies, we did not think it appropriate to give them the power to pick and choose their term of office. We set it out in the legislation that set the bodies up.

I am curious to know what the supporters of the Lords amendment think would happen if the next Parliament decided that it did not want a fixed term. It is not very clear from the amendments, how exactly the mechanisms would work. I shall take Members through the Lords amendments shortly and explain how I think they would work.

It has been suggested that a sunset clause would ensure that the issue of fixed-term Parliaments and the merits of this particular Bill would be subject to post-legislative scrutiny. That is not necessary, however. This legislation has already been scrutinised by four Select Committees: the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, the Lords Constitution Committee, the Joint Committee on Human Rights and the Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee. I am sure that any one of those Select Committees or another Select Committee will subject the Bill to some form of post-legislative scrutiny, which is something that the Government would welcome. I do not think that these sunset clauses, however, would lead to that type of sensible scrutiny.

I said that I would look at the effect of the Lords amendments on the working of the Bill. Lords amendment 9 talks about a resolution having to be “approved by each House of Parliament”.

That is fairly straightforward. The most unclear provisions relate to section 7(4), stating that a number of parts of the Bill will have effect “only until the first meeting of the... Parliament”, which would then decide whether to bring those provisions in. The provisions on early elections and confidence votes would not be clear and it would not be clear how Parliament would be dissolved. The schedule, which has a number of consequential amendments, would also not be in force. The schedule, which repeals the Septennial Act and a whole load of other provisions, would effectively cease to be in force and, presumably, all the repeals and amendments would be unrepealed and unamended. We would then end up with a very complicated constitutional proposition.

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Unless I misheard the Minister, he referred to section 7(4) of the Bill. I cannot find a section 7(4).

Mr Harper: I am looking at the copy of the Bill as amended on Report from the House of Lords, which does have a section 7. It is the final provision section. It is the bit that is dealt with by one of the Lords amendments that we are debating. I think that the amendment will be confusing. It will make many of our constitutional provisions unclear. I do not believe that those who tabled the amendments and voted for them in the other place have fully thought through how they would work in practice.

Another important issue is the relationship that would be created between this House and the other place if the amendments stay in the Bill. The importance of establishing the primacy of this House came out clearly in our debate on the Government’s proposals on House of Lords reform. The amendments would give the House and the other place the ability to vote on whether we have a fixed-term Parliament, without going through the normal legislative process. That could lead to an unfortunate scenario in which this House voted overwhelmingly in favour of the motion that we have a fixed-term Parliament and that the provisions of the Bill, if passed, come into force, while the currently unelected House failed to vote for the motion, so we would not have a fixed-term Parliament. Important decisions about elections in this country, fixed-term Parliaments, the confidence procedures and the ability to trigger early general elections would effectively be made by the unelected House, and that would diminish the power of elected Members.

3.30 pm

Chris Bryant: The Minister’s example is completely wrong. If this House voted—on the basis of the Government’s and, therefore, the Prime Minister’s
clearly from our earlier debate that most Members of power away from this House to the other place. Whatever of the other place are elected, we are talking about unelected. Secondly, regardless of how many Members in 2015, most Members of the other place will still be current form, and we have the first set of such elections we successfully push our proposals through in their place did not vote for a fixed-term Parliament, whether there would be an early election would be in the hands of the Prime Minister. The will of this House would always have carried.

Mr Harper: The hon. Gentleman confuses the will of the House and the will of the Prime Minister. The scenario that I set out stands. If the other place had chosen not to vote for fixed-term Parliaments, we would not have a fixed-term Parliament, despite this House having voted in favour, and that would give back to the Prime Minister the ability solely to decide whether there should be an election. We would have taken powers away from Members of this House who had voted, perhaps overwhelmingly, to ensure that the Bill was in force. We would have been thwarted by their lordships. Given the importance to Members of the primacy of this House, that effectively moves power in the opposite direction, which Members will find unwelcome.

Mr Cash: I appreciate that the Minister is a Minister of the Crown, but he would get into difficult territory if he suggested that the Prime Minister is a Prime Minister without the confidence of the House of Commons, which is more or less what he has just been saying.

Mr Harper: That is not what I said at all. My specific point is about the relative powers of the two Houses, but the point stands that if we do not have a fixed-term Parliament, we give back to the Prime Minister the power to call an early election. To repeat my example, the amendments would mean that both Houses must vote positively in favour of resurrecting the provisions of the Bill. I want the other place also to be elected—I know that my hon. Friend does not—but under the amendments the elected House, despite having voted by an overwhelming margin, could be thwarted by the unelected House, and the provisions of the Bill would not be in force. The will of the House of Commons, having said that it did not want the Prime Minister to have the power to call an early election, and that it wanted that power to be held by Members of this House, would have been thwarted by the other place. I am sure that my hon. Friend would not agree with that.

Mr Cash: I am grateful to the Minister for engaging in dialogue on this question, but the assumption, at any rate in the mind of the Deputy Prime Minister, is that proposals for reform of the House of Lords will go through by the end of this Parliament. The arguments to which the Minister refers, therefore, will effectively expire when the arrangements for this fixed-year Parliament come to an end.

Mr Harper: I disagree with my hon. Friend. Even if we successfully push our proposals through in their current form, and we have the first set of such elections in 2015, most Members of the other place will still be unelected. Secondly, regardless of how many Members of the other place are elected, we are talking about primacy. Effectively, the amendments would move power away from this House to the other place. Whatever one’s views about House of Lords reform, I picked up clearly from our earlier debate that most Members of this place want it to be clear that this place has primacy over their lordships’ House. The amendments, perhaps inadvertently, would lead to a different situation.

Mr Robert Syms (Poole) (Con): Under the Bill, a large number of Members of the House must vote for a Dissolution. The person who decides whether there is a general election is, therefore, the Leader of the Opposition, because if the Government and the Opposition want a Dissolution, it happens. Under the amendments, the House of Lords would effectively be taking power away from the Leader of the Opposition, who would be in a position to provide the numbers for a Dissolution.

Mr Harper: I agree. The fact remains that we are taking powers away from this House and giving them to the other place. It has been clear to me from our earlier debates that that view is not widely shared in this House, and indeed, interestingly, it does not appear to be widely shared in the other place. As I observed from careful reading of the report of the debates there, many speakers were very concerned about the primacy of this House, which was good of them. They said that they did not want to damage it in any way. Plainly their support for the amendments was inadvertent; they may not have thought through the consequences fully. I therefore think it would be sensible for this House to disagree with their Lordships, and to give them an opportunity to reconsider their decision and return the Bill to the form in which it left this House.

Mark Durkan (Foyle) (SDLP): I recognise the strength of the Minister's arguments. The effect of the amendments, surely, would be to leave us with not a Fixed-term Parliaments Bill, but a Fixable-term Parliaments Bill. We could get into a constitutional “fix” in trying to “fix” the term, with an elected Chamber voting one way and an—in all likelihood—still unelected Chamber voting another way. If that happened, what would be the default position?

Mr Harper: I agree. The hon. Gentleman has put it very well. Under the Bill as the Government want to see it—this House having disagreed with their Lordships, and their Lordships having accepted that the Bill should remain as it is—its provisions would be in force unless and until a future Parliament changed them. It would be this House that would determine whether an early election should take place if two thirds of Members, that is, a broad consensus, were in favour of it—which returns us to the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone about what would happen if there were a general view that the state of the nation was such that there should be an early election—or if the Government no longer had the confidence of this House. The other place would have no role in that process at all, which I think is right.

As the hon. Gentleman pointed out, if the amendments were in force there would be a “fix” in each Parliament: each Government would effectively be able to choose whether to have a fixed-term Parliament, because they could block the motion passed by this House. Worse, it would not be a choice that the Houses took at the start of a Parliament, because the amendments make no provision for that. At any point during the Parliament, the two Houses, if they passed the motion, could suddenly convert the Parliament to a fixed term. That would be
likely to lead to the position described by my hon. Friend the Member for Stone, with people putting a fix in place to suit a particular short-term need.

**Mark Durkan:** Does any provision in the Lords amendments or the Bill specify or restrict who can table such a motion in either House, and when or how many times it could be tabled again if whoever tables it does not succeed on the first occasion?

**Mr Harper:** The hon. Gentleman has put his finger on it. The provisions are completely silent about that. They do not say who would table the motion, or whether the same question could be continually repeated.

The amendments are not very well drafted. I think that they are wrong in principle, because under the normal procedure legislation that is passed stays in force unless it is changed by a future Parliament, but even if we liked the concept of a sunset provision, such a provision ought to be much better drafted and much more effective. This House can choose only between accepting the amendments and disagreeing with them, and I think I have almost made my case that we should disagree with them.

It has been argued that we are trying to bind future Parliaments. That is not what we are trying to do at all. We are merely trying to re-establish the normal constitutional position. We are passing legislation which we hope will become the established position, but if a future Parliament, perhaps the next one, decides that the fixed-term Parliament experiment—an experiment that is common to many countries around the world—has not been successful and has not led to better government, it will be perfectly free to pass another piece of legislation that repeals these measures either in full or in part. We do not have an arrangement whereby we “sunset” every piece of legislation, and an incoming Government then finds that the rules are unwritten and they can choose what those rules should be. That would not be a very sensible constitutional position.

**Mr Cash:** Without going into all the questions relating to judicial supremacy and the claims of ultimate authority by certain members of the judiciary, I am afraid that through this measure and a number of others the Government have opened the door to the possibility—indeed the likelihood, as Lord Bingham made clear—of Government having the power to dissolve Parliament by seeking a Dissolution from Her Majesty the Queen. I do not think that that is in accordance with what the hon. Gentleman said then.

There are a number of other useful quotes. The Labour party manifesto of last year stated that “we will legislate for Fixed Term Parliaments...We will let the people decide how to reform our institutions and our politics: changing the voting system and electing a second chamber to replace the House of Lords.”

I do not agree with the first, but I do agree with the second. “But we will go further, introducing fixed-term parliaments”.

Furthermore, the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath said that a vote for Labour was a vote for fixed-term Parliaments.

I accept that Labour did not win the election, but it seems to me that if the hon. Member for Rhondda is going to carry out the spirit of that commitment, all the people who voted Labour at the last election will expect him to vote in favour of fixed-term Parliaments. If he does not agree to disagree with their Lordships, he will not be carrying out that manifesto commitment.

**Graham Stringer** (Blackley and Broughton) (Lab): I have not read the Conservative party manifesto recently, but so far as I remember it did not contain a commitment to fixed-term Parliaments. Therefore, if the hon. Gentleman were to take his own advice, he would withdraw his support for the Bill.

**Mr Harper:** The hon. Gentleman sets me up very nicely for my final quotation. In this Bill’s Second Reading debate—which took place a long time ago, on 13 September 2010, which goes to show that the Bill has enjoyed leisurely progress through both Houses with proper scrutiny in both Chambers—the right hon. Member for Blackburn (Mr Straw) said:

“I have long been in favour of fixed terms. I could dig out correspondence I had with Margaret Thatcher in 1983 about fixed terms. The Labour party committed itself to fixed terms in the 1992 election. What typically happens—this is why I welcome the measure and why I wanted that commitment in our manifesto—is that parties in opposition that are in favour of fixed terms go off the boil on them when they come into government.”—[Official Report, 13 September 2010; Vol. 515, c. 645.]

Interestingly, we have done the opposite. We were not very keen on them in opposition, but we have become keener on them in government, and this was in our coalition agreement.

**Mr Shepherd** rose—

**Mr Charles Walker** rose—

**Mr Harper:** My comments seem to have provoked interest. I shall give way first to my hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr Shepherd).
Mr Shepherd: I am startled by my hon. Friend’s line of argument. I did toil through our election manifesto, and I saw no pledge or undertaking at all to have a fixed-term Parliament, and least of all a fixed-term Parliament for five years, so what is his line of argument?

Mr Harper: My hon. Friend rightly says that we did not have a commitment to do this, but equally we had not promised not to do it. The case was made to us that there was a good case for fixed-term Parliaments, provision was made for them in the coalition agreement and we brought the measure before the House. When good arguments are made, wise Governments listen to them and introduce these very sensible measures. They do not contradict anything that we had in our manifesto. It is usual for Governments to introduce proposals that were not in their manifesto when sensible arguments are made for them. That is a perfectly sensible proposition.

3.45 pm

Mr Cash: I have no doubt that my hon. Friend will say that the sensible basis on which this is being proposed is that the Liberal Democrats were in favour of fixed-term Parliaments. So here we go again with the tail wagging the dog.

Mr Harper: I would not characterise the relationship like that at all. A good case was made, and on this particular issue the Prime Minister has demonstrated tremendous leadership. He is the first Prime Minister to give us the power—an incredibly powerful step forward and it is very welcome.

Mr Charles Walker rose—

Mr Harper: I promised earlier to give way to my hon. Friend.

Mr Walker: The current system has served us pretty well for 350 years. The Minister cites other Parliaments around the world that have been established for perhaps 20 or 30 years at best. Perhaps they would be best advised to follow our example, as opposed to us following their example.

Mr Harper: As I said at the beginning of my remarks, I do not believe that the general public support the exercise that we go through in the run-up to the end of a Parliament, where we enter the “will he, won’t he?” argument. We all know—that this came out clearly in the debate in the other place from some who had been close to these decisions—that the decision that is taken, perfectly honourably, is about how best the Prime Minister can choose the date to maximise the chance of their party being re-elected. I simply do not think that is a good basis on which the decision should be made, and I think that our approach is an improvement.

Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): I support the Minister’s point. Even if it is the case that fixed-term Parliaments have variable terms; it decided that it was sensible to have fixed terms. If this House thought that that was good enough for them, it should be good enough for us.

Mr Harper: The hon. Gentleman is right. As I said, when this House decided to legislate to set up the Scottish Parliament, the Welsh Assembly and the Northern Ireland Assembly, it did not think that it was right to have variable terms; it decided that it was sensible to have fixed terms. If this House thought that that was good enough for them, it should be good enough for us.

Let me finish by reading out the following quote from the right hon. Member for Blackburn. [Interruption.] The hon. Member for Stoke-on-Trent Central rightly says that I have already read out the quote, but I wanted to set out the conclusion that the Labour party should draw from it. The right hon. Gentleman said that “parties in opposition that are in favour of fixed terms go off the boil on them when they come into government.”—[Official Report, 13 September 2010; Vol. 515, c. 645.]

The Labour party is in danger of doing the opposite. It is in danger of being committed to this proposition when it was in government and then going off the boil on it when in opposition. The party should reconsider.

In the time before the House is asked to make a decision on this, I hope that the Labour party will decide that we should disagree with their lordships on this group of amendments.

Chris Bryant: I am afraid that the Minister did not impress me with his arguments. In particular, he referred to the fact that the Conservative manifesto did not contain anything about introducing fixed-term Parliaments and then said that when good arguments came along people should bow to them. As far as I can see, the only good argument that came along was that the Liberal Democrats would not support the Government unless there was a fixed-term Parliament element in the coalition agreement. So the only reason why we have this Bill, particularly in its current form, is because of the attempt to create the coalition and then to keep it going for five years.

The Minister then tried to tease me a little with the idea that the former Prime Minister, my right hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), said that he wanted people who voted for Labour to be voting for fixed-term Parliaments. This amendment would allow us to vote in every Parliament for fixed-term Parliaments, so it gives more opportunities for people to vote for them, rather than fewer.

Mr Cash: Does the shadow Minister agree that the Bill has all the elements of an attempt to achieve a sort of permanent coalition arrangement? In fact, if one were to look at the current state of affairs one might feel some sympathy for those on our side of the House who have found as a result of the mistakes that have been made by the Government and other that the Prime Minister have now low in the polls and that the 56 seats that they won at the last general election might by all accounts be fewer than 20 if those opinion polls were to be believed.
Chris Bryant: I think I agree with that, but I am not entirely sure. The bit I agreed with was in feeling sympathy for those on the Government side of the House.

The three amendments we are discussing come as a package. In essence, they are all there to do the same thing: to say that the present arrangements will remain, so that the coalition gets to hold itself together until to 2015, but that after the next general election and at any subsequent creation of a new Parliament, unless other legislation is brought in, there would have to be a vote in both Houses for that system to remain in place. I shall come to the issue of both Houses in a moment.

Mr Harper rose—

Chris Bryant: I was going to come to that matter in a few moments, but if the Minister wants me to come to it now I will of course give way.

Mr Harper: I wanted to question something the hon. Gentleman said. He says that at the start of each Parliament there would have to be such a motion, but that is not what the amendments say. They leave it completely open for that to happen at any point during the Parliament, and I think that would be deeply unsatisfactory.

Chris Bryant: The Minister is absolutely right. That was a small slip of mine and the vote could happen at any time. Any Government worth their salt would without a doubt table such a motion at the beginning of the Parliament so that there was clarity.

We should also know that Lords amendment 1 was not tabled by the Labour party. It was tabled by Lord Pannick with the support of Lady Boothroyd, Lord Butler and Lord Armstrong. Their arguments carried quite a lot of weight with the House—clearly, they carried enough weight to win the vote. Lord Pannick said when moving the amendment:

“The purpose of the amendments is to address the deep unease on all sides of the House, as expressed at Second Reading and in Committee, as to whether it is appropriate to confine the circumstances in which a general election may be called within a five-year term.”—[Official Report, House of Lords, 10 May 2011; Vol. 727, c. 822.]

There has been that level of discomfort and unease in this House, too, although it was more marked down the other end. Lord Pannick also referred to the “constitutional damage” that all this might create and called the whole Bill an “unhappy Bill”. I have some sympathy with him.

It is true that I have previously commented—and I stand by those comments—that the Labour party is committed to fixed-term Parliaments. However, we think the right way to introduce legislation on something as constitutionally significant as changing the way in which a general election is called is to engage in consultation with all the parties in this House before tabling a Bill and to introduce pre-legislative scrutiny of that Bill. If the Minister had chosen to go down that route, he would have had a great deal of co-operation from Opposition Members and we would have ended up with a better piece of legislation. One issue that we might have been able to address in such circumstances is whether it is right to make the change through legislation or Standing Order, which might well have saved us from the danger of the question of calling a general election at any time being justiciable in the courts. Lord Pannick also made that point. He said that, as there had been no pre-legislative scrutiny, it was important that after a future general election there was an opportunity for each House to consider the matter again.

Naomi Long (Belfast East) (Alliance): One definition of “fix” is:

“To place securely; make stable or firm”.

Surely the Lords amendment does the reverse on two counts, in that it neither makes it the fixed position that there will be fixed-term Parliament nor sets in stone the time at which that decision would be taken by future Parliaments. What it creates is the opposite of “fixed”; it creates an insecure situation.

Chris Bryant: My contention and, I think, Lord Pannick’s contention is that this is a fix in a different way, because it is essentially rigging the constitution so as to make it possible for the coalition to remain in government until 2015—against the manifesto commitment.

Mark Durkan rose—

Naomi Long rose—

Chris Bryant: Let me finish my point. Lord Pannick also cited the Constitution Committee in the House of Lords, which said:

“the origins and content of this Bill owe more to short-term considerations than to a mature assessment of enduring constitutional principles or sustained public demand.”

I think their lordships were right. I will now give way to my hon. Friend the Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan) and then to the hon. Member for Belfast East (Naomi Long), who is slightly my hon. Friend.

Mark Durkan: I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. Earlier, he indicated to the Minister that he assumed that the resolution provided for under the amendment would be moved at the start of a Parliament on the basis that any Government worth their salt would do it then. Can he tell us what he believes any Opposition worth their salt would do in relation to such a resolution? Would not the scenario that he is arguing for, of a Government doing that at the start of a Parliament, mean that the very undemocratic spectacle that we have seen in this Parliament of a Government fixing the term to suit themselves would happen in every Parliament?

Chris Bryant: I suppose it is true that every Opposition will always want to take an opportunity to have an early general election. The nature of opposition means wanting to become the Government, so the Opposition would want the chance to have a general election. I think that is the drift of what my hon. Friend said. As I have said, I think we would have a better piece of legislation if we had had pre-legislative scrutiny and had been able to sit around a table, not just with the main parties but with the smaller, minority parties too.

Naomi Long: On the issue of fixing, would it not appear to be more of a fix if the Bill affected only one Parliament in which we happen to have a coalition and then fell into abeyance and had to be resurrected for future Parliaments than if the system were changed to introduce fixed-term Parliaments on a permanent basis, thereby requiring future Governments to rescind that decision if they wanted to change it?
Chris Bryant: No, I do not accept that, because the experience over the rather sad course of this Bill has been that there has been no consultation with the Opposition about a major constitutional change. The hon. Member for Broxbourne (Mr Walker) said earlier that the system has lasted for 300 years, but I do not think it has been a good system or that it has been perfect for the British constitution, because it has on occasion allowed too much power for a Prime Minister to call a general election at his or her—well, very rarely at her—convenience. In that regard, it is better that we should proceed in a different direction. For us the key issue is whether a term should be four or five years.

Mr Charles Walker: No system is perfect, but we have had a fairly dynamic democracy over the past 350 years and by fixing parliamentary terms we will lose some of that dynamism.

Chris Bryant: I have sympathy with that argument, but I also think that this is one of the changes towards a fixed-term Parliament that would assist in that and would be another part of the steady progress of parliamentary evolution to which he referred.

Mr Cash: Does the hon. Gentleman agree that there are really interesting historical analogies? I am thinking of the vote of 311 to 310 that led to Lady Thatcher’s becoming Prime Minister and of the debate after Munich on 10 May 1940. If we had had fixed-term Parliaments at those times, the whole thing would have been completely undermined despite the fact that the country was in uproar and wanted change. That would have been the case with a fixed-term Parliament of the kind that he wants as well as with one of five years.

Chris Bryant: No, I disagree, but we will come to that issue when we debate the second set of amendments about the measures concerning early general election. We have some disagreements with the Government, as the hon. Gentleman knows, but that is a matter for us to debate later.

4 pm

One of the other problems that I have with the way the Bill is drafted and why we support the amendments that have come from their lordships is that I do not think anybody ever sat down and thought, “We have elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly, the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly. Do we want to align them with the elections here, or do we want to make sure that they fall on a different date?” That would have been going to constitutional first principles. What we have ended up with is adjusting the election dates for all those other assemblies. We have allowed them, in effect, to decide when their next elections will be, extending to five years, yet it may be that we have an early general election, so they will not need to go to five-year terms. We are tinkering on the back of a flag packet and that is not a good way of proceeding in relation to the constitution.

Mr MacNeil: Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

Chris Bryant: If the hon. Gentleman does not mind, I will not, as I am keen to conclude my remarks.

The Minister asked whether both Houses should decide. That goes to the heart of the matter. Yes, we believe that both Houses should decide, but if the Minister had wanted to change that, he could have tabled an amendment in lieu of the Lords amendment, which could have said that just as in the provisions on an early general election, there would be a vote in one House—this House. There could have been a vote in this House on whether it was a fixed-term Parliament. The Government’s response tries to bind a future Parliament in an inappropriate way. I think that is a mistake, so we will support the Lords amendment.

Mr Symes: It is this House that determines who the Government are. This is the majority House. As we know, the upper House is a hereditary or semi-hereditary Chamber. Even under the proposals for election, it will not be the majority House. It is therefore proper and responsible that this Chamber should determine whether there should be a fixed-term Parliament. That is not the business of the upper House. The decision has to be made in this House.

The only question to debate is whether it is the Prime Minister who makes the decision or the House. Historically, it has been the Prime Minister. We have had a constitutional change. I am a conservative with a small c and I do not generally like change, but one has to acknowledge the fact that in order to command a majority in the House, the measure is part of the deal. That is a good reason for doing it. If that was not part of the deal, one would not necessarily be in government and doing many other good things for the country under our programme.

We all know that Prime Ministers lose the confidence of the House. There are occasions when Prime Ministers are challenged, and one of the things that bolsters unpopular Prime Ministers is the threat of Dissolution. It is up to them. They can throw the cards up in the air and call a Dissolution, even if they lose the confidence of their own party. That has always been one reason why Prime Ministers have stayed in Downing street when there was good reason for moving them out and having a vote of no confidence in a political party.

The other factor, which is one of the different features of modern politics, is that there are now more parties in the House—we have the Greens in this Parliament—more of a fracture in the current political system and more regional parties. It will probably be more difficult in the longer term for a party always to be confident of a majority in the House. My hon. Friend the Member for Stone (Mr Cash) is right. Coalitions may be more a part of the future than some of us who prefer majority government would like to think.

The Government’s position is tailored to that situation, so I will support what they are doing today. Circumstances have changed, and if one has to make a decision, it is better that political parties and the usual channels in the House determine a Dissolution than an unpopular Prime Minister who may have a different agenda from others in the Chamber.

Mark Durkan: I am delighted to be able to agree with the thrust of the remarks of the hon. Member for Poole (Mr Symes) in relation to the key effect of the Lords amendments, which would extend the power of the House of Lords as it now stands and in whatever future shape it takes, by making sure that the upper House was
in a position of dual control with this House on whether there was a fixed-term Parliament. We know from sentiments already expressed in this House—echoed many times in this House—that there is opposition to serious proposals on Lords reform, and in those circumstances I would certainly not indulge any extension of their powers or ability to trespass on the primacy of this House, which is exactly what the amendments would do.

A number of weeks ago the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) rightly lampooned the democratic credentials of the other Chamber, and yet now he wants to extend its control over the democratic proprieties of this Chamber and over whether there is certainty on when there will be a general election. I fully agree with him that those of us who believe in fixed-term Parliaments face a predicament with the Bill, because many of us believe that four years is the natural term for a Parliament. It was the natural term that this Parliament chose for the devolved Assemblies and Parliaments, and it was right that they were comfortable with it, but because Parliament is opting for five years, those assemblies will also have to shift to five years, which I do not believe is the natural rhythm for fixed terms.

Nevertheless, it would be a bit much for someone like me to use the fact that I believe in four-year terms, in addition to believing in fixed-term Parliaments, to vote for rupturing the nature of the Bill. As someone who is proudly in the Irish Labour tradition, I have great regard for Jim Larkin, who once said that the purpose of politics was to keep narrowing the gap between what is and what ought to be. I believe in fixed-term Parliaments. Unfortunately, the only choice we now have is five-year terms. In future, I hope that other parties will be elected with a mandate to alter that fixed term to four years and that future Parliaments will do that, but I believe that we will reach that stage quicker by voting for fixed-term Parliaments now and amending the length of the term in future. If instead we get to the meaningless point of having a Bill that is a fixed-term Parliaments Bill only in name, rather like the two-hour dry cleaners that tells customers to come back next Tuesday because “two-hour dry cleaners” is just the name of the shop, that Bill will not fulfil its purpose in any real way.

In relation to the amendments, there is a curious idea that both Chambers would decide on whether there would be a fixed term, but there is uncertainty on when those resolutions would be laid and who would lay them. The references to the Prime Minister in some of the amendments relate only to moving the date of an election back by up to two months, and I think that some people have misread that and think that it means that the resolution would have to come from the Prime Minister, but it would not. It seems that we would be left with a curious situation in which anyone could seek at any time to move such a resolution in either Chamber and create various difficulties that would simply add to the political mess and to the uncertainty on whether we have fixed terms.

I also agree with the hon. Member for Rhondda in his criticism of the Bill’s provenance and the fact that it came about not to fix the term of Parliament, but to fix the elections. It was intended to create a fixed-term Government and a fix for this Parliament. For that reason it is wrong and it is bad. However, the amendments would have the effect of prescribing legislation that would have every Parliament begin with a Government using their majority to fix the term in a way that suited them. He said that any Government worth their salt would do that early on in the term, and presuming that an Opposition worth their salt would oppose it, we are left asking what the point would be and what such legislation would achieve, other than an unedifying procedure each time a recently elected Government appear to fix the terms on which they will govern which the Opposition resist. The whole idea of a fixed-term Parliament Bill is to ensure that there is no political speculation or contention on those issues. Looking at the nature of some of the other clauses and amendments, I do not believe that the Prime Minister is ceding as much power as some hon. Members have said.

This is an unusual and uncomfortable experience for me, but I concur with the Government on these Lords amendments. Unfortunately, on this occasion I have to disagree with my hon. Friend the Member for Rhondda while fully agreeing with his basic, continuing underlying criticism of some of the background to the Bill.

**Mr Shepherd:** I agree with a lot of the points made by the hon. Member for Foyle (Mark Durkan). I am conscious that this is a Bill to fix a Parliament: that is the purpose behind it, plain and simple. The difficulty that the House of Lords faced and that we face in this House—it is the reason I voted against the Bill on Second Reading and otherwise—is the incoherence of the constitutional change that these amendments, to some extent, address.

We are embarked on almost reckless constitutional change with no overall coherent view of what we want. I know what I want, and I rather suspect that the hon. Member for Foyle knows what he wants—a democratically elected, accountable House of Lords. That raises all sorts of subsidiary questions as to which has primacy and which does not. We have here a fix, without any view as to what the constitution is going to be, that has involved nothing other than the coalition partners bringing forward a Bill that contains certain propositions that do not relate. I appreciate that we have had all the debates about four years as opposed to five years and the rhythm of the process. We have had the AV referendum, which was again unrelated to how the constitution was going to look.

That is why the Lords tabled these amendments. In a sense, they are not serious amendments—serious in the sense of how they prick this process and bring in a wider consideration of what the constitution should be, to whom is it accountable, and how we make these changes. Essentially, this fixed-term Parliament proposal is “back of the envelope”. Do we really want a five-year fixed term when we might have had only four years? I think that that was the position of the Labour party in its manifesto, and the position of the Liberal Democrats. The joyous thing about it is that we did not have a view, other than against, in our election manifesto.

**Mr Harper:** I want to pick my hon. Friend up on his point that this has been done on the back of a fag packet.

**Mr Shepherd:** I did not say that—I said an envelope.

**Mr Harper:** Yes, forgive me—it was the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) who said it was a fag packet. This Bill was introduced in July last year. It was
[Mr Harper]

fully debated in this House and in the other place, and it is now almost a year later. One cannot in any sense agree with my hon. Friend's proposition that the parliamentary debate on and scrutiny of this Bill has not been thorough and well thought through.

Mr Shepherd: I am sorry, but my point was not as the Minister so kindly describes it. My point was that we are talking about a constitution. The problem for everyone, not only in this Chamber but out there too—the people—is what are the forms and proper norms by which we should conduct our business, electorally or otherwise.

Now these piecemeal bits are coming forward whereby the Lords make the absurd proposition that it should have a role, as an unelected House, in determining when an election should be. That is clearly absurd, and to that extent I am sympathetic to the Government. However, I am very opposed to a five-year Parliament. There has been no testing on that. A parliamentary majority in this House will now determine that we have a new form of constitution that the hon. Member for Foyle is apparently happy about on the basis that it is only temporary and we might have a different, and therefore proper and better, version at a later stage. We have to deal with where we are here and now. We want a proper constitution, I would argue. I think that that is the position of the Labour party. I know that a good many Government Members also want a constitution that stands the test of time. No one from outside has really been invited into the supposed consultation.

The Deputy Prime Minister has not even come to argue for his position. That truly trivialises the whole process. I have gone on about that before. However much I am thrilled with the presence of the Minister, it is absurd that those who make these propositions cannot come here and argue for them.

4.15 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. I know that the hon. Gentleman feels strongly about this matter, but he is drifting from the point of the Lords amendments. I know that he is setting the context, but that context is getting a little too wide. I would like him to narrow his speech back to the amendments.

Mr Shepherd: I am trying to use the amendments to explain and understand what the Lords are doing. I appreciate that I may be going too wide, and I am sorry if that is so, but that is the purpose behind what I am doing. It is in that context that I am going to vote for the Lords amendments. They are absurd; there is no question about that in my mind. It is absolutely absurd that the Lords, who are not democratically elected, should be setting out such amendments. The very writing of the amendments is extraordinary for a place that we are told is full of very intellectual and clever complacents. It is extraordinary that they should even be looking into this. However, I did not open this discussion; the coalition opened it, and it did not do so in a rational or reasonable way. I am trying to find an argument to support the amendment so that I can vote against what is an improper process. It is as simple as that, Madam Deputy Speaker.

I want those on the Government Front Bench to understand my point. They are careering on. They held an AV referendum, but apropos of what—whether one was for it or against it? I know, Madam Deputy Speaker, that AV is not on the amendment paper.

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman knows that he is out of order. He is making points directly to his party. I would appreciate it if he kept to the amendments before us and did not range far and wide. There are other Members still to speak and other amendments still to cover. I know that he knows he is out of order because he keeps telling me that he is. I have been very generous to him, but it stops now. Please come back to the amendments.

Mr Shepherd: I am obliged for the courteous and pleasant way in which that was said. Mirror, mirror on the wall, I know that I am—[Laughter.]

Mr George Howarth (Knowsley) (Lab): I apologise for missing the beginning of the hon. Gentleman's speech. I wonder whether I may risk leading him astray. How does he think a fixed five-year term for this House stands alongside the proposals for a 15-year term for some peers in the other place?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. The hon. Member for Aldridge-Brownhills (Mr Shepherd) and I can both guess whether he should go down that line. I think the answer is that he should not. Can he please come back to the amendments?

Mr Shepherd: Of course. Madam Deputy Speaker. There was no way that I was going to rise to that fly. We will get back to the substance of the matter.

These are ridiculous proposals from the House of Lords—on that I agree. To that extent I am with the body of the House, which, I hope, feels that this is almost an impertinence. That impertinence is qualified, of course, by the fact that the Lords are the second Chamber, and that as it stands—other than in matters of money, as I understand it—they have all the rights of a second Chamber to make or change legislation. They are wrong to table the amendment, but they are right in the spirit of it. I hope that it is in order to suggest such a thing. My proposition is that they are right in the spirit of it because it is the only way in which they can attack this matter.

I hope that this cheerful Chamber will askance at the Minister and his colleague, the Deputy Leader of the House, who are sitting on the Front Bench and trying to seduce us into thinking that there is some immaculate constitutional conception behind the Bill. There is not. It is the raw politics of “We want to be there for five years, in the hope that something turns up at the end of the fifth year”. That is what it is about, and we know it. I urge the House to vote for the Lords amendment, and damn them.

Mr Charles Walker: Fixed-term Parliaments: constitutional vandalism.

Mr Cash: This was not in our manifesto. The people who voted for us certainly did not vote for fixed-term Parliaments.
In 1940, as I have said, the Government won the vote in May, but the public would not countenance that Government remaining in power for another day. That was what got rid of Neville Chamberlain, and Leo Amery said:

“In the name of God, go.”—[Official Report, 7 May 1940; Vol. 360, c. 1150.]

Mr Shepherd: Quoting Cromwell.

Mr Cash: There was a similar example in the Cromwellian period. There are great events taking place in the world today, and the whole question of the sustainability of government ultimately depends on the continuing will of the people as a whole. The idea of fixed-term Parliaments is intrinsically wrong, because it defies the gravity of the views of the public at large. If the public were to turn against fixed-term Parliaments, under the Bill they could not succeed because fixed-term Parliaments would have been entrenched by statute, which would be upheld by the judiciary. That is fundamentally an attack on our sovereignty and the sovereignty of the people of this country. That is why I object so strongly to the whole idea of fixed-term Parliaments, whether of five years or four. It is unconstitutional, wrong and prevents the people from being able to demand a general election irrespective of the views of a Prime Minister or a coalition that is cobbled together despite the views expressed in the respective manifestos.

Question put, That this House disagrees with Lords amendment 1.

The House divided: Ayes 312, Noes 243.

Division No. 326] [4.23 pm

**AYES**

Adams, Nigel
Afridi, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Amess, Mr David
Andrew, Stuart
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Norman
Baker, Steve
Baldrige, Tony
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barker, Gregory
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Bingham, Andrew
Binnie, Mr Brian
Birtwistle, Gordon
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Mr Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Bray, Angie
Brine, Mr Steve
Brokenshire, James
Brooke, Annette

**Noes**

Bonner, Stephen
Dorrell, rh Mr Stephen
Donnies, Nadine
Dorothy-Price, Jackie
Duddridge, James
Duncan, rh Mr Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Dunkan, Mark
Edwards, Jonathan
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ephicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Jonathan
Evernett, Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Fallon, Michael
Featherstone, Lynne
Field, Mr Mark
Foster, rh Mr Don
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freer, Mike
Fulbrook, Lorraine
Fuller, Richard
Gale, Mr Roger
Garnier, Mr Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
George, Andrew
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goldsmith, Zac
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Mr Chris
Green, Damien
Greening, Justine
Griffiths, Andrew
Gummer, Ben
Gyimah, Mr Sam
Hague, rh Mr William
Halthon, Robert
Hames, Duncan
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Mr Mike
Hands, Greg
Harper, Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Mr David
Heaton-Harris, Chris
Hemming, John
Henderson, Gordon
Hendry, Charles
Hinds, Damien
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hollingbery, George
Hollobone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Horwood, Martin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, Mr Gerald

Howard, John
Hughes, rh Simon
Huhne, rh Chris
Hunter, Mark
Huppert, Dr Julian
Jackson, Mr Stewart
James, Margot
Javid, Sajid
Johnson, Gareth
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kelly, Chris
Kennedy, rh Mr Charles
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Mr Greg
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamb, Norman
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Laws, rh Mr David
Leadsom, Andrea
Lee, Dr Philip
Leech, Mr John
Lefroy, Jeremy
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lloyd, Stephen
Long, Naomi
Lopresti, Jack
Lord, Jonathan
Lucas, Jonathan
Lumley, Karen
Macleod, Mary
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan
Main, Mrs Anne
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCARTney, Karl
McCrea, Dr William
McINTosh, Miss Anne
McPartland, Stephen
McVey, Esther
Mensch, Louise
Menzies, Mark
MerceR, Patrick
Metcalf, Stephen
Mills, Nigel
Milton, Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, rh Michael
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mosley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Mulholland, Greg
Mundell, rh David
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Newmark, rh Mr Brooks
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
O’Brien, Mr Stephen
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Beckett, rh Margaret
Barron, rh Mr Kevin
Banks, Gordon
Balls, rh Ed
Banks, Gordon
Barron, rh Mr Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Stewart, Rory
Streater, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Mr Graham
Stunnell, Andrew
Sturdy, Julian
Swales, Ian
Swinson, Jo
Swain, Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Teather, Sarah
Thurso, John
Timpson, Mr Edward
Tomlinson, Justin
Tredinnick, David
Truss, Elizabeth
Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Uppal, Paul
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Walter, Mr Robert
Ward, Mr David
Watkinson, Angela
Weatherley, Mike
Webb, Steve
Weir, Mr Mike
Wharton, James
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitaker, Craig
Whittingdale, Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Willett, rh Mr David
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Williams, Roger
Williams, Stephen
Williamson, Gavin
Willott, Jenny
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wilson, Sammy
Wishart, Pete
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wright, Simon
Young, rh Sir George
Zahawi, Nadhim

Brown, Mr Russell
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, rh, Lady
Campbell, Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Cash, Mr William
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Mrs Jenny
Chope, Mr Christopher
Clark, Katy
Clarke, rh Mr Tom
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Tony
Curran, Margaret
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
Darling, rh Mr Alistair
David, Mr Wayne
Davidson, Mr Ian
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Philip
De Piero, Gloria
Denham, rh Mr John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, rh Frank
Docherty, Thomas
Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
Doran, Mr Frank
Dowd, Jim
Doyle, Gemma
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Elliott, Dave
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Engel, Natascha
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Mr Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fiello, Robert
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilmore, Sheila
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Goggins, rh Paul
Goodman, Helen
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian

Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Mr Dai
Hendrick, Mark
Hebburn, Mr Stephen
Hermes, Lady
Heyes, David
Hillier, Meg
Hilling, Julie
Hodge, rh Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Mr Jim
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda
James, Mrs Siân C.
Jameson, Cathy
Jarvis, Dan
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Johnson, rh Alan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keelley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, rh Sadiq
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Chris
Love, Mr Andrew
Lucas, Ian
MacShane, rh Mr Denis
Macqgaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahlmood, Shabana
Mann, John
Marsden, rh Mr Gordon
McCabe, Steve
McCann, Mr Michael
McCarty, Kenny
McClymont, Gregg
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McGovern, Jim
McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenzie, Mr Iain
McKinnell, Catherine
Meacher, rh Mr Michael
Meale, Sir Alan
Meams, Ian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moore, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morrice, Graeme (Livingston)
Morris, Grahame M.
(Easington)

NOES
Abbott, Ms Diane
Abrahams, Debbie
Ainsworth, rh Mr Bob
Alexander, rh Mr Douglas
Alexander, Heidi
Ali, Rushanara
Allen, Mr Graham
Ashworth, Jon
Bailey, Mr Adrian
Bain, Mr William
Balls, rh Ed
Banks, Gordon
Barron, rh Mr Kevin
Beckett, rh Margaret
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Stuart, Mr Graham
Stunnell, Andrew
Sturdy, Julian
Swales, Ian
Swinson, Jo
Swain, Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Teather, Sarah
Thurso, John
Timpson, Mr Edward
Tomlinson, Justin
Tredinnick, David
Truss, Elizabeth
Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Uppal, Paul
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Robin
Wallace, Mr Ben
Walter, Mr Robert
Ward, Mr David
Watkinson, Angela
Weatherley, Mike
Webb, Steve
Weir, Mr Mike
Wharton, James
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whiteford, Dr Eilidh
Whitaker, Craig
Whittingdale, Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Willett, rh Mr David
Williams, Hywel
Williams, Mr Mark
Williams, Roger
Williams, Stephen
Williamson, Gavin
Willott, Jenny
Wilson, Mr Rob
Wilson, Sammy
Wishart, Pete
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wright, Simon
Young, rh Sir George
Zahawi, Nadhim

Bell, Sir Stuart
Benn, rh Hilary
Berg, Luciana
Betts, Mr Clive
Blackman-Woods, Roberta
Blears, rh Hazel
Blenkinsop, Tom
Blomfield, Paul
Blunkett, rh Mr David
Bone, Mr Peter
Bradshaw, rh Mr Ben
Brennan, Kevin
Brown, rh Mr Gordon
Brown, Lyn
Brown, rh Mr Nicholas

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NOES
Tellers for the Ayes:
Mr Shailesh Vara and
Jeremy Wright

Brown, Mr Russell
Bryant, Chris
Buck, Ms Karen
Burden, Richard
Burnham, rh, Lady
Campbell, Mr Alan
Campbell, Mr Ronnie
Cash, Mr William
Caton, Martin
Chapman, Mrs Jenny
Chope, Mr Christopher
Clark, Katy
Clarke, rh Mr Tom
Clwyd, rh Ann
Coaker, Vernon
Coffey, Ann
Connarty, Michael
Cooper, Rosie
Cooper, rh Yvette
Corbyn, Jeremy
Creagh, Mary
Creasy, Stella
Cruddas, Jon
Cryer, John
Cunningham, Alex
Cunningham, Mr Jim
Cunningham, Tony
Curran, Margaret
Dakin, Nic
Danczuk, Simon
Darling, rh Mr Alistair
David, Mr Wayne
Davidson, Mr Ian
Davies, Geraint
Davies, Philip
De Piero, Gloria
Denham, rh Mr John
Dobbin, Jim
Dobson, rh Frank
Docherty, Thomas
Donohoe, Mr Brian H.
Doran, Mr Frank
Dowd, Jim
Doyle, Gemma
Dromey, Jack
Dugher, Michael
Eagle, Ms Angela
Eagle, Maria
Elliott, Dave
Efford, Clive
Elliott, Julie
Ellman, Mrs Louise
Engel, Natascha
Esterson, Bill
Evans, Chris
Farrelly, Paul
Field, rh Mr Frank
Fitzpatrick, Jim
Fiello, Robert
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilmore, Sheila
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Goggins, rh Paul
Goodman, Helen
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian

Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Harman, rh Ms Harriet
Havard, Mr Dai
Hendrick, Mark
Hebburn, Mr Stephen
Hermes, Lady
Heyes, David
Hillier, Meg
Hilling, Julie
Hodge, rh Margaret
Hodgson, Mrs Sharon
Hoey, Kate
Hood, Mr Jim
Hopkins, Kelvin
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Irranca-Davies, Huw
Jackson, Glenda
James, Mrs Siân C.
Jameson, Cathy
Jarvis, Dan
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Johnson, rh Alan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Kaufman, rh Sir Gerald
Keelley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, rh Sadiq
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Chris
Love, Mr Andrew
Lucas, Ian
MacShane, rh Mr Denis
Macqgaggart, Fiona
Mahmood, Mr Khalid
Mahlmood, Shabana
Mann, John
Marsden, rh Mr Gordon
McCabe, Steve
McCann, Mr Michael
McCarthy, Kenny
McClymont, Gregg
McDonagh, Siobhain
McDonnell, Dr Alasdair
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McGovern, Jim
McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenzie, Mr Iain
McKinnell, Catherine
Meacher, rh Mr Michael
Meale, Sir Alan
Meams, Ian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Mitchell, Austin
Moore, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morrice, Graeme (Livingston)
Morris, Grahame M.
(Easington)
difficult to hear him, because there are a lot of private interrupt the Minister, but I am finding it rather

an emergency—

for the Prime Minister to alter the date of an election in

are proposing.

It is therefore worth explaining to the House what we

House choosing to hold one or of a vote of no confidence.

significant because it contains all the provisions for

are. Hon. Members will remember

a completely new clause 2. Hon. Members will remember

that clause 2 is particularly

original architecture of the clause, and the two triggers

for the purposes of the Bill. The amendment retains the

forms of motions of confidence and no confidence for

two thirds of all Members, and that a vote of no

may vote for an early Dissolution with the support of

proposals for the Prime Minister to vary the date of an
election, by moving it either forward or back by two months. In our debates in the Commons, many Members
identified instances in which moving the date back
would make sense, such as the outbreak of foot and
mouth in 2001, but no one could think of any good
reasons for moving an election to an earlier date. Similar
points were made in the other place and amendments
were tabled to remove the provision to move an election to an earlier date. We think that that is sensible. If
there were a general consensus that we needed to hold an election at an earlier date, we could of course use
the provisions in clause 2 and the House could vote to enable that to happen. The power to move an
election forward therefore seems unnecessary, and

amendments 4 deals with that.

Lords amendment 5 also deals with clause 1(5) of the
Bill. The Lords Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee recommended that, when seeking to vary
the date of an election under the power in clause 1(5), a
Prime Minister should lay a statement before both
Houses setting out the reasons for proposing the variance
of the date. The Government accept that that recommendation would enhance the transparency of
the exercise of that power, and the amendment would
implement the Committee's recommendation.

Lords amendment 6 is the most significant in the
group. It was supported by the Government in the other
place, and it was tabled following consultation with two
former Speakers of this House: the noble Baroness
Boothroyd and the noble Lord Martin of Springburn. It
also had support from Labour Back Benchers and
from Cross Benchers. It is significant because it substitutes
an alternative version of clause 2, setting out the exact
forms of motions of confidence and no confidence for
the purposes of the Bill. The amendment retains the
original architecture of the clause, and the two triggers
for an early general election—namely, that the House
may vote for an early Dissolution with the support of
two thirds of all Members, and that a vote of no
confidence may ultimately trigger and early general
election.

We had much debate of an important topic at an
earlier stage of the Bill and earlier today when my
hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills
(Mr Shepherd) suggested that what we were doing was
changing the constitution. It is worth reminding the
House that following a vote of no confidence in a
Government, there is currently a dual convention—that
the Prime Minister either resigns or calls a general

We beg to move, That this House agrees

Mr Harper: I beg to move, That this House agrees
with Lords amendment 4.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): With this
we may take Lords amendments 5 to 8.

Mr Harper: These amendments were moved in the
other place and I want the House to agree to them, but I
shall take a little time to explain why. One of them is
particularly significant, because it replaces clause 2 with
a completely new clause 2. Hon. Members will remember
from our earlier debates that clause 2 is particularly
significant because it contains all the provisions for
early elections, in the context either of two thirds of the
House choosing to hold one or of a vote of no confidence.
It is therefore worth explaining to the House what we
are proposing.

Lords amendment 4 deals with the powers in the Bill
for the Prime Minister to alter the date of an election in
an emergency—[Interruption.]

Madam Deputy Speaker: Order. I am sorry to
interrupt the Minister, but I am finding it rather
difficult to hear him, because there are a lot of private

conversations going on. I ask Members to listen to the
Minister. The sooner we deal with this business, the
sooner we can move on to the next.

Mr Harper: I am grateful to you, Madam Deputy
Speaker.

Lords amendment 4 leaves out the "earlier or"
provision. When we considered the Bill originally, it
contained provisions for the Prime Minister to vary the date of an
election, by moving it either forward or back by two months. In our debates in the Commons, many Members
identified instances in which moving the date back
would make sense, such as the outbreak of foot and
mouth in 2001, but no one could think of any good
reasons for moving an election to an earlier date. Similar
points were made in the other place and amendments
were tabled to remove the provision to move an election to an earlier date. We think that that is sensible. If
there were a general consensus that we needed to hold an election at an earlier date, we could of course use
the provisions in clause 2 and the House could vote to enable that to happen. The power to move an
election forward therefore seems unnecessary, and

amendments 4 deals with that.

Lords amendment 5 also deals with clause 1(5) of the
Bill. The Lords Delegated Powers and Regulatory Reform Committee recommended that, when seeking to vary
the date of an election under the power in clause 1(5), a
Prime Minister should lay a statement before both
Houses setting out the reasons for proposing the variance
of the date. The Government accept that that recommendation would enhance the transparency of
the exercise of that power, and the amendment would
implement the Committee's recommendation.

Lords amendment 6 is the most significant in the
group. It was supported by the Government in the other
place, and it was tabled following consultation with two
former Speakers of this House: the noble Baroness
Boothroyd and the noble Lord Martin of Springburn. It
also had support from Labour Back Benchers and
from Cross Benchers. It is significant because it substitutes
an alternative version of clause 2, setting out the exact
forms of motions of confidence and no confidence for
the purposes of the Bill. The amendment retains the
original architecture of the clause, and the two triggers
for an early general election—namely, that the House
may vote for an early Dissolution with the support of
two thirds of all Members, and that a vote of no
confidence may ultimately trigger and early general
election.

We had much debate of an important topic at an
earlier stage of the Bill and earlier today when my
hon. Friend the Member for Aldridge-Brownhills
(Mr Shepherd) suggested that what we were doing was
changing the constitution. It is worth reminding the
House that following a vote of no confidence in a
Government, there is currently a dual convention—that
the Prime Minister either resigns or calls a general

We beg to move, That this House agrees

Mr Harper: I beg to move, That this House agrees
with Lords amendment 4.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): With this
we may take Lords amendments 5 to 8.

Mr Harper: These amendments were moved in the
other place and I want the House to agree to them, but I
shall take a little time to explain why. One of them is
particularly significant, because it replaces clause 2 with
a completely new clause 2. Hon. Members will remember
from our earlier debates that clause 2 is particularly
significant because it contains all the provisions for
early elections, in the context either of two thirds of the
House choosing to hold one or of a vote of no confidence.
It is therefore worth explaining to the House what we
are proposing.

Lords amendment 4 deals with the powers in the Bill
for the Prime Minister to alter the date of an election in
an emergency—[Interruption.]
In his book, Professor Bogdanor sets out the view that the no-confidence votes of January and October 1924 are examples of the dual convention, which is supported by the revised clause 2. He says:

“In the past, a no confidence vote would lead to a dissolution only if there was no viable alternative government within Parliament. Otherwise, the Prime Minister would resign, and the alternative government would take office.”

As we know, the vote of no confidence in the Baldwin Government of January 1924 led to the formation of the MacDonald Government without a fresh election taking place. In his book, Professor Bogdanor also cites what happened when the October 1924 no-confidence motion took place, stating:

“George V, before granting what would be the third dissolution in two years, inquired, through his Private Secretary, of the two opposition leaders, Baldwin and Asquith, whether they were prepared to form an alternative government. Only after receiving a negative answer and only when it was clear that no alternative government was available did George V agree to a dissolution”.

Those events show the importance of allowing time to seek alternatives before resolving to call an election. That was the point that my hon. Friend. Friends the Members for Stone (Mr Cash) and for Aldridge-Brownhills were making in the debate on the earlier group of amendments. It explains why there was a 14-day period in the original clause 2 and why it is important that the same 14-day period remains in the newer clause 2.

Mr Cash: This 14-day period is simply a ruse, cobbled together by moving various Ministers around, in order simply to keep the existing Government in power. If a Government have a confidence motion and lose it by a majority of one, that is it—as happened with Lady Thatcher when a motion was passed by 311 to 310. That was the end of it; then a general election, leading to another Government, took place. That is how the system should function—the rest of it just cobbled together, as I say, for the sake of keeping a coalition moving under all circumstances. I am sure that the Prime Minister’s tutor, Vernon Bogdanor—also the Minister’s tutor—could have explained all that to him.

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): I think we get the point.

Mr Harper: My hon. Friend is simply not right. We have had this debate before. It is important because it relates to the revised clause 2, brought about by one of the Lords amendments, which refers to a 14-day period. I know that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) supported it strongly when we debated it in Committee and on Report. Indeed, the Opposition supported our proposition when we voted against an amendment that I believe my hon. Friends had tabled.

Two alternatives can take place. I know this 1924 example goes back a bit, but it is one of the scenarios that can happen. Of course, that did not happen in 1979, but that was because we were at the tail-end of a Parliament, so the general election took place. If a vote of confidence were lost early in a Parliament, the situation I described could occur.

Another important issue came up here and in the other place when the rationale for clause 2 was debated. The 14-day period is not mandatory; it is the maximum period that can apply. If the Government had lost a vote of confidence and there were a general consensus that the country should move immediately to a general election, there would be nothing to stop the Government putting down a motion for an early Dissolution. A vote on it could happen and the general election could be triggered immediately. I am not sure that that argument came out strongly in the other place; that is why it is worth putting it on the record.

We listened carefully to the concerns expressed in the other place about clause 2. We also conducted meetings with the two former Speakers, as I mentioned. We listened and made the amendment. Opposition Members will be pleased that the amendment has been made. The hon. Member for Rhondda said that as we were abolishing the Prime Minister’s right to dissolve Parliament, and placing that right in the hands of Parliament, it would be better to state in the Bill, in clear language, what constitutes a motion of no confidence, so that there can be no doubt.

Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Will the Minister explain a couple of things? First, is there another example in legislation of a motion being laid down for Parliament to follow, or is it an innovation? Secondly, who will determine whether the motion has been passed in the correct form? Will it be a matter for the courts?

Mr Harper: Let me develop my argument, and I will cover the points raised by my hon. Friend. The concern in the other place about the original drafting of clause 2 was raised particularly by the two former Speakers, who felt that not having specific motions laid down, and requiring the Speaker to certify that votes of no confidence had been lost, would draw the Speaker into controversy. This House and the other place were happy that there was no issue about privilege and the courts trespassing into decisions of the House, but it was felt that there was a risk of the Speaker being drawn into controversy. The Government accepted the other place’s view that the language of the motion should be set out clearly.

Mr Tom Watson (West Bromwich East) (Lab): On a point of order, Madam Deputy Speaker. I apologise to the Minister and to you, but given the seriousness of the matter I wish to raise I must do so urgently. The Guardian newspaper has just issued a statement saying:

“The prime minister’s account of why he failed to act on the information we passed his office in February 2010 is highly misleading.”

Have you had notice of an urgent response from the Prime Minister so that he can put the matter right at the Dispatch Box?

Madam Deputy Speaker: Comments that are made outside the House are not the responsibility of the Chair. If the hon. Gentleman is suggesting that there is a question of privilege, I would advise him that he must write to the Speaker. It is not a matter for me now.

Mr Harper: I am grateful, Madam Deputy Speaker. The new version of clause 2 set out in the amendment spells out the exact wording of motions of no confidence, motions of confidence, and motions for an early dissolution. Whether the conditions have been met would therefore be plain for everyone to see, and it would be clear from
the Votes and Proceedings and the Journal, and the Speaker would not need to be drawn into certifying whether the motions had been passed. That was the reason why the amendment was supported by the former Speakers, the Opposition and the other place. The amendment delivers what we had originally intended—that the power to trigger an early dissolution should lie with this House—but adds clarity and does not risk drawing the Speaker into controversy.

Amendments 7 and 8 are very important, especially for those Members who represent parts of the United Kingdom with devolved legislatures. When the Bill left this House, I told Members that we were in discussions with the parties in the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly about how to deal with the coincidence of elections in 2015. I wrote to the Presiding Officers of the Scottish Parliament and the Welsh Assembly on 17 February, and proposed that if they passed a resolution with the support of at least two thirds of their Members, ensuring that there was consensus across the parties, we would agree to legislate to move the dates of the 2015 Scottish Parliament and Welsh Assembly general elections up to one year later. The Scottish Parliament passed a unanimous motion on 3 March confirming that it wished the UK Government to bring forward a provision to defer the 2015 election to 5 May 2016, and a similar motion was passed by the Welsh Assembly on 16 March.

We have said that if the House accepts the amendments, in the longer term we will conduct a detailed assessment—this issue arose during the debate on the earlier group of amendments—of the implications of the two sets of elections coinciding at a later date. Once we have conducted that assessment, if we think that there is a case for changing the cycle of elections, we will carry out a public consultation in Scotland and Wales on whether the devolved legislatures should be subject to permanent five-year terms.

**Mr Cash:** Does the Minister not agree that, whether we adopted the original proposals in the Bill or the proposals of the former Speakers and others, the matter would be justiciable? The Speaker would indeed be drawn into controversy, but there would also be a risk of the whole question being adjudicated by the courts.

**Mr Harper:** We debated the issues of privilege, justiciability and whether the courts would seek to intervene in these matters at length in Committee and on Report, and they were also debated in the other place. I think that the general view was that the risk of intervention by the courts was very slight. It did not seem to concern Members of either House, although I accept that my hon. Friend still has concerns about it.

**Mr Cash:** The Clerk of the House, in his careful consideration of the issue, took the view, very strongly, that it would lead to justiciability. That is not just the view of one humble Back Bencher; it is also the view of the Clerk of the House, to whom fulsome tributes were paid yesterday for his wise advice.

**Mr Harper:** I recognise that. The Government set out our reasons for disagreeing with that view, and I believe that their case was accepted by Members of both Houses. We have already debated the matter at length, and I do not think that there is a feeling that we should resurrect that debate now.

In Northern Ireland, there will be consultation with the Northern Ireland Executive and all the political parties, which will begin when the Northern Ireland Office has received reports from both the chief electoral officer and the Electoral Commission on the May 2011 polls, which involved three combined elections. The chief electoral officer’s report has just been received and is being examined by officials, and the report of the Electoral Commission is expected to be received shortly.

Given that the amendments were accepted in the other place and there was a fair degree of consensus, I urge Members to agree with the Lords.

**Chris Bryant:** I broadly agree with what the Government have said. I would point out, however, that the Government, and the Minister himself, have developed a rather irritating habit of opposing measures at this end of the building and then agreeing with them at the other end. That is bad for the way in which we conduct our business in this House. It applies particularly to the replacement for clause 2, in Lords amendment 6. All the changes in these amendments were contained in amendments that we tabled at this end of the building—

**Mr Harper rose—**

**Chris Bryant:** I will not give way to the Minister, I am afraid.

The Minister chose to oppose the amendments in this House, and then accept them in the other Chamber.

**Mr Harper rose—**

**Chris Bryant:** I am not going to give way to the Minister. He has spoken plenty.

This is the second occasion on which the Minister has done that today. This morning he tabled a written ministerial statement that basically consisted of an amendment that he voted against during our debates on the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill. I wish he would stop doing it.

All I will say to the Minister about the improved clause 2 is that part of it, the “two-thirds majority” provision, remains foolhardy. Requiring a special majority to secure something constitutes a complete change in the practices of the House. It is also completely unnecessary, because it is almost inconceivable that on any occasion on which the Government tabled a motion for an early general election, the Opposition would not agree with it. There would always be a two-thirds majority. Let me say to Liberal Democrat Members who may think that that would protect them if the Prime Minister opted for an early general election before the planned date for the next general election, that it will do no such thing.

Lords amendment 4 agreed to.

Lords amendments 5 to 8 agreed to.

Lords amendment 9 disagreed to.
Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 83H), That a Committee be appointed to draw up Reasons to be assigned to the Lords for disagreeing to their amendments;
That Mr Mark Harper, Mr Philip Dunne, Chris Bryant, Jonathan Reynolds and Mr Mark Williams be members of the Committee;
That Mr Mark Harper be the Chair of the Committee;
That three be the quorum of the Committee.
That the Committee do withdraw immediately.—(Mr Goodwill.)
Question agreed to.

Committee to withdraw immediately; reasons to be reported and communicated to the Lords.

5 pm

Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo): Order. I now have to announce the results of Divisions deferred from a previous day. On the question relating to the Equality Act work on ships, the Ayes were 316 and the Noes were 233, so the Ayes have it. On the question relating to the Equality Act duties on public authorities, the Ayes were 316 and the Noes were 230, so the Ayes have it.

[The Division lists are published at the end of today’s debates.]
whether the responsibility we need goes right to the top of our society, and about the truth that no corporate interest should be able to write the law or be above the law.

Mr William Cash (Stone) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the point that I put to the Prime Minister earlier, which is that it would be incongruous to have terms of reference for this particular inquiry—most of the terms of reference having been announced—that exclude the sound and visual medium? We talk of "the media" generally, but most of the argument turns on the question of the word "press" and newspapers. Should the definition not be extended?

Edward Miliband: I am sure that that point will be considered, but what I say to the hon. Gentleman is that the abuses that we have seen are in our newspaper industry, and we do want this inquiry to get on and actually concentrate on where there have been abuses. It will, of course, examine cross-media ownership, and I think it is right for it to do so.

This debate is also about the relationship between private power and the power of people, given voice by this Parliament. We need strong entrepreneurial businesses in this country, but we need them to show responsibility, and in these highly unusual circumstances it was right that Parliament intervened. The case was clear about why the stakes were so high in this bid—I will say something about that—about why the revelations of the recent past comprehensively undermine this bid, and about why the motion was necessary. I will deal with those points briefly.

Charlie Elphicke (Dover) (Con): The right hon. Gentleman talks about the "recent past". As a new Member, I look and see that this goes back to 2003. We had deeply concerning reports from the Information Commissioner in 2006, so why was action not taken before 2010? Why was this not dealt with?

Edward Miliband: I say to the hon. Gentleman that all of us accept our share of responsibility for not having spoken out more on these issues. The question is: what is to be done now? Is this House going to take action? Are we going to work together to deal with these issues?

Let me start by talking about why the stakes in this case were so high. News Corp was bidding for 100% control of BSkyB. This would have represented a major change for our public life in any circumstances, let alone those that we now face. It would have given News Corp unfettered control of one of the two largest broadcasters in Britain, as well as the 40% control of the newspaper market that it already owned. This was not some incidental change, but a major departure. The revelations of recent weeks went to the core of this bid. They suggest that people at News International have concealed and dissembled in an attempt to hide the truth about what had been done, including from this House of Commons.

Mr Chuka Umunna (Streatham) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend agree that, given the revelations and the differences in the information that has been provided to this House, it is right and proper for Rebekah Brooks, James Murdoch and Rupert Murdoch to answer the call from the Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport to give evidence to this House next Tuesday?

Edward Miliband: My hon. Friend is absolutely right about this, because those people are key figures in the newspaper industry, and indeed the whole media industry in Britain, and they should not be above the Select Committee. It is absolutely right—I am sure that this view will be shared in all parts of this House—for them to come before the Select Committee.

Christopher Pincher (Tamworth) (Con): Does the right hon. Gentleman agree with the point that I put to the Prime Minister earlier, which is that it would be incongruous to have terms of reference for this particular inquiry—most of the terms of reference having been announced—that exclude the sound and visual medium? We talk of "the media" generally, but most of the argument turns on the question of the word "press" and newspapers. Should the definition not be extended?

Edward Miliband: I am going to make progress, but I will give way to the hon. Gentleman.

Christopher Pincher: Was the right hon. Gentleman saying those things to Rupert Murdoch when he was eating his canapés three weeks ago?

Edward Miliband (Doncaster North) (Lab): Let me say to the hon. Gentleman, who is new to this House, that this is an opportunity for the House of Commons to speak with one voice on these issues. That is what we should do today.

I was about to say that the issues we are discussing are about the integrity of people working at News International. The Chair of this House’s Select Committee on Culture, Media and Sport says that he was misled, the head of the Press Complaints Commission says that she was lied to by News International, James Murdoch has admitted serious wrongdoing in the company, and there are now, of course, allegations that News International knew that phone hacking was widespread as long ago as 2007.

Toby Perkins (Chesterfield) (Lab): On the subject of the individuals to whom my right hon. Friend just referred, one thing that shocked many people as much as anything was the fact that on Sunday and Monday, when Rupert Murdoch arrived, he said that his No. 1 priority was Rebekah Brooks—not the Dowlers, not the families of the victims of 7/7, and not the families of dead servicemen. Rebekah Brooks was his No. 1 priority. Does that not show why he has a complete responsibility to come to this House and answer its questions?

Edward Miliband: My hon. Friend is entirely right. Throughout this process Mr Murdoch has seemed to show no recognition of the scale of abuse of the trust of the people of this country, whom he claims daily in his newspapers to represent and whose voice he claims to understand. My hon. Friend is totally right.

Jim Sheridan (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (Lab): Does my right hon. Friend share my concern about the workers who will be losing their jobs in this whole debacle? While the Rebekahs of this world refuse to move on, those at the bottom end of the pay chain will have no choice about losing their jobs.

Edward Miliband: My hon. Friend is right: the cruel irony of the closing of the News of the World is that the one person who we know was responsible, in the sense that she was in charge when Milly Dowler’s phone was hacked, was the one person not to lose her job as a result of the decisions that were made.
Let me make some progress. Even though we do not yet know what charges may be laid and against whom, it is apparent that there are serious questions to be answered about alleged criminal activity perpetrated by people in News International. Sky is a respected broadcaster under diverse ownership, and we did not want Sky taken over by a company under such a cloud.

Let me explain why the motion was necessary; I see that the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport is in his place. For months the Government have argued that they could rely on assurances given to them by an organisation about which there was mounting evidence of serious wrongdoing. Last Wednesday the Prime Minister told me there was no alternative to the Culture Secretary changing direction, a decision I welcome, and referred the bid to the Competition Commission. That decision—hon. Members should understand that this is why the motion was necessary—would have ended up back on the Secretary of State’s desk before the end of the criminal process. He would then have needed to make a decision about the bid without all the relevant factors having been considered. That is why we tabled this motion.

**Edward Miliband**

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**Pete Wishart** (Perth and North Perthshire) (SNP): The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right to say that the motion was necessary, and he will note that Scottish National party Members were signatories to the motion and support him in his endeavours. He is also right to stress that cross-party unity is important in all this, but will he accept and acknowledge that he perhaps got the tone wrong today at Prime Minister’s questions? The public do not want to see this argy-bargy between the two main parties. All parties in the House must work together on this issue.

**Edward Miliband**: I take on board the hon. Gentleman’s advice, but I do not necessarily agree with it on this occasion.

We tabled this motion because the issue would have ended up back on the Secretary of State’s desk.

**Alun Cairns** (Vale of Glamorgan) (Con) rose—

**Edward Miliband**: I am going to make some progress. Let me talk more generally about the issues we face. We want a free press. We want an independent press. We want the kind of journalism that does that profession proud and makes the rest of us think. The vast majority of journalists are decent people, with a vital role to play in our public life, but the best way to protect them, and to protect the integrity of our press, is to root out the kind of journalism that has left us all sickened. We all have a responsibility to get to the bottom of this scandal and ensure that something like that can never happen again. That is why I welcome the inquiry that has been announced today, and the comprehensive nature of that inquiry.

**Sajid Javid** (Bromsgrove) (Con) rose—

**Edward Miliband**: I am not going to give way.

We have to address all the issues that we face for the future. On the relationship between the press and politicians, let me be clear. There is nothing wrong with politicians engaging with the media, and Members across all parts of the House will continue to do so. What matters is not whether those relationships exist but whether they stifle either the ability of the press to speak out against political leaders or the ability of political leaders to speak up.

**Mr Graham Stuart** (Beverley and Holderness) (Con): Will the right hon. Gentleman give way?

**Edward Miliband**: I am not going to give way.

The events of the past seven days have opened all our eyes and given us the chance to say, “It doesn’t have to be like this.” I want, before I finish, to pay tribute to the people who made this possible, and to Back Benchers across the House for their courage in speaking out. I pay tribute particularly to my hon. Friend the Members for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) and for West Bromwich East (Mr Watson) for their tireless and brave work on these issues. I pay tribute to Members on the Government side, such as the hon. Members for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith) and for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames), who spoke out about BSkyB in last week’s emergency debate, and to the Select Committees and their Chairs on both sides of the House. I also want to pay tribute to Mr Speaker, for the seriousness with which you have taken Parliament’s role on this issue.

This is a victory for Parliament. This House has been criticised in recent years for being timid, irrelevant and out of touch. Today Parliament has shown an ability to speak out without fear or favour, to speak to our great traditions, and to show that we can hold power to account and that nobody is above the law. To paraphrase the late Lord Denning, be ye ever so high, the people are above you. This House—all Members and all parties—have given voice to the people and have said to Rupert Murdoch, “Abandon your bid.” The country wanted this: it wanted its voice to be heard, and today it has been heard.

5.18 pm

The Leader of the House of Commons (Sir George Young) May I begin—[HON. MEMBERS: “Where’s Cameron?”] May I begin by welcoming the tone of the Leader of the Opposition’s speech, which I very much hope will set the tone of our debate this evening? In response to the sedentary interventions from the Opposition, may I say that it is entirely appropriate that the Leader of the House should speak during this...
debate given that today represents a victory for Parliament and for those whom we represent. As events have overtaken the motion and as this is a short debate I propose, like the Leader of the Opposition, to make a brief contribution.

Despite the fact that the police investigation is under way and that the public inquiry announced by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister is soon to be up and running, we are still hearing shocking allegations by the day. We are hearing allegations that personal details of members of the royal family were handed over to newspapers for profit, that the former Prime Minister, the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), whom I welcome this evening, had his details blagged by another News International title and that victims of terrorism also had their phones hacked into and their privacy invaded. As both the nature of the malpractice and the scope of the newspapers involved widens, it is right that the police continue to follow their inquiries and the evidence wherever it takes them.

It was simply unrealistic to expect the public and politicians to separate all this from News Corporation’s proposed takeover of BSkyB. That is why both the Prime Minister and the Deputy Prime Minister were right when they said earlier this week that News Corporation should withdraw its bid. Any hon. Member who was running the company right now, with all its problems, difficulties and the mess it is in would want to get their house in order first, before thinking about the next corporate move. That is why it was entirely right for News Corporation to withdraw its bid today. The whole House will welcome that decision.

I want to pick up a point that the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) made towards the end of his remarks. Today has proved that those commentators who have in the past written this place off were completely wrong. We have seen the tenacity of Back Benchers. The hon. Members for West Bromwich East (Mr Watson) and for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), my hon. Friends and my right hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes) have been in the forefront of a relentless campaign for the house in order first, before thinking about the next corporate move. That is why it was entirely right for News Corporation to withdraw its bid today. The whole House will welcome that decision.

I also pay tribute to the forensic scrutiny of Select Committees—those chaired by my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale), the right hon. Member for Leicester East (Keith Vaz) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Sir Alan Beith). They have vindicated the decision to make the Select Committees more independent of the Executive. The Chamber, which some had argued was losing its relevance and power, has in fact been leading the public debate over the past fortnight, with the Standing Order 24 debate, statements and Select Committee hearings all being televised live.

No one can say today, as they did two years ago, that Parliament is irrelevant. Yes, we have learned the hard way how easy it is to lose the trust of our constituents, but having proved itself an effective champion of the people in this issue, the House has the opportunity not only to regain the initiative, but to restore public confidence in Parliament at the same time.

Several hon. Members rose—
dramatic change in how Parliament was perceived by the public, with the reputation of the majority tarnished by the actions of a minority.

I see parallels between what happened to us and what is now happening to another important pillar of any democracy, namely a free press. While there are parallels, there are also lessons. As with expenses, the right approach to the current situation is to reach political agreement on the right way forward, to ensure much greater transparency and to move away from self-regulation to independent regulation without impeding the media’s ability to fulfil its democratic role.

Mr Cash: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Sir George Young: I will make progress, as many Members wish to speak. The police investigation, the inquiry that the Prime Minister launched today and the ongoing inquiries being carried out by Select Committees must now be allowed to get on with their crucial work.

Mr Cash: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.

Mr Speaker: I hope that it is a point of order.

Mr Cash: We have been told that there are published terms of reference and it would be helpful to have access to them. We do not know where they are and have not been told what they are.

Mr Speaker: That is a very important point, but it suffers from the disadvantage of not being a point of order.

Sir George Young: My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister said in his statement this afternoon that the draft terms of reference would be placed in the Library.

This country has a rich tradition of a lively and free press, which must continue. We have been fortunate to have a strong and robust police force, which now must prove itself beyond reproach. Finally, although some outside this country may disagree, we are fortunate to have a House of Commons that is independent of Government, and the fact that Parliament has proved itself effective in resolving the issue is a tribute to how the House has addressed the matter.

5.26 pm

Mr Gordon Brown (Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath) (Lab): It is a bit like the old days for me, with the Government on the run, the Opposition in pursuit and the public, with the reputation of the majority tarnished by the actions of a minority.

I see parallels between what happened to us and what is now happening to another important pillar of any democracy, namely a free press. While there are parallels, there are also lessons. As with expenses, the right approach to the current situation is to reach political agreement on the right way forward, to ensure much greater transparency and to move away from self-regulation to independent regulation without impeding the media’s ability to fulfil its democratic role.

Mr Cash: Will my right hon. Friend give way?

Mr Speaker: Order. I apologise for interrupting the right hon. Gentleman. Mr Stuart, I am going to say it to you once and once only: you are far too excitable. Be quiet and calm down—[Interruption.—] Order. If you cannot—do not shake your head at me—then leave the Chamber.

Mr Brown: I want to set out the facts for the House and will be happy take any interventions after.

In nearly 30 years as a Member of this House, in opposition and in government, I have never sought to propose or impose any restrictions on the freedom of the press. At all times I have defended their right to expose any wrongdoing wherever it is found and to speak truth to power however uncomfortable it is, and indeed was at times for me. Although I will today make proposals for reform and comment on each point that the Prime Minister made earlier in the House, it is my judgment that we should reform but never undermine something so fundamental to our ordered liberty as our twin commitments to the freedom of the individual and to a free press.

I rise to speak not about myself, but for those who cannot defend themselves: the grieving families of our brave war dead; the courageous survivors of 7/7; the many other dignified, but now outraged, victims of crime and; most recently, and perhaps worst of all, the victims of the violation of the rights of a missing and murdered child. Many, many wholly innocent men, women and children who, at their darkest hour, at their most vulnerable moment in their lives, with no one and nowhere to turn to, found their properly private lives, their private losses, their private sorrows treated as the public property of News International—their private, innermost feelings and their private tears bought and sold by News International for commercial gain.

Amassed against these guiltless victims and against a succession of other victims of crime whose names I know about and have seen, and have yet to be made public, was the systematic use of base and unlawful methods—new crimes with new names: blagging, hacking, Trojans to break into computers and not just phones. It was not the misconduct of a few rogues or a few freelancers but, I have to say, lawbreaking often on an industrial scale; at its worst dependent on links with the British criminal underworld.

Mr Graham Stuart rose—

Mr Brown: I will set out my case and then I will answer questions. This is the only way—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. I apologise for interrupting the right hon. Gentleman. Mr Stuart, I am going to say it to you once and once only: you are far too excitable. Be quiet and calm down—[Interruption. Order. If you cannot—do not shake your head at me—then leave the Chamber.
Mr Brown: This is the only way to describe the behaviour of those at News International who took the freedom of the press as a licence for abuse, who cynically manipulated our support of that vital freedom as their justification, and who then callously used the defence of a free press as the banner under which they marched in step, as I say, with members of the criminal underworld. This nexus—this criminal-media nexus—was claiming to be on the side of the law-abiding citizen but was in fact standing side by side with criminals against our citizens. Others have said that in its behaviour towards those without a voice of their own, News International descended from the gutter to the sewers. The tragedy is that it let the rats out of the sewers.

When I became Prime Minister in 2007, I, with everyone else, had no knowledge of this systematic criminality within News International. I also did what any holder of the great office I held would do. With our armed forces at war in two theatres, and with my own sense of the need for a renewed national purpose, I wanted to unite the country, not divide it; to bring people on board, not to pick fights with them; and to strive to create the broadest coalition of churches and others across our nation in support of our nation’s best interests, and not willfully to set out to make an enemy of anyone. I therefore believe it was right, in what is often called the Prime Minister’s honeymoon, however brief it turned out to be for me—and for my successor—to seek to build bridges with members of the public and the press and to strive to construct the widest coalition of understanding for our policies and purposes. I would be surprised if I am unique in politics in hoping for the best of relationships with our media.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Brown: Let me say, Mr Speaker, that I am about to set out some facts for this House, and I hope that once I have done so I will be able to give way to Members.

In the month that I started at No. 10, there were already issues of state involving News International—a decision that the Government had to make on a Competition Commission inquiry into the recently acquired stake that brought its ownership of ITV up to 16.8%. It was for the Government to decide on any referral to the competition authority, and the Government approached this with no bias against BSkyB. However, after examining in some detail BSkyB’s activities, the Government, on the advice of the relevant authorities, found a case to answer and announced the strongest remedy possible—a referral to the competition authority, which went on to rule that BSkyB’s share purchase in ITV was not in the public interest. So far from siding with the News International interest, the Government stood up for the public interest by making the referral. While we correctly gave it time to sell its shares, its shares had to be sold.

Next was the proposed Ofcom review into the onward sale of BSkyB sporting and other programmes, and the claims of its competitors that it had priced BT, Virgin and other cable companies out of the market. The public interest was in my view served by due investigation. We did not support the News International interest, but stood up for what in our view was the public interest. The Ofcom recommendation, which News International still opposes today, demanded that there be fair competition.

It is no secret that the 2009 McTaggart lecture given by Mr James Murdoch, which included his cold assertion that profit not standards was what mattered in the media, underpins much of News International and BSkyB agenda under his and Mrs Brooks’ leadership that was brutal in its simplicity. Their aim was to cut the BBC licence fee, to force BBC online to charge for its content, for the BBC to sell off its commercial activities, to open up more national sporting events to bids from BSkyB and move them away from the BBC, to open up the cable and satellite infrastructure market, and to reduce the power of their regulator, Ofcom. I rejected those policies.

Martin Horwood (Cheltenham) (LD) rose—

Nadhim Zahawi (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con) rose—

Mr Brown: I will give way after I have set out my evidence.

Those policies were clearly in News International’s interests, but were plainly not in the British people’s interests.

The truth is there in Government records for everyone to see. I am happy to volunteer to come before any inquiry, because nothing was given: there were no private deals, no tacit understandings, no behind-the-scenes arrangements and no post-dated promises. I doubt whether anyone in this House will be surprised to hear that the relationship between News International and the Labour Administration that I led was, in all its years from start to finish, neither cosy nor comfortable.

I think that if people reflected on events as early as the summer of 2007, with the portrayal of me in The Sun as the betrayer of Britain, they would see them as somewhat absurd proof of an over-close and over-friendly relationship. Headlines such as “Brown killed my son”, which made me out to be the murderer of soldiers who were actually killed by our enemy, the Taliban, could hardly be a reflection of a deep warmth from News International towards me. The front-page portrayal of me as “Dr Evil” the day after the generally accepted success of the G20 was hardly confirmation of The Sun’s friendship and support as the world battled with the threat of a great depression.

It has been said that the relationship between News International and the Government of the day changed only because in 2009 News International suddenly decided to oppose Labour formally. I say that the relationship with News International was always difficult because Labour had opposed its self-interested agenda.

I have compiled for my own benefit a note of all the big policy matters affecting the media that arose in my time as Prime Minister. That note also demonstrates in detail the strange coincidence of how News International and the then Conservative Opposition came to share almost exactly the same media policy. It was so close that it was often expressed in almost exactly the same words. On the future of the licence fee, on BBC online, on the right of the public to see free of charge the maximum possible number of national sporting events, on the future of the BBC’s commercial arm, and on the integrity of Ofcom, we stood up for what we believed to be the public interest, but that was made difficult when the Opposition invariably reclassified the public interest as the News International interest. It is for the commission
of inquiry to examine not just the promises of the then
Opposition, but the many early decisions of this
Government on these matters.

During the last year of our Government, information
became public to suggest that the hacking of phones,
and indeed of computers, went far beyond one rogue
reporter and one rogue newspaper. In February 2010,
the Culture, Media and Sport Committee reported that
the number of victims was more than the handful that
had been claimed. It said it was inconceivable that no
one else at News International other than those convicted
was in the know. News International, it said, was guilty
of “deliberate obfuscation”. But already, in August
2009, Assistant Commissioner Yates of Scotland Yard
had taken only eight hours—less time, I may say, than
he spent dining with the people he should have been
investigating—to reject pre-emptively a further police
inquiry. Even the proposal that an outside police force
take over the Scotland Yard inquiry had been rejected.

Having seen the Select Committee report, I immediately
asked the head of the civil service to agree that we set up
a judicial inquiry. Far from the so-called cosy relationship
alleged with News International, which would have
meant doing nothing, my answer to what appeared to
be News International’s abuse of press freedom was a
judicial inquiry. I can say for the record that, as
set up a judicial inquiry. I can say for the record that, as

Mr Brown: I notice that the hon. Gentleman asks for
a time limit; perhaps what he ought to do is listen to the
facts.

If we do not act now on what we now know, and if we
do not act forcefully and with clarity, friends around the
world who admire our liberties will ask what kind of
country we—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. I apologise for having to interrupt
the right hon. Gentleman.

Earlier today the Prime Minister said it; the Leader
of the Opposition has said it; the Leader of the House
has said it—a new tone, a new mood. [Interruption.]
Order. The hon. Member for Broxtowe (Anna Soubry)
will be quiet. There will be interventions when the
Member who has the floor takes them, and not before.
Members will observe basic courtesies and listen quietly
and with respect to speakers. That is the end of it.

Mr Stuart, if you are not prepared to do so, leave the
Chamber. We can manage without you.

Mr Brown: If we do not act now as a House of Commons,
knowing what we now know, and act forcefully
and with clarity, friends around the world who admire
our liberties as a country will now ask what kind of
country we have become. A crime has been committed
against innocent members of the public; a complaint
has been made to the police and no satisfaction has
been given. Even when the police have had someone’s
name as a likely victim, they were neither telling them
nor taking action. No action from the head of the first
police inquiry, Andy Hayman, whose next job just
happened to be at News International; no action from
his successor, who had overall responsibility for two
inquiries—Mulcaire and Abebal, or what is called
Southern Investigations—each with vast but unexamined
archives exposing criminality on a huge scale. Inspector
Yates has redefined for us the meaning of an inquiry.
He not only failed to ask any of the right questions but,
as became clear yesterday, he failed even to ask any of
the basic questions.

I deeply regret my inability to do then what I wanted
to do—to overturn the advice of all the authorities and
set up a judicial inquiry. I can say for the record that, as
I left office, I talked to the leader of the Liberal party
and warned him that a Coulson problem would emerge,
and I did so directly, and not through an intermediary
who might not remember to pass on the message. At the
same time, I handed him, in person, our proposal for a
commission into the media, and in summer last year, I
wrote to the head of the civil service to point out that
the previous advice against the judicial inquiry had
clearly since been overtaken by the new evidence.

I am afraid that the House must examine more recent,
more damning and more alarming evidence. Because of
what happened to my children, whose privacy at all
times I have tried to protect, I have been sent, I have
been offered, and I have had thrust upon me a great
devil of evidence that is relevant to this debate, which is
now for the police to examine. It is right for the House
to know that the damage done in the past 10 years to
innocent lives was avoidable. As early as the winter of

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Brown: I think that for the benefit of the future
debates on the matter and the inquiry, this information
is relevant.

The memorandum stated that if an appeal was made
against a judicial inquiry, such a challenge might succeed,
and that there was not only no case for a judicial-led
inquiry, but not a strong case for either a non-judicial
inquiry or even a reference to the Independent Police
Complaints Commission, or even for asking the police
to reopen their inquiry.

Mr Graham Stuart: On a point of order, Mr Speaker.
May I ask whether there is any time limit in this debate,
and—

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman will resume
his seat. If there were a time limit it would be announced;
2002, senior police officers at Scotland Yard met the
now chief executive of News International and informed
her of serious malpractice on the part of her newspaper
staff and criminals undertaking surveillance on their
behalf. The new investigation will no doubt uncover
why no action was taken within News International and
what lay behind the subsequent promotion of that
junior editor concerned.

In that context, and again, because of what happened
to my family, I have been made aware of an additional
and previously unexamined stream of orders by one of
the editors at News International, Mr Alex Marunchak,
to hack and to intrude—a man who was subsequently
promoted to be a full editor of a regional edition of the
News of the World. As we now know, a cover-up can be
damaged as the original crime, and the decision of
the News International chairman to pay, without
reference to his board, some victims sums of around
£500,000, may now be seen as the buying of silence.

Given his statements to this House, that must now be
the subject of full parliamentary, as well as police,
scrutiny.

The freedom of the press in this country was built
through the countless acts of fearless people who had
done no wrong, and yet had to make huge sacrifices.
Today, the freedom of the press can best be assured by
full disclosure and reparation by those who know that
they have done wrong. First, for the future, the press
media itself should immediately press for a new Press
Complaints Commission. We need one that is proactive,
not passive; one that is less about protecting the press
from the public, and more about properly processing
the complaints of the public against the press; and one
that is wholly independent, so that it can differentiate,
and be seen to differentiate, between the abuse of power
as a result of self-interest and what we really need,
which is the pursuit of truth in the public interest.

We need to put an end to the violation of rights, but
also to ensure the rightsing of wrongs. Secondly, therefore,
News International papers, and every other responsible
paper, should in future be obliged to publish—not on
page 35 or 27, but on page 1—apologies to all individuals
whose rights have been infringed. Perhaps in future we
will know the naming and shaming of criminals inside
the media by the name of one of the saddest victims, as
happened with Sarah’s law. That would require News
International to practise what it has so self-righteously
preached to other people.

Thirdly, we must do all in our power to prevent the
subversion of our basic rights again. We must therefore
be ready to discuss limits to the undue concentration of
ownership in the media as a whole. I must say to the
Prime Minister, in response to the statement he made
earlier today, that I believe that he will have to widen the
remit of the commission of inquiry, so that we are sure
that it will examine not just the police and general
ethics, but all the evidence of the abuse of surveillance
techniques and technologies, as a result of which we
saw the undermining of our civil liberties.

In the long and winding evolution of our rights and
freedoms, the people of this country have always been
at risk from huge concentrations of power. Traditionally,
they have seen the freedom of the press as a force for
their freedom, but when our country’s biggest media
organisation has itself become an unchallengeable
concentration of power, as it was until today; when it is

has held in contempt not only basic standards of legality,
but basic standards of decency, too; when it has replaced
freedom with licence; when it has wielded power without
ever being elected to do so; and when it has regarded
itself not only as above the law, but as above the elected
institutions of our country, all concerned people in this
House should be able to see that what should be our
greatest defence against the abuse of power had itself
become an intolerable abuser of power.

History will also show that a press will not long
remain free in any country unless it is also responsible.
If the irresponsibility that has characterised News
International is not to define the public view of the
media as a whole and if continued irresponsibility is not
to force Parliament to take ever stronger measures to
protect the public from the press, we will need far more
than the closure of a newspaper one week and the
withdrawal of a bid the next.

Jacob Rees-Mogg (North East Somerset) (Con): Will
the right hon. Gentleman give way?

Mr Brown: I give way.

Hon. Members: Hear, hear!

Jacob Rees-Mogg: I am extremely grateful to the
right hon. Gentleman for giving way, as are many other
Government Members. Before he finishes with this high
moral tone, will he tell us something about Messrs
Whelan and McBride?

Mr Brown: I find it strange that when I am giving to
the House new evidence of criminal wrongdoing, the
Conservative party, instead of listening, want to shout
down the speaker. On reflection, when we are talking
about people who have been abused as a result of the
infringement of their liberties, the Conservative party
will think it better to hear the evidence before jumping
to conclusions.

Mr Graham Stuart: Will the right hon. Gentleman
give way?

Mr Brown: Of course I will give way.

Mr Stuart: I am so grateful to the right hon. Gentleman.
He said that he was not aware of systematic abuses of
the law by News International. May I put it to him that
from near the beginning of the previous Government,
News International executives, in conjunction with
Members of the then Government, conspired to smear
Lord Ashcroft and they illegally—\[Interruption.\] Labour
Members think that there is one law for them and
another law for others. They illegally blagged bank
accounts in order to try to undermine Her Majesty’s
Opposition. He knew about it then. Why was nothing
done?

Mr Brown: I am surprised that this debate, which
started with our desire to protect the lives of innocent
children, should end up with the Conservative party
more interested in defending Lord Ashcroft. I would
have thought that, if the hon. Member for Beverley and
Holderness (Mr Stuart) knew that there were so many
abuses at News International at the time, he would have
advised the then Leader of the Opposition not to employ
Mr Andy Coulson.
Nadhim Zahawi: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. I gave way. It is nice to see him in the Chamber, Mr Speaker. I have listened carefully to him—[Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. The hon. Gentleman must be heard.

Nadhim Zahawi: Thank you, Mr Speaker. I have listened carefully to the right hon. Gentleman as he has so eloquently outlined for us his bravery in standing up to Murdoch. Does he regret that the previous Government held a slumber party for Elisabeth Murdoch and Rebekah Wade, as she was known then, at Chequers?

Mr Brown: The hon. Gentleman started by implying that I have not been in the House much. I have come to a debate on the future of the media on an issue in which the Prime Minister of this country is implicated and has questions to answer. [HON. MEMBERS: “Where is he?”] I repeat to the House that had I, as Prime Minister, not attended a debate on a problem that was partly my responsibility, Conservative Members would have been up in arms.

Alun Cairns: It was said earlier that if these inquiries are to succeed, the tone needs to be right. Does the right hon. Gentleman believe that he has contributed to that tone in the way he has provided his evidence today?

Mr Brown: Yes, because what I have sought to do is give the facts about the infringement of civil liberties, about the relationships between News International and the Government and about those instances where News International and the public interest diverge. I hope that the hon. Gentleman will ask the leader of the Conservative party and Prime Minister to do exactly the same on every single issue that I have raised, because it is going to be a matter of concern for the whole country, not just this month, but in many months to come: what are the precise relationships on individual policy issues between the Government of the day and one of the biggest corporations of the country? I make no apologies for setting out the record of our Government in our relationships with News International, and I hope that Members on the other side of the House will ask their leader to set out what happened in the relationship between his party and News International.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Brown: I will finally take one more question, because Mr Speaker will never call me again.

Charlie Elphicke: I thank the right hon. Gentleman. I gave way. As a parent myself, I share the disgust at the invasion of his privacy, and I agree with him that the police have serious questions to answer. Nevertheless, criminality was disclosed in the Culture, Media and Sport Committee report in 2003 and by the Information Commissioner in 2006. As a new Member, I ask him: why was nothing done?

Mr Brown: I have set out the record of my desire to have a judicial inquiry. It was opposed by the police, opposed by the Home Office and opposed by the civil service, and it was not supported by the Select Committee of the day. However, if the hon. Gentleman felt that it was right in 2003 that there should have been an inquiry into the media, why at no point, even until last week, did the Conservative party ever support an inquiry into the media in this country?

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Brown: I am so tempted to take further interventions, but I would lose my chance ever to speak again, so I must bring my remarks to a conclusion.

Ofcom—this is incredibly significant—has this afternoon announced that it is now going to apply the “fit and proper” test to the remaining holdings of News International in BSkyB. This is a further useful step, but we must now have three things: a sustained and rigorous process of investigation and disclosure; a fairer distribution of media power in our country which will eventually restore the public faith in a media that are fully and genuinely free; and, as a result of what we now know, robust measures, akin to those that I have described this afternoon, to ensure that the lethal combination of illegality, collusion and cover-up that we now know has prevailed for a whole decade can never happen again.

5.58 pm

Mr John Whittingdale (Maldon) (Con): It is not often, I expect, that I shall sign a motion in the name of the Leader of the Opposition. On this particular occasion I thought it right to do so. I commend the Leader of the Opposition on his approach, which is that we must tackle these appalling matters on a cross-party basis. I have always tried to do that in the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, which I am proud to chair, and I think that we have succeeded. I will merely say that I am sorry that the Leader of the Opposition’s predecessor did not choose the same approach this afternoon.

I believe that the atmosphere at present has become so poisoned by the stream of appalling revelations that it would have been quite wrong for the News Corporation bid to acquire the whole of BSkyB to go ahead. We still do not know—we still have not even begun to know—the full extent of what has been going on in the newsroom at the News of the World, in the higher levels of News Corporation or, possibly, outside that, in other organisations, but clearly there were already question marks about the “fit and proper” test for News Corporation’s bid. The important thing is that we should obtain answers to questions very rapidly. There is an ongoing police inquiry, which needs to be concluded as fast as possible; there is the judicial inquiry that the Prime Minister has rightly set, which I fear will take much longer; and then there is my Select Committee, which has asked Rupert Murdoch, James Murdoch and Rebekah Brooks to appear before it next Tuesday. We have not yet received a response. The Select Committee will meet tomorrow morning, and if we have not received a reply by then, we might well wish to return to the House to ask it to use the powers available to it to ensure that witnesses attend.

Penny Mordaunt (Portsmouth North) (Con): There is an assumption that, once the News of the World ceases to trade, the victims of phone hacking will still have legal redress and that there will be a compensation fund for them. I doubt that that is the case, however. Is that something that the Committee could look at?
Mr Whittingdale: It might be more appropriate for the judicial inquiry to look at that matter, as it essentially involves a point of law, but I entirely share my hon. Friend’s concern that the victims should have access to proper compensation when wrong has clearly been done to them.

The Committee decided that we wanted to hear from Rebekah Brooks because she is the chief executive of News International, and from James Murdoch because he was until recently the chairman of News International in this country. We have also asked Rupert Murdoch to appear, because he is essentially synonymous with News Corporation. He has considerable achievements to his name. He pioneered the use of new technology in the newspaper industry, which transformed it, and he took the brave decision to launch BSkyB, which changed the whole face of British television. It is the case, however, that he will now be forever tarred with the revelations that have come out over the past few months about what has happened in his papers.

Sir Gerald Kaufman (Manchester, Gorton) (Lab): As the hon. Gentleman knows, I was his predecessor as Chairman of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee. As he also knows, we asked Rebekah Brooks—then Rebekah Wade—to give evidence to the Committee, with Andy Coulson, at that time. She admitted with clarity that she had been involved in paying money to the police. Andy Coulson said that that had been done only within the law, which was an unbelievable lie because it is impossible for a newspaper to pay money to the police. When the hon. Gentleman has Rebekah Brooks and the other people from News International before him, I advise him to take a long spoon with him, because of the way in which they will try to lie and cheat their way out of the predicament that they are in.

Mr Speaker: Order. Interventions must be brief.

Mr Whittingdale: I recall vividly the evidence given by Rebekah Brooks to the Committee when the right hon. Gentleman was its Chairman. It included matters that he rightly says might turn out to be criminal, and I am certain that the judicial inquiry will want to examine them. I have no doubt that some of my colleagues on the Select Committee, who are extremely robust on these matters, might well wish to ask questions about those matters as well, should they have the chance to do so.

In regard to the takeover of BSkyB—which is, after all, the matter that we are supposed to be debating this afternoon—it has always been the case that there are more stringent tests for the acquisition of a media company in this country. That is right; it is a reflection of the power of the media that they should be subject to greater tests. I would like to take this opportunity to commend the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), who has been utterly scrupulous in his handling of this matter. I believe that he has acted on the basis of independent advice at every stage, and it is difficult to find fault with the way in which he has conducted himself.

Kevin Brennan (Cardiff West) (Lab): Speaking as a former competition Minister, may I ask the hon. Gentleman to accept that it was open to the Secretary of State to make a choice to stick with his original conclusion that he was minded to refer the matter to the Competition Commission? Had he done that, we could have been saved a lot of trouble.

Mr Whittingdale: My right hon. Friend the Secretary of State acted on the basis of the advice that he received from Ofcom. The original advice was that he should refer the bid, but Ofcom then came back and said that the undertakings being given by News Corporation were sufficient and that there was no longer a need to do so. At every stage, he has acted on the advice of the independent regulator.

I want to say a few words about BSkyB, which has been an extraordinarily successful company. It has pioneered choice in television and introduced the personal video recorder, high-definition television and 3D television. It has recently passed the 10 million home mark. It has been incredibly successful. It is right that its ownership should be subject to very close scrutiny. I would also like to commend it on its most recent announcement of £600 million of annual investment in UK content, which will do a tremendous amount of good.

The test that my right hon. Friend the Culture Secretary put up to be examined was that of plurality. That is about Sky News. It is worth saying that throughout this saga, Sky News has displayed the same objectivity and independence in its coverage of matters concerning its parent company—or the company that sought to become its parent company—as it has in other matters.

Mr Cash: We heard earlier about the published terms of reference set out by the Prime Minister. We got them from the Library and they refer to a “judge-led inquiry into phone hacking”—but it is confined to the press. Would my hon. Friend, having been consulted and with his Committee meeting tomorrow, agree to look into these terms of reference? Does he agree that sound and visual media journalism has to be included to make the inquiry fully comprehensive?

Mr Whittingdale: I have not yet heard any suggestion that similar activities have been undertaken by television or radio companies, but, should that be uncovered, I have no doubt that the judge would request a broadening of the terms of reference to include it. The important thing is that the judge should follow the evidence wherever it leads. As I understand it, that is the undertaking that the Prime Minister gave.

Some have expressed the concern that Sky News might go the way of Fox News. Fox News is very successful, but I do not believe that it would ever succeed in this country. We have an entirely different climate. Nevertheless, that was the key issue under consideration when we examined plurality. However, the revelations over the course of the last two weeks have raised a much more serious issue—the “fit and proper” test and whether or not News Corporation meets it, not just in respect of its 100% ownership, but now in respect of its 39% ownership of BSkyB. That is something that Ofcom will want to consider, but I believe that Ofcom is correct in saying that it should act on the basis of evidence rather than allegation. These matters need to be pursued to the very end. We need to discover the truth, and if it turns out that very senior executives in News Corporation are involved in, or had
knowledge of, what has been going on, that will raise questions about the fit and proper test. I have no doubt that Ofcom will pursue them.

It might take years for us to find the full extent of what has been happening and to get to the truth, but if that is what it takes, that is what we must do. This episode must never be allowed to recur. We need to find out the full extent of it. We will try to begin to uncover some of the truth on Tuesday, if those people are willing to appear before us, but this judicial inquiry and the police inquiry must find the truth.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Speaker: Order. In view of the level of interest expressed, from now on there will be a four-minute limit on Back-Bench contributions.

6.8 pm

Mr Ben Bradshaw (Exeter) (Lab): I wish to concentrate briefly on an issue that, in the understandable outrage over the phone-hacking scandal, has been largely overlooked, at least until it was raised by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), the former Prime Minister, earlier this afternoon. That issue is the extent to which the current Government’s policy has been influenced by News Corp interests.

The sorry saga of the BSkyB takeover bid has already been well documented, but other Government policies could also have been written in Wapping. The first was the announcement last summer that the Government would not implement the recommendations of Labour’s Davies report into listed sporting events. Sport is one of the biggest money spinners for Sky and there remains real public concern about the lack of sport, particularly of test cricket, on free-to-view television. When the Leader of the House responds, I would like him to tell us when the Government intend to implement Davies’ modest and sensible proposals in full.

The second example is when the Government abandoned Labour’s proposals for regional news consortia, funded by a protected element of the licence fee, in order to secure the future of high-quality, impartial regional news and news in the nations on ITV. James Murdoch hated this idea; I know because he told me so in one of the many rows we had. One of the first decisions the current Secretary of State took when he came into office was to scrap these regional news consortia, in spite of the fact that they were already well down the road to implementation and had the full support of the industry and the public.

The third area, to which my right hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath has already referred, is the Government’s assault on the BBC through the biggest cut in funding in its history, leaving the corporation having to cut its programme funding by a massive 25%.

We should not be surprised by any of this. All that one needs to do is read James Murdoch’s chilling speech at the Edinburgh TV festival in 2009, in which he called for the BBC to be “cut down to size” and for Ofcom to be “neutered or scrapped”. What did the then Leader of the Opposition do in response? He added Ofcom to his list of quangos for the chop.

Returning briefly to the now dead News Corporation-BSkyB takeover, we know from the Business Secretary’s unofficial spokesman Lord Oakeshott that the Business Secretary would have referred the bid to the Competition Commission. Why did the Culture Secretary change the Business Secretary’s policy and bend over backwards to help News Corporation avoid a long and costly inquiry? His approach in this regard has been extraordinary.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Bradshaw: He has repeatedly tried to hide behind the argument that he has a quasi-judicial role. Had he exercised that, he would have followed Ofcom’s original recommendation and referred the bid in full to the Competition Commission. Is it not the case that there has always been a plurality problem? We thought there was a plurality problem; the Business Secretary thought there was a plurality problem; Ofcom thought there was a plurality problem; every serious media analyst in the country thought there was a plurality problem. The only people who did not think there was a plurality problem were News Corporation and the Government.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Bradshaw: To dispel any suspicion—[Hon. Members: “Give way!”] No, I will not give way. [Interruption.]

Mr Speaker: Order. If the right hon. Gentleman wants to give way, it is up to him.

Mr Bradshaw: I give way to the Secretary of State.

The Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport (Mr Jeremy Hunt): Will the right hon. Gentleman accept that it was on the basis of Ofcom’s independent advice that the media merger should go ahead that I made that recommendation to the House? On Monday morning, I wrote back to Ofcom to ask whether it stood by that advice, as a result of which the bid ended up being referred to the Competition Commission.

Mr Bradshaw: We will discover that when all the papers are published, which is my next point. However, what happened came only after the Secretary of State intervened on behalf of News International in a negotiation with Ofcom.

To dispel any suspicion in the House and among the British people that the Government acted under pressure from News Corporation, the Government must now disclose the details of all meetings, discussions and communications involving Ministers, officials and representatives of News Corporation, or their representatives. That must include details of the now infamous back-door visit to Downing street straight after the election, and the Prime Minister’s Christmas dinner with James Murdoch and Brooks in Oxfordshire.

May I finish with some friendly advice to the Government? The information will come out. It is far better for the Government to put it voluntarily into the public domain now than to have it prised out by freedom of information requests or by the forthcoming judicial inquiry. As my right hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath has said, it is rarely the initial mistake, incompetence or bad judgment that is fatal, but the cover-up.
6.13 pm

Mr Don Foster (Bath) (LD): The Leader of the Opposition was right to begin his remarks by saying that what has happened today is a victory for the British people. It was the British people who were horrified by the Milly Dowler affair, and by the hacking of the communications of the families of victims of 7/7 and of Afghanistan. The Leader of the Opposition was right to say that the British public forced the political parties to unite in the motion before us, and to put pressure on Rupert Murdoch in relation to the takeover.

I congratulate the Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of the House on the tone of their speeches and for seeking to avoid partisan remarks. As the whole House knows, for the past 30 years there have been significant failures by Governments of both major parties to stand up to the media in this country. What has happened today as Murdoch has backed down, probably only temporarily, is a victory for the British people. However, the Prime Minister was right to say that it is not the end of the matter: we must continue with the thorough police investigation to root out wrongdoing and bring those who have committed crimes to justice.

Mr Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): I am grateful to the right hon. Gentleman for giving way, although my intervention will give him injury time. I want to pray in aid a point made by his right hon. Friend the Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark (Simon Hughes). The Information Commissioner’s analysis shows that we should worry more about the Mail newspapers than about Murdoch. Ten years ago, when my mother was recovering from a stroke, a reporter from The Mail on Sunday went into her house without knocking on the door to try to extract information from me.

Mr Foster: The right hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. The report to which he refers was published in 2006, when his party was in power. It alleged that 305 journalists were acting illegally, and no action was taken.

We could become involved in party political stuff. I could point out that it is amazing that the former Prime Minister, who gave us that list of things that he did as Prime Minister, failed to make any mention of what his party did in government when he was merely the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

Critical actions are necessary. The Press Complaints Commission has been drinking in the last chance saloon for far too long. It is ridiculous that papers such as the Daily Express and the Daily Star can walk away from it, and that only people who have been directly affected by a judgment can get it to investigate. That must be changed.

It is also ridiculous that there is so little clarity about how the “fit and proper person” test should be conducted. I asked the Secretary of State about that on Monday, and I asked the Prime Minister about it today. It is true that the British public wanted to know not just whether Murdoch’s was a fit and proper organisation to take over yet more shares, but it was not made clear whether the test could take place on the basis of its current 39% shareholding. I am delighted that Ofcom is now investigating that, but the law is still confused about the issue.

The law is also confused about plurality—the issue of who should own our media to ensure that it contains multiple voices. Surely by now the House recognises that, in the modern era of communication, it is not just news and current affairs that determine how we think about ourselves and the world. That can also be done by drama, comedy and many other means.

Duncan Hames (Chippenham) (LD): I suggested to the Secretary of State in March that there was a case for wider application of automatic triggers for referral to the Competition Commission. Does my hon. Friend agree that the Government should consider that?

Mr Foster: My hon. Friend is absolutely right. There is so much that needs to be sorted out.

Rupert Murdoch has dropped his bid for the time being, but who knows when he will return via another bid? The British public will never forgive us if we take our eye off the ball. The inquiries must go ahead, and the revisions to law must go ahead, so that we can have a decent press in this country in which journalists—the majority—who carry out the fearless inquiries that we want, but do it legally, are allowed to continue to do so.

It is a disgrace that when Rupert Murdoch closed the News of the World, a large number of journalists who had done absolutely nothing wrong lost their jobs, while the person in charge, Rebekah Brooks, kept hers. When Rupert Murdoch arrived in this country, she was the person whom he described as the key issue for him. That is the most disgraceful thing that has happened in the last week.

6.18 pm

Sammy Wilson (East Antrim) (DUP): My party has no hesitation in backing the motion. The debate has now moved on. There will be inquiries. There will be an investigation of the wrongdoing, and there will be an investigation of the police and their activities. However, one thing must be dealt with if we are not to see a repeat of these events and a further undermining of our democracy. I refer to the whole issue of the concentration of press power in the hands of one organisation. It does not matter whether it is concentrated in the hands of News International, Rupert Murdoch or anyone else, but as long as that concentration is there, there will always be a tendency for those of us who are involved in the political field to want to be on the right side of the people who hold the power.

Karl McCartney (Lincoln) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the debate is about more than a media mogul owning newspaper and television companies? Does it not also flag up the issue of dual share structures, in which the owners of one class of share, such as the class A non-voting shareholders of News International, have no voting rights?

Sammy Wilson: We must address everything that leads to that concentration of power. If that is not dealt with, there will always be a tendency to rush after and try to please those who have such influence.

We have only to consider the accusations that have flown back and forth across this House today. Why did the current Prime Minister, when he was at a low ebb in opposition, and under pressure from the Government
of the day, hire a dodgy character even though he had been warned? Was that because of the influence that might give and the doors that that person would open? Was it because of some of the other benefits that would come from the appointment?

Why did the current Prime Minister’s predecessor bottle this, despite the fact that he knew about wrongdoing? He told us today that he knew about them. Was it because the Home Office said he could not do anything? Was it because the police said there was no evidence? Or was it because he knew there was a certain limit beyond which he could not go? After all, he was the Prime Minister, so he could have made the decision. I do not wish to be partisan; I just think that we must look at what has happened under both the current Prime Minister and previous Prime Ministers. How did they behave? How did parties behave when in government and seeking the support of News International? As long as we have that concentration of power, there will always be the danger that our democracy might be undermined by those to whom we have to pander because we need the headline.

That is bad for the business concerned as well, because of what it then believes. I have no doubt that News International believed it could get away with what it did get away with, because, being in such a powerful position, it felt that politicians might pull their punches and that the police might not fully investigate matters. As it felt that it could get away with some of those activities, it did them: then it pushed the limits and went further and further. If we do not deal with the concentration of power, I believe that this might happen again, regardless of what comes out of the inquiry, who goes to jail, and what sanctions are put in place.

Pete Wishart: As the hon. Gentleman will know, there are some big critical issues for the devolved Administrations in terms of the inquiry. Does he agree that it is imperative that whoever leads the inquiry, and however they do their business, they consult fully and engage comprehensively with the devolved Administrations?

Sammy Wilson: I hope that will be the case, and I am disappointed that there was not more consultation with the smaller parties representing Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland about the terms of the inquiry, but I hope that will be remedied in the future.

The third reason why I believe we must deal with the concentration of power is that there will always be public mistrust of the news industry if it is felt that one group is so large that it can influence the law and politicians, and get away with things. That is not good for the press and the newspaper industry either, or for those who get on the wrong side of the door. We have seen how it has swung against the Labour party. At one stage that party was the darling of News International—but no longer. At one stage the Conservative party suffered as a result of being on the wrong side of the door. I know about that, too, from my experience in Northern Ireland, when the Conservative party joined with the Ulster Unionist party before the last election. News International had taken little interest in Northern Ireland politics and politicians, but suddenly there seemed to be an undue interest, in our party in particular. Indeed, a number of our party members were targeted—not that News International ever found any wrongdoing, but there was innuendo, and it was sufficient to sow doubts in the mind of the electorate.

That is why politicians will always try to get on the right side of the door. If we are on the wrong side, we know what will happen. We will not get the headlines, and instead we will get the investigations and the innuendo.

For that reason, the concentration of power must be dealt with, even though the inquiry is not going to deal with it.

Graham Jones (Hyndburn) (Lab): Would the hon. Gentleman reflect on the headline that we see at every election, “It’s the Sun wot won it”?

Sammy Wilson: Whether that is true or not—sometimes I think that perhaps we do not give enough credit to the electorate—politicians are aware that mass media can influence elections, so they try to keep on the right side. I hope that the inquiries will be made to look into the issue of concentration.

6.25 pm

Dr Phillip Lee (Bracknell) (Con): May I begin by emphasising my personal disgust at the revelations that have come out over recent days, particularly those with regard to the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown)? I really cannot imagine what it must be like to see one’s child’s health records in the public domain.

I wish to step back from what we have been discussing so far, as I think that it is important for Members of this House to do that in times of storm. We should not be in the middle of it; we should be stepping back. I wish instead to discuss media plurality in reality, as it is now in this world. The way in which individuals search for news, and indeed share news, is changing and has changed. As for the idea that the ownership of one news channel watched by a relatively small number of people should concern us greatly, I suggest that the ownership of search engines and social media should concern us more.

Let me set out a few facts from the United States. According to recent information from the Pew Research Center, Google is the biggest single driver of traffic to news sites in the United States. Facebook has 500 million users worldwide, and of increasing importance to Facebook is the fact that it shares news; it is a way for people to communicate with each other and pass on stories. People do not turn on Sky News to get stories; they get them from friends on Facebook.

In this country more than 90% of online searches go through Google, with the figure for Europe and the wider world being more than 95%. Why am I so interested in this? I have a company on my patch called Foundem, which has three employees and has interested the European competition commission. That vertical search engine company was launched in 2006, and was allegedly suppressed by Google. It is a vertical search engine for washing machines and motorcycle helmets—but news too is a commodity. If Google can suppress a company like that, it can suppress a news organisation; it can point people in the direction of their news. People may obsess about trying to make Mr Murdoch the bogeyman of the present, but this is past; this is not the way things will be in the future. It is all going to be about where
people get their news from, and that will not necessarily be the News of the World. By concentrating on one man at the moment, people are missing the point. That is the central thrust of my argument. News has changed, and the way in which people communicate has changed.

Mrs Madeleine Moon (Bridgend) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman accept that part of the revulsion against News International has arisen because it became a virtual state within the state, running to its own set of rules, being above the law and feeling that it did not have to follow even the rules of moral decency? Does he agree that one of the challenges that we face with organisations such as Facebook and Google is ensuring that they too cannot be allowed to become above the law, and above the laws of moral decency in what they publish, and in what people post?

Dr Lee: Of course I agree with that: it is a statement of the obvious, is it not? I am greatly concerned that we do have a media state in this country. I saw an interview with somebody on the BBC recently—a former deputy editor of the News of the World—who stated as much. However, my point is that the media are changing. I do not need to comment on someone’s “fit and proper” right to own a newspaper or a news organisation; that is for others to do. My point is that at the moment we do not have control over where a lot of people are seeking to get their news from, and we have absolutely no idea whether what they are getting is the truth or not, because there is no check. That is why I agree with the hon. Lady.

Alun Cairns: I am grateful to my hon. Friend for making such serious and valid points. Does he recognise that the regulation of new media is much more difficult than even the regulation of the press, which makes it much more unpredictable and unmanageable?

Dr Philip Lee: Yes, I do. That is the problem: we need cross-border understanding. As for getting some sense of an international legal framework, good luck with that. It is very difficult, but that is the challenge we face.

I do not want to take up all the time I have available, because I know that others want to speak. If hon. Members will indulge me, I shall quote a few lines of poetry. I heard this the other day from a modern poet:

“The slow one now,
Will later be fast,
As the present now,
Will later be past.”

We should remember those words, because that is where we are now. There is a danger that we will obsess about the ownership of BSkyB whoever it is owned by, whether that is Mr Murdoch or someone else, following the announcement this afternoon. We might obsess about one component of the media, yet its importance will have passed. It will no longer be important to us as politicians, who clearly need to get our message over, but need to do so by having a professional relationship with the person who controls the presentation of that message to the public.

In conclusion, we should remember that the world is changing very quickly. In the future, Governments of any colour, red or blue, abroad or at home, will need to be very cautious about their relationships with businesses such as Google, Facebook and Twitter. They are the media giants of the future, and they might be just as capable of employing people who have committed the crimes alleged in recent days as News International has been in the past. We should bear that in mind.

6.31 pm

Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab): Some chilling words: “This one is my priority,” spoken by Rupert Murdoch about Rebekah Brooks; “There is far worse to come,” spoken by Rebekah Brooks about the revelations; “News International was deliberately thwarting a police investigation,” spoken by Commander Peter Clarke, who was in charge in the investigation and who has never said that in public until now; “I am 99% certain that my phone was hacked,” spoken by Assistant Commissioner Yates, who is in charge of counter-terrorism in this country; and “Have you ever paid police officers?” “Yes,” spoken by not just Rebekah Brooks but Andy Coulson.

Some disturbing facts: News International bullied those who opposed or were critics of the BSkyB empire; the policeman investigating News International went on to work for the company not years but weeks after he had stopped working for the Metropolitan police; Parliament has been lied to time and time again by a series of different people; material was deleted at News International and sometimes squirreled away and kept against a rainy day when a police officer might come knocking on the door to try to incriminate somebody else lower down the chain in the organisation; some people were ditched and thrown overboard, as we have seen throughout this year; and, as the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr Foster) said earlier, one of the most disgusting things that has happened in the past two weeks is that the people slaving away in the boiler room had to carry the can for those who were at the helm. That does not show that that is a decent company with which to do business.

Executive and non-executive directors at News Corporation completely failed in their fiduciary duties to ensure that criminality was not going on at their company and that the organisation was co-operating completely with the police. That involves Mr Aznar, Peter Barnes, Kenneth Cowley, Lachlan Murdoch, Thomas Perkins, John Thornton and Stanley Shuman, who should all be considering their position, too. I believe that this is proof that News Corporation is not a fit and proper body to hold its present holding in BSkyB, let alone any increased holding.

I pay tribute to the hon. Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale), who has been tenacious over the years on this matter. He said that BSkyB has done much that is good and I am sure all our constituents would agree. They watch lots of Sky television and enjoy their Sky Plus. The company has lots of technological innovation that only a robust entrepreneur could to bring to British society, but it has also often been profoundly anti-competitive. I believe that the bundling of channels so as to increase the profit and make it impossible for others to participate in the market is anti-competitive. I believe that the way in which the application programming interface—the operating system—has been used has been anti-competitive and that Sky has deliberately set about selling set-top boxes elsewhere, outside areas where they have proper rights. If one visits a flat in
Spain where a British person lives, one finds that they mysteriously manage to have a Sky box there even though it is registered to a house in the United Kingdom.

Sky has a virtual monopoly over many areas of our lives, with 67% of residential pay-TV subscriptions and 80% of pay-TV revenues—with an average spend of £492 a year.

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): I pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman's tenacity and courage over the course of this matter. He has been a credit to Parliament in the way he has pursued this. He is quite right that News International must be brought to justice, but does he agree that we must address the concentration of ownership of the media? If we do not do that, the idea that we have a free press and free media is simply false.

**Chris Bryant**: I completely agree that we failed to address the fact that we have allowed one man to have far too much power in his hands, including four newspapers and all the rights I have been talking about.

It is not just newspapers and broadcasting that have been subject to anti-competitive practices; it is also advertising. Sky spends £127 million on advertising—double what Virgin is able to—in any one year. The fact that it has such a big presence in the market makes it difficult for others to enter. It is anti-entrepreneurial to allow one person to have so much power, which is why no other country would allow it.

I suspect that the people of the country have been way ahead of us politicians on all of this. In the 10 years that I have been an MP, many have come to my constituency surgeries and demanded changes to the system. We have all failed in our duty for far too long, perhaps because we were frightened. If the Murdochs fail to attend the Select Committee next week, I believe that the people of this country will conclude that the Murdochs are waving goodbye to Britain—and maybe that would not be a bad thing.

6.37 pm

**George Eustice** (Camborne and Redruth) (Con): I strongly support the motion and I think that Sky has absolutely right to withdraw its bid. It gives the police time to complete their investigation and, at the end of all that, gives Ofcom time to assess whether BSkyB is fit and proper to have a broadcast licence.

I want to focus on a couple of areas, particularly to do with media regulation and how it could be improved. This change is long overdue. There is nothing new about these problems with the media. In 2006, a very comprehensive report from the Information Commissioner uncovered widespread problems here with a trade in people's personal information. A whole series of recommendations was made about toughening up the role of the Press Complaints Commission and changing the laws in some areas, but it was seen as too easy to ignore those recommendations and turn a blind eye to the report. That is a real indictment of the Opposition. As my hon. Friend Campbell spent the best part of a decade warning them that there was a problem with the media and that something needed to be done and it is wrong that that opportunity was not taken up.

Mel Stride (Central Devon) (Con): My hon. Friend raises the PCC, which has not been mentioned much in the debate. Does he agree that it has proven, over time, to be something of a toothless tiger? One of the big lessons from this sorry affair is that we need to look at having a situation in which, rather than one newspaper deciding on the rights and wrongs of another, we have a different way forward.

**George Eustice**: I absolutely agree, and I shall come to those issues in a moment. First, I want to say that the introduction of new regulation of the media should not be feared by journalism. Indeed, it could raise the status of journalism and restore confidence in the profession. If clear boundaries are enforced, that will strengthen the position of journalists if they are told to do a hatchet job on some story by their newspaper's proprietor or editor, perhaps because they are angry that a story was given to a rival paper. In such a situation, a journalist will be in a stronger position to resist and say, "No, that would be in breach of the code and would put us in a difficult position." At present the boundaries are not clear enough. That undermines journalism and makes it harder for journalists to face down demands from proprietors and editors alike.

It is also wrong for people to be concerned that a code would muzzle free speech. We have a tough broadcasting code to which all our broadcasters are subject, as my hon. Friend the Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale) mentioned. Sky News is a very good news organisation. It does a good job. There is nothing in that broadcasting code that hinders free debate. We have robust debates in a range of formats, but papers are culturally different so it would be wrong to apply the entire broadcasting code to the print media. In particular, it would be wrong to expect impartiality of the print press.

I shall touch on some of the aspects where we could improve the PCC or its replacement. There is not much wrong with the PCC code. The problem is that we has not been enforced with the rigour that we should require. In particular, the public interest defence, which is a kind of get out of jail card in so many areas, has been used and abused over the years, and used in all sorts of cases where there was no such public interest to justify the pursuit of certain means.

Another problem is a lack of sanctions. As the right hon. Member for Bath (Mr Foster) said, broadcasters who breach their code face serious and heavy fines of £250,000 and sometimes more. The press does not have such a culture. If there is no real consequence for newspapers that breach the code, they will not be too bothered about abiding by it. Finally, I wish to pick up on something that the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown) said, and which I have been pushing for some time. If a newspaper wilfully prints a story that it knows to be untrue, it is right and proportionate that it should give the same space to its correction as it gave to the original story. Sensible changes like that could help a great deal.

We all accept that the relationship between politicians and the media has got far too cosy over the years.

**Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that the role of the regulators on ownership is important? Although we in the House are
right to express our views and anger about BSkyB and other issues, it should not be for politicians to make arbitrary decisions about who owns what, or that may be seen as too much political interference in a free press.

George Eustice: I entirely agree. We need to keep the issues separate, but as I said earlier, given all that is going on, it is right...

Frank Dobson (Holborn and St Pancras) (Lab): Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

George Eustice: I will not give way. I am sorry. I have given way enough and we are nearly out of time.

We need to change the culture in which, over decades, the press barons have been led to believe that they can decide policy. It is no wonder, if they have had so many politicians coming to court them and seek their support. We need to try and get over that culture, and change things for the better. By weakening the press barons, we could strengthen journalism. It is important that we approach the debate in the right tone. We should be clear that we are not trying to stifle free speech, but that our objective is to strengthen journalism itself.

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call Steve Rotheram to speak until 6.44 pm.

6.43 pm

Steve Rotheram (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): There are not many in Liverpool who will shed any tears for the catastrophic downfall of News International and Rupert Murdoch or their belated withdrawal of the deal to purchase BSkyB, although they will sympathise with those innocent of any wrongdoing who have subsequently lost or may lose their jobs.

Twenty-two years ago the people of Merseyside decided to take on The Sun after it lied about the Hillsborough disaster. Although for a short time we received support in other cities, people gradually forgot the smear that had been perpetrated against us, while others preferred to believe what they had read, but nobody forgot on Merseyside. In 1999 the fight for justice for the 96 victims began and it is as strong today—

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): Order. Winding-up speeches to begin.

6.44 pm

Mr Ivan Lewis (Bury South) (Lab): Today the House has come together to speak with one voice, but we must also show some humility. In reality, there were only two or three hon. Members willing to pursue these issues over a long period. My hon. Friends the Members for West Bromwich East (Mr Watson) and for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) deserve our respect for their courage and relentless pursuit of the public interest. That is ultimately why we are elected to this place. We also heard a remarkable speech by my right hon. Friend the Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), who not only provided sensational new information, but reminded us that this issue goes to the heart of the character of our country, or the good society, as he would say.

In truth, the public do not ask much of their public institutions or private corporations. They have a right to expect a free and responsible press, clean and competent police, politicians who speak up for the public interest without fear or favour and businesses that obey the law and have decent ethical standards. On all those counts they have reason today to ask, “Who can we trust?” In the aftermath of the global banking crisis and the MPs’ expenses crisis, there is an urgent need to answer that question. Today is our chance to make a start, but it is also a day for Mr Murdoch to reflect on the consequences of his company, which had no limits and a “story at all costs” culture that not only fuelled criminality, but offended every standard of decency. It is also a day for other newspapers to reflect on their level of involvement in illegal activities, because it is wrong that the reputation of the vast majority of journalists and editors is being undermined by the actions of a few. Remaining silent is no longer an option.

Given the outstanding serious allegations of criminality, the hacking of Milly Dowler’s phone and of the phones of relatives of 7/7 victims and brave soldiers who fought in Iraq and Afghanistan, the public would never have understood this deal being allowed to go ahead. From the beginning we have called for it to be referred to the Competition Commission for a full and independent inquiry, but I was told time and again by the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport that that was not necessary and, in recent days, not possible.

Mr Jeremy Hunt: On that basis, does the hon. Gentleman think that I was wrong to follow the procedures laid down in the Enterprise Act 2002 and—the Act does not require this—to ask for and publish independent advice at every stage?

Mr Lewis: The right hon. Gentleman was wrong not to refer the matter to the Competition Commission and to rely on the good faith of a company that has been involved in this kind of activity.

What lessons have been learnt from this sorry episode? In matters of media ownership and mergers, politicians should never again fulfil a quasi-judicial role. Market share and power, and not simply plurality, must now be at the heart of the debate we are to have on the future. We welcome the fact that this will be part of an independent inquiry. A fit and proper person test should be applicable in all cases of serious failure of corporate governance. A new independent press regulatory system must reflect the new digital age and the rights of ordinary citizens more than the politician and the celebrity.

The Secretary of State must reflect on the judgments he has made, and I say to Government Members that the BBC may need reform, but its strength is absolutely central to the vitality of our democracy. We all know that the Conservative party has wanted to undermine the BBC at every opportunity. The Prime Minister described cuts to it as delicious, which demonstrates the kind of broadcasting environment they wanted to see in this country before these revelations changed forever the course of how we make these decisions. Today is an historic day for this country. This House has asserted the public interest and finally made it clear, according to the values of my party, that no corporate interest can be allowed to write the law or break it.

6.49 pm

The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Heath): This has been a very important day both for the country and for
Parliament. It is important because, for the first time, we have had a very clear indication that the police investigations that were carried out so inadequately before are now going ahead and yielding results.

It is important because we have heard of the establishment of a proper judicial inquiry under a very capable judge, Lord Justice Leveson, that will deal not only with the inadequacies of the previous inquiry and not only with the unacceptable practices in the press and the media. I am wholly unconvinced that those practices were confined to News International, and I am glad that the inquiry will work on a wider spectrum. The inquiry will look at the relationship between some media and some politicians and allow for proper investigation of the perhaps too cosy relationship that has sometimes existed. The decision by the Prime Minister to provide for proper disclosure of meetings between senior politicians and the media—I hope that the Leader of the Opposition will agree to that for his own party—seems to be a great step forward.

The other area that the inquiry will deal with—this is absolutely crucial, and I give credit to the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), who has been talking about it for some time—is the potential systemic suborning of police officers by some elements of the media. We must put an end to that.

Nicholas Soames (Mid Sussex) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree that it is extremely important that the inquiry deals in great depth not only with the points that he has made but with the abuses of many other newspapers in illegally procuring personal information?

Mr Heath: I absolutely agree with that intervention. I agree with the Leader of the Opposition and my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House that this is a good day for Parliament. We should avoid being self-congratulatory—we have hardly been a model of good practice over the years—but today, and over recent days, we have been able to demonstrate that we can express the views of the public.

It is also a good day because News International’s bid for BSkyB has been withdrawn, as it should have been withdrawn. There was increasing revulsion at the revelations of what were called offences against common decency. I think people would have found it very difficult to understand why the Murdoch empire was carrying on trying to expand its boundaries when there were such clear deficiencies within.

Simon Hughes (Bermondsey and Old Southwark) (LD): Is it also the responsibility of the inquiry to look at the warnings that have been given over 17 years about the accretion of powers by the Murdoch empire, the failure to act on those warnings during those years, and the failure to act on the very clear recommendations to which the hon. Member for Mid Sussex (Nicholas Soames) referred, which suggested in 2006 that 31 newspapers and more than 300 journalists had been guilty of illegality. Nothing was done about that in the following five years.

Mr Heath: I am grateful to my right hon. Friend for saying that. It is absolutely essential that we look at not only the actions but the inactions of very many people during the progress of this scandal. It is extraordinary that so little was done for so long.

Frank Dobson rose—

Mr Heath: This is the last intervention that I will take.

Frank Dobson: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that the rot set in when, against the advice of the late Michael Foot, Mrs Thatcher set the precedent of refusing to refer the purchase of The Times and The Sunday Times to the then Monopolies and Mergers Commission on the grounds that 40% ownership of newspapers was too much in one pair of hands?

Mr Heath: We have had abundant evidence since then of what has or has not been done in relationships with the media.

The best contributions to the debate have been the most sober and non-partisan, and I am grateful to colleagues who entered into the debate in that context. I am grateful to the Chairman of the Culture, Media and Sport Committee, the hon. Member for Maldon (Mr Whittingdale), whose Committee has done such a lot of good work. I am grateful, as I have indicated, to the hon. Member for Rhondda for what he has said not just today but on previous occasions. I am grateful to my right hon. Friend the Member for Bath (Mr Foster), to the hon. Members for East Antrim (Sammy Wilson), for Bracknell (Dr Lee) and for Camborne and Redruth (George Eustice), and to the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) for his very brief contribution. They talked not only about the criminal behaviour that has been uncovered over recent days and weeks, but about the concentration of power and ownership and the effect that that has on the media in this country, and about the adequacy of the Press Complaints Commission, which we clearly need to look at. The hon. Member for Bracknell warned that new media and technologies will bring new challenges that we have to address.

There were contributions from members of the previous Government. I think that most of what the right hon. Member for Exeter (Mr Bradshaw) said had more to do with the competition authorities and the Department for Culture, Media and Sport than with the contents of this debate, but he took this opportunity to raise those issues. There was a long contribution from the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown). May I say that it is genuinely a pleasure to have him contributing to our debates in this House, and he should do so more often? Everybody understands his personal issues concerning the completely inappropriate release of information about his family, and everybody has sympathy for him over that. Everybody will take careful notice of the serious evidence that he produced to the House, which I hope will be properly considered by the inquiry. I hope that he will give full evidence to the inquiry, as he indicated he would in his contribution, as I hope will other members of the previous Government who have a story to tell. I would criticise him because there was a self-exculpatory tone in much of what he said, and I think that that may have grated on some. Nevertheless, it was an important contribution.
The hon. Member for Bury South (Mr Lewis) did not quite rise to the occasion. He wanted to take a partisan view, in considerable contrast to the leader of his party. He wanted to reside from the body of law that the Government of whom he was a member put in place. He wanted to say that issues that cannot be clearly linked in law should be linked in law. I remind him of what he said on 10 June, because it is relevant to his contribution:

“The serious admissions of culpability by News International aren’t relevant to the News Corp-BSkyB media plurality issue.”

Now he is saying that those admissions are intrinsic to it. He cannot have it both ways.

What we have seen is a systemic failure across the institutions of public life to get to grips with a cancer of wrongdoing. There were abundant signs over the years: admissions of criminal behaviour, Select Committee reports that went unheeded, and clear examples of big media organisations wielding too much power, political and commercial. I hope that the inquiries that are being put in place today will deal with that issue. I hope that that chapter is drawing to a close. I believe that we have a unique window of opportunity to get it right.

[Interruption.] The hon. Member for Wrexham (Ian Lucas) says that we have barely started yet. He is absolutely right. We have barely started getting to grips with this cancer of wrongdoing, but we will get to grips with it. We now have an inquiry that will set us on the right path and a Government determined to act. That is as it should be. I am grateful, Mr Deputy Speaker, for the opportunity to contribute to this debate.

Question put and agreed to.

Resolved.

That this House believes that it is in the public interest for Rupert Murdoch and News Corporation to withdraw their bid for BSkyB.

Mr Foster: On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. On a lighter note, is there a way in which you can draw to the attention of the House the significant victory by the House of Commons rowing team, by four lengths, to the attention of the House the significant victory by the House of Lords?

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I could not possibly think of a way of making it more widely known than you just have, Mr Foster. Thank you very much for lightening the proceedings.

Business without Debate

DELEGATED LEGISLATION (COMMITTEES)

Ordered.

That the draft Modifications to the Standard Conditions of Electricity Supply Licences, which were laid before this House on 9 June, be referred to a Delegated Legislation Committee.—(Stephen Crabb.)

SITTINGS OF THE HOUSE (19 JULY)

Ordered.

That, on Tuesday 19 July, the Speaker shall not adjourn the House until he has notified the Royal Assent to Acts agreed upon by both Houses.—(Stephen Crabb.)

DRAFT FINANCIAL SERVICES BILL (JOINT COMMITTEE)

Motion made,
That this House concurs with the Lords Message of 21 June, that it is expedient that a Joint Committee of Lords and Commons be appointed to consider the draft Financial Services Bill presented to both Houses on 16 June (Cm 8083).

That a Select Committee of six Members be appointed to join with the Committee appointed by the Lords to consider the draft Financial Services Bill presented to both Houses on 16 June (Cm 8083).

That the Committee should report on the draft Bill by 1 December 2011.

That the Committee shall have power—
(i) to send for persons, papers and records;
(ii) to sit notwithstanding any adjournment of the House;
(iii) to report from time to time;
(iv) to appoint specialist advisers; and
(v) to adjourn from place to place within the United Kingdom.

That Mr Nicholas Brown, Mr David Laws, Mr Peter Lilley, David Mowat, Mr George Mudie and Mr David Ruffley be members of the Committee.—(Stephen Crabb.)

Hon. Members: Object.

DELEGATED LEGISLATION

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): With the leave of the House, we shall take motions 8 to 12 together.

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

TAXES

That the draft International Tax Enforcement (Liberia) Order 2011, which was laid before this House on 17 June, be approved.

That the draft Double Taxation Relief and International Tax Enforcement (South Africa) Order 2011, which was laid before this House on 17 June, be approved.

That the draft International Tax Enforcement (Aruba) Order 2011, which was laid before this House on 17 June, be approved.

That the draft International Tax Enforcement (Curaçao, Sint Maarten and BES Islands) Order 2011, which was laid before this House on 17 June, be approved.

That the draft Double Taxation Relief and International Tax Enforcement (Mauritius) Order 2011, which was laid before this House on 17 June, be approved. —(Stephen Crabb.)

Question agreed to.

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

CONSTITUTIONAL LAW

That the draft Criminal Justice and Licensing (Scotland) Act 2010 (Consequential Provisions and Modifications) Order 2011, which was laid before this House on 22 June, be approved.—(Stephen Crabb.)

Question agreed to.

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

SOCIAL SECURITY

That the draft Disclosure of State Pension Credit Information (Warm Home Discount) Regulations 2011, which were laid before this House on 23 June, be approved.—(Stephen Crabb.)

Question agreed to.
EUROPEAN UNION DOCUMENTS

Motion made, and Question put forthwith (Standing Order No. 119(11)),

CONSULAR PROTECTION

That this House takes note of European Union Document COM(2011) 149, relating to consular protection for EU citizens in third countries; recalls that such Communications are not legally binding; underlines that the competence for consular protection remains with Member States; and agrees with the Government's approach to the EU's consular work.—(Stephen Crabb.)

Question agreed to.

PETITIONS

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): We now move on to petitions. The first is from Teresa Pearce. She is not available, so we move on to Mr Nicholas Brown.

Abolition of Cheques

7.2 pm

Mr Nicholas Brown (Newcastle upon Tyne East) (Lab): I should like to present a petition on behalf of my constituent Dr Helen Gilthorpe, declaring that the petitioners are profoundly concerned by the proposed abolition of cheques. It is accompanied by another petition in similar terms signed by some 60 of my constituents, many resident at the Abbeyfield care home in my constituency.

I know that the arguments for the retention of cheques are well understood by the House. The cheque is still the second largest means of payment by value in this country, and cheques are a convenient way of paying bills and making donations to charity. Some 46% of cheque use is by those aged 55 and over, and the campaign to keep the cheque is supported by groups ranging from Age UK to the Federation of Small Businesses. I understand that the Payments Council has announced the suspension of its proposal to abolish cheques, and I hope that it will take this petition as further support for that decision.

Following is the full text of the petition:

The Petition of Dr H. Gilthorpe and others,

Declares that the petitioners are profoundly concerned by the abolition of cheques.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to encourage the Payments Council to reverse the decision to abolish cheques and maintain them as a method of payment for the foreseeable future.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

Abolition of Cheques

7.3 pm

Kate Hoey (Vauxhall) (Lab): I have great pleasure in bringing to the House the first of what I think will be many, many thousand petitions coming over the next few months on the importance of and need for a referendum on this country's membership of the European Union. As many Members know, there is a growing campaign on that across the country, and I am very pleased that I am able to bring along some signatures that were collected in a very short space of time at the weekend in my constituency and in Lambeth. I believe that we will be seeing a lot more of these petitions over the coming months, as people in this country finally wake up and start campaigning to get a referendum, which is greatly needed, on whether we should stay in or leave the European Union.

The petition states:

The Humble Petition of constituents from London and others,

Sheweth that the Petitioners believe that the Government should allow the British people a referendum on the United Kingdom's continued membership of the European Union.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House urges the Government to bring forward legislative proposals to allow the British people a referendum on the United Kingdom's continued membership of the European Union.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.

[000940]

Protection of Y Morfa (Prestatyn)

7.5 pm

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): As a Welshman, Mr Deputy Speaker, you will be aware that y morfa is Welsh for marsh. Marshes are not ideal places to build, but nevertheless, some developers want to build on Y Morfa in Prestatyn, and the good people of Prestatyn are opposed to that.

The petition states:

The petition of residents of the Vale of Clwyd,

Declares that the petitioners support Chris Ruane MP's call for Y Morfa, Prestatyn, Denbighshire to be protected from development in perpetuity; that the Petitioners regard it as important as a wetland area and wildlife habitat and the role it plays in protecting Prestatyn from flooding; and further declares that the Petitioners support Prestatyn and District Environmental Association's proposal to have it designated green open space under the Queen Elizabeth II Jubilee Trust to mark the Queen's Diamond Jubilee.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to strengthen measures to protect wetlands, public open space and areas at risk of flooding from future development.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

[000942]

Development on the Riverside Gardens, Erith

7.6 pm

Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans): I call Ms Teresa Pearce.

Teresa Pearce (Erith and Thamesmead) (Lab): I am extremely grateful, Mr Deputy Speaker.

I wish to present a petition on behalf of the members of the Friends of Riverside Gardens Erith group and other residents of the London borough of Bexley who support its campaign. The petitioners oppose plans by Bexley council to sell part of the Riverside gardens to developers, so that a tower block of flats can be built on the only riverside green space in Erith. The petitioners want the Riverside gardens to be designated as a town green, so that the only...
Thames riverside open space in Bexley is preserved, and they have my full support. The petition has 1,440 signatures.

The petition states to the House of Commons states:

The Petition of residents of the London Borough of Bexley,
Declares that the petitioners oppose Bexley Council's Erith Western Gateway plan to allow for blocks of flats to be built on part of the Riverside Gardens in Erith; that the Riverside Gardens were gifted to the people of Erith by the former coal company William Cory and Son for use by the local community; and that the Riverside Gardens should be designated a Town Green and protected as an open green space.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government to allow for greater protection for green areas of particular importance to local communities in the Localism Bill, as outlined in his Department’s plan 2011-2015.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

Offshore Gambling and the Horseracing Levy

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

7.8 pm

Matthew Hancock (West Suffolk) (Con): It is an honour and a privilege to speak in this House on any day, but on a day like today, when the voice of the House has called so loudly, it is an honour indeed.

I shall speak about an issue that is extremely important to a large part of my constituency: offshore gambling and its relationship with horse racing. When they talk about hacking in Newmarket, they tend to be talking about something rather different to what the House was talking about earlier, because Newmarket is the global centre and headquarters of horse racing. Five thousand people employed in the town get their jobs and livelihoods directly or indirectly from the sport. That means that one third of employment is linked to the sport.

This is not just an issue for Newmarket, however; it is an issue for our whole country. I want to set out the argument that over the past few years, funding for horse racing has been in crisis and that the problem has in part been that those who make a profit from the sport through gambling have gone offshore to escape contributing to the sport on which they rely. I then want to propose action that the Government should take and set this in the wider context of changes that need to be made. We need to put this sport, which gives so much excitement to so many people, back on an even keel so that its funding is fair and secured for years to come.

Claire Perry (Devizes) (Con): I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising this subject again in the House. As he knows, my constituency has a number of racing stables. I was recently at Richard Hannon's stables in Herridge. It is not just the excitement that the sport brings; it is the employment that it provides for thousands of people across the country and the support that those people then bring to the rural community—to the shops and the pubs. It is an unbelievably important industry in so many of our constituencies. I commend my hon. Friend again for raising this important matter.

Matthew Hancock: My hon. Friend makes a typically passionate intervention. I am talking not just about the beauty and heritage of horse racing, but about jobs—not just those directly involved in the horse racing industry, but those in breeding, training and all the connected livelihoods that support the sport. I will give some examples of the problem. Over the past two or three years, funding of racing through the levy has declined rapidly.

Peter Aldous (Waveney) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate. Does he agree that the levy is long past its sell-by date, that all parties should try to come together to find an alternative and that that alternative, as far as offshore business is concerned, must be mandatory, not voluntary?

Matthew Hancock: My hon. Friend makes some important points. A future for the levy built on funding that is not onshore will be a system built like a house without foundations. Unless we deal with the problem of gambling going offshore before we tackle the wider
problems of the levy, which is a broken system, we will not be able to build a strong and sustainable future for racing in this country. Over the past few years, the levy has fallen from £110 million to £59 million last year. We were delighted when the Minister announced that this year's levy would be between £75 million and £80 million, but now, halfway through the season, it looks as though the levy contributions will in fact be less than £60 million—lower than last year—and will be lower still next year. Crucially, that means that prize money in British races is falling fast.

George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con): I pay tribute to my hon. Friend's leadership on this issue, and I would like to align my comments with those of my hon. Friend the Member for Devizes (Claire Perry). This sport is often referred to as the sport of kings—its more glamorous side is often the side seen by the public—but is it not also a vital part of the wider rural economy? As with so many other industries, its grass roots are essential to its continuation, and in fact the effect on prize money at the bottom is even more severe. Prizes are falling and small trainers and owners are struggling to maintain the industry.

Matthew Hancock: My hon. Friend makes an important contribution. Prize money is critical to the sport and its future, but it has fallen by almost a half in just the last two years. Also, betting duty—the tax that the Exchequer takes—has fallen from £420 million to £340 million, so it, too, is on the decline. I am a low-tax Tory, but I do not think that we were talking about that.

Simon Hart (Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire) (Con): What my hon. Friend is suggesting sounds like a good idea, but—he will have to forgive my ignorance here—can he assure me that it will not have an adverse effect on point-to-point racing, which is also a major contributor to local economies and provides great enjoyment to those who do not go to major race meetings?

Matthew Hancock: Absolutely, because almost all betting on point-to-point racing is on-course, and one cannot be both offshore and on-course at the same time. Point-to-point racing is a critical part of local and, especially, rural livelihoods. I know that my hon. Friend the Member for Hexham (Guy Opperman) would also like me to make the same point in his absence. He cannot be here because he is recovering from a serious illness, but he is an experienced point-to-point rider.

The levy, prize money and tax revenues are all falling sharply. Why is this? Over the past few years, more and more betting companies have moved offshore. Only two of our 19 biggest bookmakers are now onshore for tax and levy purposes. The previous Government did a deal with the gambling industry—they would not put the levy up, and in return the bookies would stay onshore—but the bookies have gone. I can understand their reason, because once one competitor has moved offshore and does not pay tax or the levy, the competitive pressure on others to move offshore becomes great. I have had many bookies come to me and say, “We would like a level playing field, because it isn’t fair to be driven offshore by competitors who are not paying tax when you are.” Today I would like to propose that instead of having what has essentially become a voluntary tax, we create that level playing field by ensuring that all gambling in the UK pays UK tax and the UK levy. Let us also make it a compulsory level playing field.

Richard Fuller (Bedford) (Con): I greatly appreciate my hon. Friend’s giving way, as well as the contributions by my hon. Friends from rural constituencies. I represent an urban centre, and he is making some excellent points about levelling the playing field, because another consequence of the levy falling into disrepair has been onshore betting shops siting gambling machines in their premises, which play to people’s addiction when they are gambling. It has had a detrimental impact on horse racing and played to addiction. Is that not another argument why his proposals are so important?

Matthew Hancock: It absolutely is, because bookies who go offshore for tax purposes also go offshore for regulatory purposes, and that means that all the high standards demanded by the British Horseracing Authority are not required of them. There have been instances of poor practice by bookmakers based elsewhere—for instance, in Gibraltar—who fall outside the regulatory practice in the UK. That is not necessarily because the bookie wanted to be outside the regulatory net; rather, they went because of the competitive pressure to reduce their tax and stop paying what had become a voluntary tax and a voluntary levy.

I come to the action that we need in the narrow sphere of offshore gambling. The case for action is strong, but what can we do? I propose a simple solution: we should make the requirement to pay tax and the levy in the UK part of a gambling licence. It is a simple change, but the consequence would be that no serious bookmaker could avoid what has become a voluntary tax, because they would be liable to the law of the land and would be unable to advertise in the UK. Indeed, they would also be unable to come to the UK, because what is currently tax avoidance would become tax evasion. My proposal is for a straightforward change that is being looked at in many other countries. Indeed, it has been enacted in Ireland, and a similar but bigger change has already been put through in France. In any other walk of life, we would not accept an industry choosing not to pay tax by moving headquarters offshore while continuing operations onshore in precisely the same way as before. Why should we allow the gambling industry to avoid tax in that way, when no one in this room could simply choose not to pay their income tax?

Claire Perry: I am sure that my hon. Friend is aware, given his wide experience of economic matters, that we have debates in the Chamber and elsewhere all the time on tax evasion in other industries. Indeed, the way in which we tax people whose main sphere of operation is in the UK, and the need to prevent the kind of tax-shifting mechanisms that so many companies use, form a big part of the political discussion. Is he saying that we need another simple mechanism to ensure that an industry that primarily gets its funding and its excitement from the UK market properly pays its taxes in that market?

Matthew Hancock: I agree wholeheartedly with my hon. Friend. We need to ensure that the foundations on which the funding of racing is built are strong. We can
then go on to deal with the wider task of replacing the broken levy system, which the racing industry, the gambling industry and the Government do not like, with a commercial arrangement that recognises the contribution that racing makes to the product on which gambling bases its bets.

I have spoken before in the Chamber about the need for a racing right, and I was delighted to see that that is one of the three proposals in the consultation put forward by the Minister. I urge him to push in that direction. Before he does so, however, it is critical that we solve the problem of offshore gambling. From the romance of the misty gallops on a Newmarket morning through to the excitement of the finishing post, racing is threaded through the history of our country and through the history and culture of my constituency. Let not its future be built on sand; instead—

Peter Aldous rose—

Matthew Hancock: Instead, I shall give way.

Peter Aldous: My hon. Friend has put forward his proposal very eloquently. Does he agree that any solution must specifically address the issue of betting exchanges?

Matthew Hancock: My hon. Friend raises an important question. Betting exchanges should of course be brought onshore as part of the creation of a level playing field. We must also address the question of what constitutes a bet, for tax and levy purposes. I strongly believe that when two people interact to make a bet, that is a bet. We should go forward on that basis.

Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on raising this issue. As he knows, I represent Cheltenham race course, which I would argue is the greatest race course on Earth, especially in the national hunt field. He is absolutely right to say that the levy is broken and needs to be replaced. Does he agree that its replacement, whatever it might be, should be based on a commercial arrangement so that there can be no room for manoeuvring or slippage? Should it not be a purely commercial arrangement, perhaps between bookmakers and race courses? Does he have that in mind as the best way forward?

Matthew Hancock: The future of the levy should be based on a commercial arrangement so that the Government do not constantly have to get involved, but that commercial arrangement must be based on the sale of a right to bet on a race. Otherwise, racing will be putting on something for nothing, and the gambling industry will be making a profit—which I support—using the input from racing for which it is not paying. So long as such a commercial arrangement was based on a contract relating to the sale of a right, I would support it.

Resolving this issue is critical to ensuring that we can build the future of racing on a sustainable foundation, so that this vital sport can be fully and properly funded and the people who run it and work in it can know that it has a strong, long-term future. In the name of racing, and of all those whom I represent and who support me, I urge the Minister to act.

The parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport (John Penrose): I join other colleagues in congratulating my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk (Matthew Hancock) on securing this debate on an important issue. It is a timely debate in that, as he mentioned, we are in the middle of a consultation process on how to move forward with the levy. My hon. Friend is also absolutely right to say that one of the major issues around the levy is the problem of offshore gambling. He has timed his debate beautifully; I shall try to address the points he raised.

I agree with everyone who has either spoken or intervened in the debate that it is common currency and commonly agreed that the levy as it currently stands is broken. It does not work. People on all sides—whether they are involved in the gambling industry or in racing—are pretty united in their criticism of the levy. The solutions they propose, however, are quite divergent, which is part of the political problem I face. I think that everyone is united at least in their critique of it. People often make three or four points, but they all revolve around the issue that my hon. Friend raised several times—that we need to create a level playing field. It is essential to do that.

The current levy fails to deliver a level playing field in a number of ways. It can be seen, first, in the comparison between onshore and offshore betting, as rightly and eloquently set out by my hon. Friend. I would not dream of disagreeing with his analysis of the problem; it is self-evidently true, and it is a problem that, I think, has grown steadily as the migration from onshore to offshore has taken place over the last five or more years.

The levy also fails to create a level playing field—in the minds of many, at least—between classic traditional bookmakers and betting exchanges. It would be wrong for the Government to try to play favourites between either of those two parts of the gambling industry. As a free-market Tory, I think that would be particularly wrong, but from the point of view of the levy, it is important to avoid any inbuilt bias one way or another between bookmakers or exchanges. At the moment, because these are two different kinds of businesses—they operate on a different kind of business model, with betting exchanges being much higher-volume and lower-margin organisations than traditional bookmakers—there is a great deal of disquiet about the absence of a level playing field between those different kinds of business within the gambling industry.

It would also be fair to say that the way in which the levy is currently set up and the levy board is required to operate is almost guaranteed to create an adversarial relationship between bookmaking or gambling in general and the racing industry. That cannot be helpful. If we could get the two sides to co-operate, we could achieve a unanimity of purpose in terms of trying to grow the total amount of interest in, and betting on, horse racing. With an adversarial relationship, it is extremely difficult for such productive discussions to take place.

Mr Andy Slaughter (Hammersmith) (Lab): I do not want to take much time out of the Minister’s response, but many of my constituents work for Betfair, which is based in my constituency. I know that the Minister has said some warm words about Betfair, which is voluntarily paying £6 million to the levy and is on record as saying
that it believes the whole industry should contribute either to the levy or to whatever replaces it. I was a little concerned to hear the Minister say that there might be a distinction to be drawn between online firms and traditional bookmakers. It would be useful if he could put it on the record that the Government have no intention to make the customers of online betting firms such as Betfair subject to the levy, as some parts of the industry have indicated that they should be.

John Penrose: I am very happy to repeat to my previous comments that it was extremely responsible, and extremely welcome, of Betfair to decide to make a voluntary contribution to the levy. That was a very responsible reaction from the company. I also echo the hon. Gentleman’s remarks in that I too wish that more offshore organisations of any kind would follow Betfair’s lead and behave in a similarly responsible fashion. As for whether people using betting exchanges should or should not pay the levy, that is precisely what we are in the middle of consulting on, so it would be rather premature for me to prejudge that. I know that organisations like Betfair and other betting exchanges are making strong representations as part of the consultation, which will, of course, be listened to extremely carefully for precisely that reason.

As my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk mentioned, we are in the middle of a consultation. We have ended a pre-consultation and are now digesting the results before starting an official consultation on the levy, which will be more broadly based. I shall quickly sketch out the three options under consideration.

The first option would involve relatively little change to the current levy, but would have the important benefit of removing politicians from the decision-making process. I cannot claim that that option offers to fix some of the other issues, such as that of offshore betting, but the requirement for extensive political lobbying from both sides would be reduced. That would be a step, although only a partial one, in the right direction. The suggestion has drawn relatively limited comments and contributions from both sides of the debate, but it is at least an option.

The second option, which I think my hon. Friend mentioned in passing, is effectively a voluntary or contractual arrangement between gambling and horse racing, along the lines mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for Tewkesbury (Mr Robertson), who represents Cheltenham race course, an important part of the jump racing organisation. That option would involve a contractual arrangement between racing and the gambling industry, in which politicians would, by definition, have no direct involvement. We might help to broker the discussions leading to it, but it would be a private contractual deal, although the Gambling Commission might then require both sides to be party to the arrangement in order to be granted a gambling licence. That would provide back-up.

The third option on which we are consulting is the betting right, or racing right, which my hon. Friend the Member for West Suffolk suggested. That option is widely desired in the racing industry, although for perhaps obvious reasons the gambling industry is a great deal more concerned about it, and it has been sketching out the reasons for that concern in some detail, as is only fair and proper.

I want to place on record that, as part of our pre-consultation arrangements, the Association of British Bookmakers has proposed an interesting fourth option, which we shall unveil in due course. It would be improper to breach the association’s confidence in that regard, but we will publish its proposal as another alternative. I mention that purely to illustrate that there is a great deal of involvement, engagement and creative thinking on all sides about how to square the difficult circle of fixing the levy in a way that will be sustainable and stable, that will provide a source of income that is fair to both the gambling industry and the racing industry, and that will be a stable solution for a long time to come—stable not only economically but politically, so that it will not require endless political intervention that would be regarded by other sports as alien and unexpected.

On my hon. Friend’s point about offshore gambling, I am delighted to be able to provide some breaking news. Tomorrow, a written ministerial statement will be tabled in the House—I trust that I am not breaking parliamentary rules by pre-announcing it in the House, as I cannot be accused of ignoring the House of Commons. I am delighted to announce that we intend to move, as fast as possible, towards a system that will, to a great extent, fix the problem of offshore betting. We will switch away from the current system, which has driven many bookmakers offshore for entirely understandable and logical commercial reasons, to one based on point of consumption rather than point of production. That rather arcane phrase means that anybody based anywhere in the world who wants to sell gambling services of any kind—this applies more broadly than to horse race betting alone—to any consumer of gambling services based in the UK, will in future have to have a Gambling Commission licence.

That gives rise to a number of important changes in the current arrangements. As I said earlier, it will apply not just to horse race betting—but it will obviously have implications for that—but to a far broader range of activities. It will apply to online poker, online roulette, and all the other gambling services that are provided. What is vital is that it will increase the amount of consumer protection for any punters in the United Kingdom who use those services. At present, those who use an online gambling service provided by a UK-based company already regulated by the Gambling Commission can be pretty sure that it is a reputable company which is properly looked after, and that they are therefore protected to the full extent of the law. A provider based offshore may also be regulated by a reputable jurisdiction, but it may not be. It is extremely hard to know where some of the websites are based, and it is just possible that someone might find that he was gambling with the equivalent of Arthur Daley Gambling, based off Tripoli, and that as a result he had very little consumer protection. We aim to fix that.

Matthew Hancock: I warmly welcome the Minister’s announcement, which will come as a huge relief to the racing world. I am also surprised and delighted by the speed with which I have received a response in policy terms, and by the Minister’s recognition of the pressure that exists. Will he tell us how much he thinks the reform will raise, and what impact it will have on the levy?
John Penrose: I am afraid that I cannot do that, much as I would like to, for a couple of reasons. We are dealing first with consumer protection, and reform of the horse race betting levy will be a subsidiary issue. However, as my hon. Friend knows, we have stated explicitly that some of the three options in our pre-consultation document will require primary legislation in order to be feasible, and that will open the door to their feasibility.

The change that we propose will have other benefits. It will not just improve consumer protection; it will also help to level the regulatory playing field in the way that my hon. Friend has requested. It will improve our ability to deal with betting integrity, because it will be easier to capture information about potentially suspicious betting patterns and refer it to the relevant authorities as required.

7.38 pm

House adjourned without Question put (Standing Order No. 9(7)).
Deferred Divisions

EQUALITY

That the draft Equality Act 2010 (Work on Ships and Hovercraft) Regulations 2011, which were laid before this House on 13 May, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 316, Noes 233.

Division No. 323]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Amess, Mr David
Andrew, Stuart
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Norman
Baker, Steve
Baldry, Tony
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barker, Gregory
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Bingham, Andrew
Birtwistle, Gordon
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Mr Crispin
Boles, Nick
Bone, Mr Peter
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brake, Tom
Bray, Angie
Brazier, Mr Julian
Brine, Mr Steve
Brokenshire, James
Brooke, Annette
Browne, Mr Jeremy
Bruce, Fiona
Bruce, rh Sir Malcolm
Buckland, Mr Robert
Burley, Mr Aidan
Burns, Mr Mark
Burns, Mrs Simon
Burrows, Mr David
Burston, Paul
But, Lorely
Byles, Dan
Cable, rh Vince
Cairns, Alun
Cameron, rh Mr David
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
Carmichael, rh Mr Alistair
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Cash, Mr William
Chishilti, Rehman
Clappison, Mr James
Clark, rh Greg
Clarke, rh Mr Kenneth
Clegg, rh Mr Nick
Clifton-Brown, Geoffrey

Clwyd, rh Ann
Coffey, Dr Thérèse
Collins, Damian
Colville, Oliver
Cox, rh Mr Geoffrey
Crabb, Stephen
Crockart, Mike
Crouch, Tracey
Davies, David T. C. (Monmouth)
Davies, Glynn
Davies, Philip de Bois, Nick
Dinenage, Caroline
Djanogly, Mr Jonathan
Dorries, Nadine
Doyle-Price, Jackie
Duddridge, James
Duncan, rh Mr Alan
Duncan Smith, rh Mr Iain
Dunne, Mr Philip
Ellis, Michael
Ellison, Jane
Ellwood, Mr Tobias
Elphicke, Charlie
Eustice, George
Evans, Graham
Evans, Jonathan
Evenett, Mr David
Fabricant, Michael
Falcon, Michael
Featherstone, Lynne
Field, Mr Mark
Fox, rh Dr Liam
Francois, rh Mr Mark
Freeman, George
Freer, Mike
Fullbrook, Lorraine
Fuller, Richard
Gale, rh Mr Roger
Garnier, Mr Edward
Garnier, Mark
Gauke, Mr David
George, Andrew
Gibb, Mr Nick
Gillan, rh Mrs Cheryl
Glen, John
Goodwill, Mr Robert
Gove, rh Michael
Graham, Richard
Grant, Mrs Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Damian
Griffiths, Andrew
Hague, rh Mr William
Harrison, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Mr David
Hemming, John
Henderson, Gordon
Hendry, Charles
Hermon, Lady
Hinds, Damian
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hollingbery, George
Hollolbone, Mr Philip
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Horwood, Martin
Howarth, Mr Gerald
Howell, John
Hughes, rh Simon
Hunter, Mark
Huppert, Dr Julian
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Johnson, Gareth
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr Daniel
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kelly, Chris
Kennedy, rh Mr Charles
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Mr Greg
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamb, Norman
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
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Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Oliver
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, rh Ian
Liddingon, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lloyd, Stephen
Long, Naomi
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lumley, Karen
Macleod, Mary
Main, Mrs Anne
Maude, rh Mr Francis
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCARTHY, Karl
McIntosh, Miss Anne
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPARTLAND, Stephen
McVey, Esther
Mensch, Louise
Menzies, Mark
Metcalfe, Stephen

Miller, Maria
Mills, Nigel
Milton, Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, rh Michael
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, Nicky
Morris, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mosley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Mulholland, Greg
Mundell, rh David
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Sheryll
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
Nuttall, Mr David
O’Brien, Mr Stephen
Ollerton, rh Eric
Osborne, rh Mr George
Ottaway, Richard
Paice, rh Mr James
Parish, Neil
Patel, Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Pickles, rh Mr Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Prik, Mr Mark
Pugh, John
Randall, rh Mr John
Redwood, rh Mr John
Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Reevell, Simon
Reid, Mr Alan
Rikkind, rh Sir Malcolm
Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
Robertson, Hugh
Robertson, Mr Laurence
 Rogerson, Dan
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, Amber
Ruffley, Mr David
Russell, Bob
Rutley, David
Sanders, Mr Adrian
Sands, Laura
Scott, Mr Lee
Seelos, Andrew
Sharma, Alok
Sheebauche, Alec
Shepherd, Mr Richard
Simmonds, Mark
Simpson, Mr Keith
Skidmore, Chris
Smith, Miss Chloe
Smith, Henry
Smith, Julian
Smith, Sir Robert
Soubray, Anna
Spelman, rh Mrs Caroline
Spencer, Mr Mark
Stephenson, Andrew
Stevenson, John
Stewart, Bob
Stewart, Iain
Stewart, Rory
Streeter, Mr Gary
Stride, Mel
Stuart, Mr Graham
Sturdy, Julian
Swales, Ian
Swayne, Mr Desmond
Swinson, Jo
Swire, rh Mr Hugo
Syms, Mr Robert
Tapsell, Sir Peter
Teather, Sarah
Timpson, Mr Edward
Tomlinson, Justin
Tredinnick, David
Truss, Elizabeth
Turner, Mr Andrew
Tyrie, Mr Andrew
Uppal, Paul
Vaizey, Mr Edward
Vara, Mr Shailesh

Vaz, rh Keith
Vickers, Martin
Villiers, rh Mrs Theresa
Walker, Mr Charles
Wallace, Mr Ben
Warner, Mr Robert
Watkinson, Angela
Weatherley, Mike
Webb, Steve
Wharton, James
Wheeler, Heather
White, Chris
Whitaker, Craig
Whittingdale, Mr John
Wiggin, Bill
Willett, rh Mr David
Williams, Mr Mark
Williams, Roger
Williams, Stephen
Williamson, Gavin
Willet, Tony
Willet, Mr Rob
Wollaston, Dr Sarah
Wright, Jeremy
Wright, Simon
Young, rh Sir George
Zahawi, Nadhim

Fiell, Robert
Flint, rh Caroline
Flynn, Paul
Fovargue, Yvonne
Francis, Dr Hywel
Gapes, Mike
Gardiner, Barry
Gilmour, Sheila
Glass, Pat
Glindon, Mrs Mary
Goggin, rh Paul
Goodman, Helen
Greatrex, Tom
Green, Kate
Greenwood, Lilian
Griffith, Nia
Gwynne, Andrew
Hain, rh Mr Peter
Hamilton, Mr David
Hamilton, Fabian
Hanson, rh Mr David
Havard, Mr Dai
Hepburn, Mr Stephen
Heyes, David
Hilling, Julie
Hodge, rh Margaret
Hogson, Mrs Sharon
Hood, Mr Jim
Hopkins, Kelvin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, rh Mr George
Hunt, Tristram
Irranca-Davies, Huw
James, Mrs Siân C.
Jamieson, Cathy
Jarvis, Dan
Johnson, rh Mr Alan
Johnson, Diana
Jones, Graham
Jones, Helen
Jones, Mr Kevan
Jones, Susan Elan
Joyce, Eric
Keeley, Barbara
Kendall, Liz
Khan, rh Sadiq
Lammy, rh Mr David
Lavery, Ian
Lazarowicz, Mark
Leslie, Chris
Lewis, Mr Ivan
Lloyd, Tony
Llwyd, rh Mr Elfyn
Love, Mr Andrew
Lucas, Caroline
Lucas, Ian
MacNeill, Mr Angus
Brendan
MacShane, rh Mr Denis
Mactaggart, Fiona
Mahwood, Shabana
Mann, John
Marsden, Mr Gordon
McCabe, Steve
Mc Cann, Mr Michael
McCarthy, Kerry
McClymont, Gregg
McCrean, Dr William
McDermott, Paul
McDonnell, Mr Alasdair
McDonnell, John
McFadden, rh Mr Pat
McGovern, Alison
McGovern, Jim
McGuire, rh Mrs Anne
McKechin, Ann
McKenzie, Mr Iain
McKinll, Catherine
Meale, Sir Alan
Means, Ian
Michael, rh Alun
Miller, Andrew
Moon, Mrs Madeleine
Morden, Jessica
Morrice, Graeme (Livingston)
Morriss, Graham M.
(Easington)

Meare, Mr George
Munn, Meg
Murphy, rh Mr Jim
Murphy, rh Paul
Murray, Ian
Nandy, Lisa
Nash, Pamela
O’Donnell, Fiona
Onwurah, Chi
Owen, Sandra
Paisley, lan
Pearce, Teresa
Perkins, Toby
Phillipson, Bridget
Pound, Stephen
Qureshi, Yasmin
Rainsford, rh Mr Nick
Reed, Mr Jamie
Reynolds, Emma
Reynolds, Jonathan
Riordan, Mrs Linda
Ritchie, Ms Margaret
Robertson, Angus
Robinson, Mr Geoffrey
Rotheram, Steve
Roy, Lindsay
Ruane, Chris
Ruddock, rh Joan
Sarwar, Anas
Seabeck, Alison
Shannon, Jim
Sharma, Mr Virendra
Sheerman, Mr Barry
Sheridan, Jim
Shuker, Gavin
Skinner, Mr Dennis
Slaught, Mr Andy
Smith, rh Mr Andrew
Smith, Angela
Smith, Owen
Spellar, rh Mr John
Straw, rh Mr Jack
Stringer, Graham
Stuart, Ms Gisela
Sutcliffe, Mr Gerry
Tami, Mark
Thomas, Mr Gareth
Timms, rh Stephen
Trickett, Jon
Turner, Karl
Twigg, Derek
Twigg, Stephen
Umunna, Mr Chuka
Vaz, Valerie
Walley, Joan
Deferred Divisions

441 442 13 JULY 2011 443

Deferred Divisions

Question accordingly agreed to.

That the draft Equality Act 2010 (Specific Duties) Regulations 2011, which were laid before this House on 27 Jun, be approved.

The House divided: Ayes 316, Noes 230.

Division No. 324]

AYES

Adams, Nigel
Afriyie, Adam
Aldous, Peter
Amess, Mr David
Andrew, Stuart
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Bacon, Mr Richard
Baker, Norman
Baker, Steve
Baldry, Tony
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barker, Gregory
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
Bebb, Guto
Beith, rh Sir Alan
Benyon, Richard
Beresford, Sir Paul
Berry, Jake
Bingham, Andrew
Birtwistle, Gordon
Blackman, Bob
Blackwood, Nicola
Blunt, Mr Crispin
Bolles, Nick
Bradley, Karen
Brady, Mr Graham
Brake, Tom
Bray, Angie
Brazier, Mr Julian
Brine, Mr Steve
Brokenshire, James
Brooke, Annette
Browne, Mr Jeremy
Bruce, Fiona
Bruce, rh Malcolm
Buckland, Mr Robert
Burley, Mr Aidan
Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Mr Simon
Burrows, Mr David
Burnstall, Paul
Burt, Lorely
Byles, Dan
Cable, rh Vince
Cairns, Alun
Cameron, rh Mr David
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Chishi, Rehman
Clappison, Mr James

Graham, Richard
Grant, Mr Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Damian
Griffiths, Andrew
Hague, rh Mr William
Hanson, Robert
Hames, Duncan
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Matthew
Hancock, Mr Mike
Hands, Greg
Harper, Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Mr David
Hemming, John
Henderson, Gordon
Hendry, Charles
Heron, Lady
Hinds, Damian
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hollingbery, George
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Horwood, Martin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, Mr Gerald
Howard, John
Hughes, rh Simon
Hunter, Mark
Huppert, Dr Julian
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Johnson, Gareth
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kelly, Chris
Kennedy, rh Mr Charles
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Mr Greg
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamb, Norman
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Laws, rh Mr David
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leech, Mr John
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Edward
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lloyd, Stephen
Llwyd, rh Mr Elyfn
Long, Naomi
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lumley, Karen
Macleod, Mary
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan

Main, Mrs Anne
Maude, rh Mr Francis
May, rh Mrs Theresa
Maynard, Paul
McCartney, Karl
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVeigh, Esther
Mensch, Louise
Menzies, Mark
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, Maria
Mills, Nigel
Milton, Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, rh Michael
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, Nicky
Morrison, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mosley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Mulholland, Greg
Mundell, rh Dr David
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Sherryl
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O’Brien, Mr Stephen
Offord, Mr Matthew
Ollerenshaw, Eric
Osborne, rh Mr George
Otway, Richard
Paice, rh Mr James
Parish, Neil
Patel, Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Pickles, rh Mr Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pugh, John
Randall, rh Mr John
Redwood, rh Mr John
Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Reevell, Simon
Reid, Mr Alan
Rigby, rh Sir Malcolm
Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
Robertson, Angus
Robertson, Hugh
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Rogerson, Dan
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, Amber
Ruffley, Mr David
Russell, Bob
Rutley, David
Sanders, Mr Adrian
Sandsys, Laura
Scott, Mr Lee

NEES

Aldous, Peter
Alun
Amess, Mr David
Andrew, Stuart
Arbuthnot, rh Mr James
Baker, Steve
Baldry, Tony
Baldwin, Harriett
Barclay, Stephen
Barker, Gregory
Baron, Mr John
Barwell, Gavin
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Brazier, Mr Julian
Brine, Mr Steve
Brokenshire, James
Brooke, Annette
Browne, Mr Jeremy
Bruce, Fiona
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Buckland, Mr Robert
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Burns, Conor
Burns, rh Mr Simon
Burrows, Mr David
Burnstall, Paul
Burt, Lorely
Byles, Dan
Cable, rh Vince
Cairns, Alun
Cameron, rh Mr David
Campbell, rh Sir Menzies
Carmichael, Neil
Carswell, Mr Douglas
Chishi, Rehman
Clappison, Mr James

Graham, Richard
Grant, Mr Helen
Gray, Mr James
Grayling, rh Chris
Green, Damian
Griffiths, Andrew
Hague, rh Mr William
Hanson, Robert
Hames, Duncan
Hammond, rh Mr Philip
Hammond, Stephen
Hancock, Matthew
Hancock, Mr Mike
Hands, Greg
Harper, Mr Mark
Harrington, Richard
Harris, Rebecca
Hart, Simon
Haselhurst, rh Sir Alan
Heald, Oliver
Heath, Mr David
Hemming, John
Henderson, Gordon
Hendry, Charles
Heron, Lady
Hinds, Damian
Hoban, Mr Mark
Hollingbery, George
Holloway, Mr Adam
Hopkins, Kris
Horwood, Martin
Hosie, Stewart
Howarth, Mr Gerald
Howard, John
Hughes, rh Simon
Hunter, Mark
Huppert, Dr Julian
Hurd, Mr Nick
Jenkin, Mr Bernard
Johnson, Gareth
Jones, Andrew
Jones, Mr David
Jones, Mr Marcus
Kawczynski, Daniel
Kelly, Chris
Kennedy, rh Mr Charles
Kirby, Simon
Knight, rh Mr Greg
Kwarteng, Kwasi
Lamb, Norman
Lancaster, Mark
Latham, Pauline
Laws, rh Mr David
Lee, Dr Phillip
Leech, Mr John
Leslie, Charlotte
Letwin, rh Mr Edward
Lewis, Brandon
Lewis, Dr Julian
Liddell-Grainger, Mr Ian
Lidington, rh Mr David
Lilley, rh Mr Peter
Lloyd, Stephen
Llwyd, rh Mr Elyfn
Long, Naomi
Lord, Jonathan
Loughton, Tim
Luff, Peter
Lumley, Karen
Macleod, Mary
MacNeil, Mr Angus Brendan

Main, Mrs Anne
Maude, rh Mr Francis
May, rh Mrs Theresa
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McCartney, Karl
McLoughlin, rh Mr Patrick
McPartland, Stephen
McVeigh, Esther
Mensch, Louise
Menzies, Mark
Metcalfe, Stephen
Miller, Maria
Mills, Nigel
Milton, Anne
Mitchell, rh Mr Andrew
Moore, rh Michael
Mordaunt, Penny
Morgan, Nicky
Morrison, Anne Marie
Morris, David
Morris, James
Mosley, Stephen
Mowat, David
Mulholland, Greg
Mundell, rh Dr David
Munt, Tessa
Murray, Sherryl
Murrison, Dr Andrew
Neill, Robert
Newmark, Mr Brooks
Newton, Sarah
Nokes, Caroline
Norman, Jesse
O’Brien, Mr Stephen
Offord, Mr Matthew
Ollerenshaw, Eric
Osborne, rh Mr George
Otway, Richard
Paice, rh Mr James
Parish, Neil
Patel, Priti
Paterson, rh Mr Owen
Pawsey, Mark
Penning, Mike
Penrose, John
Percy, Andrew
Perry, Claire
Phillips, Stephen
Pickles, rh Mr Eric
Pincher, Christopher
Poulter, Dr Daniel
Prisk, Mr Mark
Pugh, John
Randall, rh Mr John
Redwood, rh Mr John
Rees-Mogg, Jacob
Reevell, Simon
Reid, Mr Alan
Rigby, rh Sir Malcolm
Robathan, rh Mr Andrew
Robertson, Angus
Robertson, Hugh
Robertson, Mr Laurence
Rogerson, Dan
Rosindell, Andrew
Rudd, Amber
Ruffley, Mr David
Russell, Bob
Rutley, David
Sanders, Mr Adrian
Sandsys, Laura
Scott, Mr Lee
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<th>Deferred Divisions</th>
<th>Deferred Divisions</th>
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<td><strong>445</strong></td>
<td><strong>13 JULY 2011</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Turner, Karl</strong></td>
<td><strong>Watts, Mr Dave</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Twigg, Derek</strong></td>
<td><strong>Whitehead, Dr Alan</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Twigg, Stephen</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Umunna, Mr Chuka</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Vaz, Valerie</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wilson, Sammy</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Walley, Joan</strong></td>
<td><strong>Winnick, Mr David</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Watson, Mr Tom</strong></td>
<td><strong>Winterton, rh Ms Rosie</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Wright, David</strong></td>
<td><strong>Woodcock, John</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Wright, Mr Iain</strong></td>
<td><strong>Wright, David</strong></td>
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*Question accordingly agreed to.*
High-speed Rail

Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(Stephen Crabb.)

9.30 am

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Before we start the first debate, may I say that it will not come as a surprise to hon. Members that a large number of people are seeking to catch my eye? While there can be no formal limit on speaking times, as there can be in the Chamber, it will be helpful, and a great courtesy to each other, if Members are able to keep their remarks to three or four minutes apiece. Anyone who speaks for 10 minutes will get dirty looks from other hon. Members.

9.31 am

Susan Elan Jones (Clwyd South) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray.

I am pleased that the building of a high-speed rail line, which was first proposed by the previous Labour Government, is supported by the present Government, as it is important that there is consensus on the issue. The project certainly makes sense. It is ridiculous that, by rail, I can get from London to Paris faster than I can get to Wrexham, and get to Brussels faster than to Glasgow. France, Germany, Italy and Spain are all enjoying their high-speed rail networks, but in the country that invented railways, we are still just talking about it, and that needs to change.

I secured the debate because although the Government are committed to the project—I welcome the fact that it appears in the coalition agreement and the Government parties’ manifestos—I fear that it may be under threat from not just outside but within the ranks of the Government. I am of course talking about the Secretary of State for Wales. I welcome the fact that it was the Secretary of State who first proposed the high-speed rail line, which was first proposed by the previous Labour Government, is supported by the present Government, as it is important that there is consensus on the issue. The project certainly makes sense. It is ridiculous that, by rail, I can get from London to Paris faster than I can get to Wrexham, and get to Brussels faster than to Glasgow. France, Germany, Italy and Spain are all enjoying their high-speed rail networks, but in the country that invented railways, we are still just talking about it, and that needs to change.

The Wales Office’s annual report, which was published earlier this week, tells us that, over the past year, every one of 41 named day questions to the Wales Office were answered on the day specified, yet the answers to two questions asked by my hon. Friend the Member for Pontypridd (Owen Smith) were over a week late. Strangely enough, they were both to do with the assessment that the Secretary of State has made of benefits that HS2 would bring to Wales. We must assume that that was because she was held up trying to find any research that does not foresee massive economic benefits to Wales from the high-speed line.

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Susan Elan Jones: Do I find it strange, but not when one considers the Secretary of State’s personal opposition to the project. Professor Cole has made it clear that the project would also bring great benefits through inward investment in Wales.

The Secretary of State said of her opposition: “This project goes right through my backyard”.

If that is not nimbyism, I do not know what is. It is not even disguised nimbyism; it is self-interest pure and simple. In a debate on the issue in March, the hon. Member for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans) recounted tales of people stating: “I am not a nimby, I just don’t want a railway line built near my house.”—[Official Report, 31 March 2011; Vol. 526, c. 177WH.]

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I am grateful to the hon. Lady for securing the debate. On that point about residents’ concerns, does she accept that lessons have to be learned? My constituency recently had High Speed 1, but then standard services were reduced and High Speed 1 fares went up by 30%. If we want more people to use high-speed rail, it has to be affordable, and we cannot have it at the expense of standard services.

Susan Elan Jones: I totally agree. We have to look at all those issues sensibly. However, equally, as a representative of a Welsh constituency—I know that Members from other parts of the United Kingdom feel this too—I am not prepared to see HS2 delayed on the grounds of pure and simple nimbyism. That is quite different from the point raised by the hon. Gentleman.

Mr Mark Field (Cities of London and Westminster) (Con): Does not the hon. Lady have sympathies for the plight of those Members of Parliament who represent seats on the route? I represent an area where Crossrail is infuriating, angering and frustrating many of my constituents. It has done that for many years and will do so for decades to come. As it happens, I am a keen supporter of Crossrail and am willing to make the case. Perhaps the hon. Lady should be setting out the argument that MPs who are on the line should be making a robust case, particularly about capacity, which I think is one of the big issues. As my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti) was pointing out, if general capacity is reduced, that undermines many of the perceived benefits of such a new scheme.

Susan Elan Jones: I have considerable sympathy for that view, but the difference is that the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr Field) does not aspire to be Secretary of State for Wales—

Chris Ruane (Vale of Clwyd) (Lab): Not yet.

Susan Elan Jones: Indeed.
There is a conflict here. I understand that people are likely, as they are entitled, to complain about local developments to which they are opposed, but we need our Government to take a broader national view, and Wales certainly needs a Secretary of State who will do better. That is why I am here to make the case for high-speed rail, and specifically the Welsh case, because I fear that it is not being made by the person whose job it is to do so.

The official ministerial answers on the benefits of HS2 for Wales may be missing, but there is plenty of evidence from elsewhere in Europe with which hon. Members can form their own opinion, such as the case of Lille. In the early 1990s, the French Government chose to divert their high-speed TGV line through Lille, as opposed to using a more direct route through Amiens, because of high unemployment and post-industrial decline in that area.

Nick Smith (Blaenau Gwent) (Lab): My hon. Friend says that high-speed rail and rail electrification are particularly important for economic development. Does she agree that it is important that we get that for the lines in the valleys and in other parts of Wales, and particularly for the Cardiff-Ebbw Vale line?

Susan Elan Jones: I am in total agreement with my hon. Friend’s point, both for south Wales and for north Wales.

In the case of Lille, the French Government decided that following the slightly less direct route was worth the extra €500 million that it cost because of the massive potential for regeneration and employment that the project would bring to Lille. Professor Stuart Cole of the Wales transport research centre at the university of Glamorgan, whom my hon. Friend the Member for Newport East (Jessica Morden) mentioned earlier, submitted evidence to the inquiry of the Welsh Affairs Committee on inward investment to tell us what happened next. Twenty years later, Lille is ranked as the fourth most accessible European city and has been described as a boom town. As the French Government showed that they were serious about investing in the area, private sector investment followed. A major commercial centre, a retail centre, hotels and offices all sprung up around the terminal. An elite university opened a campus in the town and tourism flourished. The expansion is continuing. A major conference centre is scheduled to be built, along with significant new office accommodation and housing. Public investment in connectivity, accessibility and profile led to private investment, jobs and growth.

Mr Mark Williams (Ceredigion) (LD): We have heard from the south and north of Wales, but in regard to economic development, the hon. Lady must not overlook mid-Wales. In the absence of a direct line from Aberystwyth to London, we would welcome reduced journey times from London to Birmingham, which is part of our journey.

Susan Elan Jones: It is no secret that the slow pace of rail journeys to parts of mid-Wales is scarcely believable. I agree totally that the London-Birmingham high-speed link would make a tremendous difference to that, or at least part of a difference. This is our opportunity. I want to see benefits of the kind that the TGV delivered in northern France brought to Wales, as well as to the midlands, northern England and Scotland, through HS2.

Although the planned route for HS2 does not go directly into Wales, that does not matter. Getting the journey time from London to key hubs such as Manchester or Liverpool down to an hour and 10 minutes would be a massive improvement for us. Some tube journeys take longer than that, as I am sure many hon. Members realise. Suddenly, getting business representatives from London to north Wales and back in a day would look easy.

Guto Bebb (Aberconwy) (Con): On that point, I travel down by train from Chester or Runcorn simply because the North Wales Coast Railway line is so poor. How does the hon. Lady think that the economic case for north Wales will be improved by making the journey time to Manchester 1 hour 10 minutes rather than 1 hour 50 minutes, when north Wales will still be three-and-a-half hours away?

Susan Elan Jones: There is work to be done in north Wales. We are talking about a link that would speed up the entire journey down here. The examples that I gave earlier show how it is much quicker to travel to parts of Europe than to parts of north Wales, which bears testimony to my argument.

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): At present, many people travel by car to Manchester and hubs. As the hon. Member for Ceredigion (Mr Williams) said, if we get the high-speed rail network, there will be connectivity between Birmingham and various other cities, and north Wales. People from north Wales will travel by train, which will save the environment and save time.

Susan Elan Jones: I agree totally with my hon. Friend. When the north Wales main line is electrified, a small number of trains—one or two a day, for example—could be diverted off the main track at Crewe or another convenient point to travel along that track. A passenger would therefore be able to travel from continental Europe to Rhyl, Bangor or, indeed, my hon. Friend’s constituency. Of course, I would also argue for the inclusion of Wrexham directly, Wales, and north Wales in particular, is on the periphery of Europe, but a high-quality transport plan could bring us into real contention for business.

Owen Smith (Pontypridd) (Lab): My hon. Friend is ahead of me because she is talking about the benefits that HS2 will bring to north Wales passengers via Crewe. Does she agree that the Secretary of State for Wales does not need to look as far as Lille for evidence of that; she could merely talk to the Secretary of State for Transport—her colleague in the Cabinet room. In an answer to the hon. Member for South Northamptonshire (Andrea Leadsom), he said that HS2 will bring significant benefits to north Wales rail passengers, with all the obvious economic benefits that my hon. Friend is talking about.

Susan Elan Jones: I agree totally with my hon. Friend. Technically, there is nothing to stop such a plan in the long term. High-speed trains in France make some
journeys across regular track, such as to Cannes. If the routes of Brussels to Bangor, Rotterdam to Rhyl, or Frankfurt to Flint sound a bit far-fetched, that is evidence of how inaccessible some of our towns are perceived to be.

Mr Mark Field: A number of people are worried that the route will lead to an overheated south-east England, which many would regard as undesirable. If travel times from London to Manchester or to Liverpool are 45 or 60 minutes shorter, does not that simply make London even more attractive for people from the north-west, or indeed from north Wales, rather than necessarily bringing great benefits to Wales?

Susan Elan Jones: I agree with the hon. Gentleman and I thank him for his thoughtful contributions.

Esther McVey (Wirral West) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that high-speed connectivity is vital? At a time when we are talking about rebalancing the economy, particularly for the Merseyside area, this is not just about speed. We want to develop our port and make it the port of the north. We need freight and people connectivity, so high-speed rail is vital.

Susan Elan Jones: I totally agree with the hon. Lady. If hon. Members will excuse me, I must try to make a little progress because otherwise they will not be able to make their speeches in the time available.

It is not just Wales that stands to benefit. Ninety business leaders in Yorkshire recently wrote to the Secretary of State for Transport to tell him that the project is vital. The Sheffield city region local enterprise partnership said that 91% of 200 firms surveyed agreed that the benefits of HS2 to the city would be huge. The Northern Way alliance of regional development agencies from the north of England said that it valued the wider economic benefits of north-south high-speed rail at £10 billion, and described the high-speed link as “an opportunity to create a new economic geography”. The Scottish Minister for Housing and Transport said: “the case for high-speed rail... is compelling, robust and clear”. Manchester council says that high-speed rail will enable local business to compete and will boost tourism, and Stoke-on-Trent council says that it will open up national and international markets. Liverpool supports it and Birmingham supports it. The message from across the UK is loud and clear. We cannot let a small group of people railroad this debate. People welcome major investment in infrastructure to bring about new jobs and new business.

Stephen Timms (East Ham) (Lab): I agree with my hon. Friend about the new economic geography. On Rotterdam to Rhyl, does she agree that if the London stop were Stratford and the trains bypassed St Pancras, the length of the journey from Rotterdam to Rhyl and the other journeys she had mentioned could be significantly reduced, which would have widespread advantages?

Susan Elan Jones: I am certainly open to that idea, which I had not previously thought about. In terms of UK-wide economic benefits, HS1 offers some concrete feedback. Despite some criticism, independent reports have put the value of investment attracted by the line at £20 billion, which is 40 times more than original estimates. The operation has not been sold at a loss, whatever the HS2 Tamworth Action Group says. The lease has been sold, and will be re-sold again and again on expiry. Two more sales will bring the scheme into profit, even without taking the massive wider economic benefit into account.

Mrs Siân C. James (Swansea East) (Lab): The economic benefit is well known in rail terms: it is known as the spark effect. As my hon. Friend knows, we in Swansea are fighting hard for electrification of the whole rail system to Swansea. We want that economic development. The spark effect is happening across Europe and we would like it in Britain, please.

Susan Elan Jones: My hon. Friend speaks with considerable expertise in this area and I am grateful for her intervention.

Indirectly, HS1 enabled the delivery of three major development schemes, in Ebbsfleet, Stratford and King’s Cross, which are all areas in need of regeneration. Some 15,000 homes and 70,000 jobs were created. The project delivered £3.8 billion of transport benefits, which, combined with the operating surplus, offsets the whole project cost.

Independent reports found, in conclusion, the following: “it is clear that overall the scheme represents high value for money”.

Karen Lumley (Redditch) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that the project will provide wider access to Birmingham airport, with a journey time of just 49 minutes? That will ease congestion in the London area and make Birmingham and the west midlands more attractive.

Susan Elan Jones: I certainly agree with the hon. Lady. The project will also make her journeys to Wrexham quicker, which I believe is her old home.

Chris Ruane: The interventions we have had across the piece seem to show that there is a national consensus for this 21st-century rail project to go ahead. Why does my hon. Friend think there is a delay? Is the reason political?

Susan Elan Jones: I would hope not. On HS2, the 2008 Atkins report concluded that a high-speed rail network would deliver more than £60 billion-worth of benefit to the UK economy in its first 60 years. In 2009, the British Chambers of Commerce calculated revenues and benefits to the economy worth £55 billion. The Government’s consultation paper puts the benefits at around £71 billion in revenue and benefits.

David Mowat (Warrington South) (Con): On the subject of benefits and the point about delay, it might be worth putting on the record that the business case for High Speed 2 puts the net benefit ratio of the project at 2.6, which is higher than Crossrail, Thameslink or HS1.

Susan Elan Jones: I agree with the hon. Gentleman, but not with the Taxpayers Alliance, which suggests that the business case is unproven. I confess that that is not the only thing I disagree with the Taxpayers Alliance on.
Wendover Action Against Chiltern HS2 Routes claims that passenger demand forecasts have been overestimated. It ignores the fact that, after 10 years of 5% annual rises in passenger numbers, HS2 envisages just 1.4% annual growth. Again, it does not offer its own projected profit figures. The RAC has offered the following gem of a critique:

“the analysis so far has been largely uni-modal and future analysis will need to be multi-modal so as to assess HSR against rival and complimentary investments, particularly in the air and road sectors, whilst further work may also be required to analyse the inter-relationships with the classic rail sector and to test the robustness of modelling results”. Perhaps we can pass that on to the Plain English Campaign, so that it can translate it for the rest of us. Ultimately, it is clear that the experts all agree on one thing: there will be economic benefits and, even if we cannot agree on every penny, we know they will be hefty. Whether someone lives in the Chilterns or not, they cannot escape the economics. If it is done properly, high-speed rail works. Once we accept that, it only remains for us to consider whether those benefits are outweighed by any overriding negatives. As we have heard, the Secretary of State for Wales believes that one such negative is the fact that the line will pass through her backyard. Putting the right hon. Lady’s begonias aside, what are the real facts on environmental impact?

I totally agree that areas of outstanding natural beauty must be protected. Indeed, a new such area is on its way in my constituency. I believe that they must be protected and preserved wherever possible; I do not accept, however, that HS2 will cause unacceptable blight in the Chilterns. In fact, all but 1.2 miles of the route through the Chilterns area of outstanding natural beauty will be in tunnels, and one cannot get much less obtrusive than that. We will not be able to see it—it will be under the ground. Other parts of the route will be hidden in deep cuttings, or run alongside motorways. A lot of work has gone into ensuring that the line will cause minimum disruption. In fact, route changes mean that only 340 properties will be affected by noise, of which 210 are in central London, itself hardly a haven of peace. Just 10 properties will be affected by high noise levels. That does not add up to irreparable damage to the countryside. The fact that it will be possible to see and hear this rail line in the distance does not outweigh the very real economic and social benefits it will bring.

I have one point to add, regarding the residents in Holborn and St Pancras whose homes may be demolished. That may be classed as irreparable damage and I would not want to see that outcome; I hope very much that a solution can be found to avoid that demolition. I would back any amendment to the plan that could avoid the destruction of homes.

**Mr Mark Field:** So, doing that in Labour-held seats is acceptable, but not in Conservative-held seats?

**Chris Ruane:** They are not knocking them down in Tory seats.

**Susan Elan Jones:** It is a shame. The hon. Gentleman should have known that I would have said exactly the same had it been in his seat. I am reluctant to take back my earlier compliments for his interventions.

Having overcome the environmental argument, what about the costs of building during the recession? Let us look at the figures. HS2 will cost £2 billion a year during the building phase, which I believe is roughly the same as Crossrail. Construction will start at roughly the same time as Crossrail finishes, meaning that the overall transport budget will stay quite steady, but HS2 will spread jobs and benefits much more widely than Crossrail. Initial estimates predict the creation of 40,000 jobs. Some of those jobs will be in London and the south-east, but many will be spread along the line. Several thousand will be non-permanent construction jobs, but many will be permanent. At a time when the construction industry is struggling, I, for one, would welcome that.

Even if the budget has to stretch to pay for the build, which I do not believe it will, the figures all show that we can expect a return of £2 for every £1 invested in the project. If we think long term, and we should, that is an attractive proposition. If aliens from Mars turned up and heard about a project set to create 40,000 jobs, to link north and south, and to boost our national profile, they might well guess that the Government had decided to subsidise such a project for the public good. I am sure they would be shocked to hear that it was to be permanent. At a time when the construction industry is struggling, I, for one, would welcome that.

Mr Field: What are the real facts on environmental impact?

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What about the suitability of the UK for a high-speed line? Detractors say that the UK is too small to benefit from high speed, that our country is densely populated and already well-served by lots of railways. However, the distances between our major cities are very similar to those with successful high-speed rail abroad. Frankfurt and Cologne are 110 miles apart, which is the same distance as London to Birmingham. Tokyo and Osaka are 325 miles apart—roughly the same distance as London to Edinburgh.

While it is true that we already have railways, our lines are full. On capacity, fares are going up and up as demand increases, a point raised earlier by the hon. Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti). The cost of some season tickets in the south-east rose by almost 13% this year. Anyone who says that HS2 fares will be too high should consider the situation with our existing network. Sir Roy McNulty’s review of fares, published in May, suggested that off-peak fares should rise by 30% “to manage capacity”, as thousands of people pack on to trains with cheaper fares. We are actually having to price people off our trains to prevent them from bursting. That cannot be the right approach.

We want to encourage public transport use, as my hon. Friend the Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) said earlier, not suppress it.

We need more trains, and our existing network cannot provide them. For example, management at the west coast main line, which has recently had a major £10 billion upgrade that caused huge disruption to passengers, has announced that it will be at full capacity again within six to 10 years, even if extra carriages are added. It is not possible just to run more trains: there simply is not enough space. Even though there is the demand for more fast, direct trains up the west coast, the local commuter services and freight trains that use the lines do not leave extra space for the extra trains. We need more capacity. Network Rail has acknowledged that, and it spells it out very simply:
“HS2 solves the capacity problem”.

HS2 not only allows the existing network to operate at full capacity during its construction; it is the only option that will release real, significant extra capacity when in operation. Current services would continue to run on the existing lines, but the high-speed routes would no longer be hemmed in by them. Instead, they would have a free run on the new lines. Towns without HS2 stations will benefit as space for more trains is freed up on existing lines, with less crowding and more services. It is a win-win situation.

Mr Brian Binley (Northampton South) (Con): Does the hon. Lady agree that for towns such as Northampton, which are not directly on the route but feed into it at Milton Keynes, the issue of capacity is vital, specifically when we recognise that population will increase by 120,000 by 2026? If HS2 does not happen, we will have serious problems, and I thank her for making that point.

Susan Elan Jones: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his thoughtful contribution—many thanks.

Finally, let me deal with the so-called Rail Plan 2, which could apparently solve our capacity problems for a fraction of the price of HS2. That plan contains such major flaws that even its supporters are having to modify it as they go along. I have already heard of Rail Plan 2a, for example, which is supposed to be more “sympathetic”. RP2 basically involves doing almost nothing, maintaining and improving our existing tracks in a hotch-potch manner, and improving capacity a little bit here and a little bit there. Of course it is cheaper—it has not achieved anything that we would not have done as a matter of routine upkeep. Of course, it is quicker as well. It will have to be quick, because rebuilding a line that is still in use as the main line route will cause massive disruption. I wonder whether the cost of that massive disruption has been taken into account in these very low cost estimates for RP2, let alone that the massive disruption would have a free run on the new lines. Towns without HS2 stations will benefit as space for more trains is freed up on existing lines, with less crowding and more services. It is a win-win situation.

If we want a top-class railway system, it is not enough just to fiddle around little by little. High-speed rail is the way forward. It has worked in other countries and is backed by all the key figures around the UK. Of course, we can and should improve our existing network as well. I have already said that I hope that the north Wales main line, referred to by the hon. Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb), will be electrified soon. However, such a piecemeal investment project will have no wider economic benefits and create no draw for inward investors, and it will create such chaos on the railways while being built that it could make the whole idea of inter-city travel less attractive altogether. If we never begin a long-term project, we will never finish it, either.

Mark Tami (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): I am a weekly user of the line. It is already at capacity. Everybody has to stand up on the Arriva trains between 4 pm and 5 pm. We need that investment and we need it soon.

Susan Elan Jones: I agree. My hon. Friend for Alyn and Deeside wished to intervene.

Mark Tami: As my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Clwyd (Chris Ruane) mentioned, I am not a regular user of the train. There are connection problems. I used the train last week, only to find that I waited for a connection for nearly 40 minutes. That is an issue. It is all very well having high-speed rail, but if the connection time is so out, we will not get the benefit.

Susan Elan Jones: I agree with my hon. Friend on that point.

As I was saying, if we never begin a long-term project, we will never finish it, either. Even if HS2 takes many decades to build, the benefits it will bring will make it worth its many times over in the long-run. RP2 may work for a while but, ultimately, it will leave us continually plugging leaks, while the rest of the world races away with new technologies and coherently planned schemes.

In conclusion, we need more capacity, faster journey times, jobs, investment and better access. HS2 can give us all that, and it is heartening to see so much support among hon. Members this morning. I call on the Government to face down the saboteurs and stick to their promises. Only a small number of people oppose the scheme—regrettably, they include the Secretary of State for Wales and the Chilterns—but everyone else backs it, and so do I.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. Before I call the next speaker, I point out that I intend to call the Front Benchers no earlier than 20 minutes to 11, although I might seek a little bit of a squeeze on that at a later stage, because 14 people have written to Mr Speaker asking to catch my eye. In my estimation, that gives two and a half minutes a piece, and anyone who speaks for longer will be squeezing out someone else.

10 am

Mr Brian Binley (Northampton South) (Con): I will try to be quick, Mr Gray, and I am most grateful to serve under your direction.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) on a comprehensive and wide-ranging explanation of the need for High Speed 2, which, to my mind, is absolutely clear. The hon. Lady made the point that high-speed rail is increasingly a feature of advanced economies. It is vital for business purposes, because it is about not only individuals going up and down an important line, but the well-being of economies in many areas of the country and Britain’s future. As the hon. Lady has said, the experience of high-speed rail has been immensely positive for so many areas in France and for Lille and Lyons in particular. Many nations and towns are desperately trying to promote the concept of high-speed rail in Europe and, frankly, throughout Asia.

Our economy needs high-speed rail. The issue is to do with business, because the existing network will not be able to cope with the anticipated growth and the pressure it inevitably faces now and in the coming decades. There is a blockage at Birmingham coming down from the
north-west; freight is having great difficulty getting through to the south-east; and passengers are finding journeys immensely difficult. The construction of HS2 will increase the corridor capacity of the west coast main line threefold, which is massive, in return for a sizeable investment.

The southern part of the west coast main line is set to be running at full capacity within 15 years—that bit unblocks the whole problem in Birmingham and impacts on my town, Northampton. We are on the growth agenda of both the previous Government and this one. We are expected to build 59,000 homes by 2026, which is an additional 120,000 people, creating a town of 350,000. Already, 5,000 people a day commute to London, and we will have at least another 12,000 who want to do so; we will fail without high-speed rail and releasing capacity on the west coast main line. We need to create 85,000 new jobs, and we will fail without high-speed rail. Consequently, I support the plea of the hon. Member for Clwyd South and add the voice of the people of Northampton: without high-speed rail, we will have the population growth but we will not have the jobs growth; it is that simple.

10.3 am

Tom Greatrex (Rutherglen and Hamilton West) (Lab/Co-op): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) on securing the debate and on the case that she has made for High Speed 2. There is no need to repeat the benefits for the business environment and the economy or the point about capacity constraints, because those points have been well made.

I want to touch on a couple of issues relating to Scotland and to my constituency and neighbouring constituencies. The Minister is aware of the group High Speed 2 Scotland, which has published papers looking at the benefits of high-speed rail for Scotland. I want to reiterate some of its key points on the environmental benefits in particular. Currently, some 7 million journeys to London from Glasgow and/or Edinburgh are undertaken every year, but 6 million of those are by air. I freely admit that I do the same more often than I would like to, which is the case for many people I have spoken to who must travel to London for business purposes. They would rather not do the journey by air but, unfortunately, the time taken by rail at the moment is too long. There is an issue to do with the opportunities for business in Scotland as well.

In the past, the Minister’s predecessors had discussions with Scottish Ministers about HS2 in Scotland. She will be under pressure to respond to many points, but I hope that she will touch on whether such discussions have continued and when she last met Scottish Ministers. I also hope that she will touch on the feasibility of, if we eventually reach consideration of an extension beyond the initial phase of HS2, and potential for building from north to south, rather than from south to north, because that might be useful.

Jim Shannon (Strangford) (DUP): The hon. Gentleman is discussing Scotland. Other hon. Members have spoken eloquently about other parts of the country, and as a Northern Ireland MP my request concerns the HS2 opportunities for Stranraer, where the Northern Ireland

10.7 am

Iain Stewart (Milton Keynes South) (Con): It is always a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I add my congratulations to the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) on securing the debate.

I am a member of the Select Committee on Transport, and we are midway through our inquiry into high-speed rail, which is one of the most fascinating subjects that I have had to consider in my time as a Member. In the interests of time, I will not rehearse all the arguments for and against. I want to do two things in my contribution. First I make a plea to all sides in the debate to keep their remarks objective and evidence-based, and not to indulge in unhelpful and insulting point scoring. I say that to everyone. To those who support high-speed rail, it is incredibly unhelpful and insulting to polarise the debate as jobs in the north against lawns in the south, which is insulting to lots of people who have real and passionate objections to the concept of high-speed rail.

Albert Owen: The hon. Gentleman is making an important point. The problem is that little evidence is available in this country. In particular, my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) has asked the Wales Office for a detailed analysis and to collate the data, so that we can have an evidence-based argument and put forward stronger cases.

Iain Stewart: That is one of the things that the Transport Committee is digging into, to ensure that we make a decision based on fact.

To those who oppose high-speed rail, I have seen evidence of threatening letters to some proponents of high-speed rail and some exaggerated claims. My plea to everyone is to stop it. This is the most significant strategic, long-term transport decision we will take for a generation, and it has got to be right. The project will outlive several Governments, of goodness knows what colour and composition, so the decision has got to be right and we must have agreement on it.
Secondly, I would like some reassurance from the Minister about the scope of the Department for Transport inquiry and that that inquiry is not a simple choice between the current High Speed 2 proposals and doing nothing, but that a range of other options can be considered. The Transport Committee has just returned from a visit to France and Germany to look at their high-speed networks. One conclusion that I came to is that what matters is not just building a line, but how it is connected into the existing rail network, the connectivity to the termini on the line, and how it fits in with the wider transport strategy involving freight and aviation. That is what makes high-speed rail a success or failure. We must look at it in the round.

The hon. Member for Clwyd South has mentioned Lille. Yes, it has been successful, but we found that that has often been at the expense of neighbouring towns. The French have recognised belatedly that better connectivity is needed to Lille, and that that is what drives the benefits.

Time precludes me from going into many of the other issues that I wanted to raise, but one is the operating speed of the route. High Speed 2 has been designed for an operating speed of 250 mph, but all the evidence from Europe, China and elsewhere is that although the trains can technically run at that speed, for all sorts of practical reasons they are limited to about 200 mph. That opens up the possibility of other route options. We can build High Speed 2, but not necessarily along the proposed route. The latest generation of Shinkansen bullet trains, which tilt, opens up the possibility of building lines alongside an existing transport corridor, such as the M1 or M40, which would mitigate much of the concern about environmental intrusion. That is what the Germans have done.

Mr Denis MacShane (Rotherham) (Lab): Is the hon. Gentleman aware that the M1 stops just north of Leeds?

Iain Stewart: It does indeed, and the current proposal is to go only as far as Leeds. There may be a further development alongside the A1 in future, but I will not argue for that.

The hon. Member for Clwyd South has mentioned the Frankfurt to Cologne line, which was built largely alongside the autobahn, and there has been no concern in Germany about the noise and visual intrusion of that line, which has been welcomed. My request to the Minister is that we examine all the options, because it is vital to get the details right. If we do, we will have a transport system that we can be proud of; if we get it wrong, we may have an expensive white elephant.

10.15 am

Martin Vickers (Cleethorpes) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) on securing this debate. I am an enthusiastic supporter of railways in general and high-speed rail in particular. As my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) has said, time does not permit development of too many of the economic and environmental arguments, but they are generally proven.

My constituency has much to thank the railways for. When the Manchester, Sheffield and Lincolnshire railway eventually arrived at the coast, it effectively created the resort of Cleethorpes, and the neighbouring port of Immingham. The MSL railway was known as mucky, slow and late, but I am not sure whether that description was affectionate. The key route from Cleethorpes to Manchester is still the main rail route into the resort, but I have a few caveats on which the Minister could perhaps provide some reassurance.

Mr MacShane: I am often on that train, although I do not go as far as Cleethorpes, but I know the line well. Is the hon. Gentleman aware that in a fine campaign by the Yorkshire Post, which should be sent to all hon. Members, the whole of Yorkshire articulated that it wants high-speed rail to happen? I hate to play the north against the south, but there is a real feeling that this is a golden opportunity for the north of England, particularly Yorkshire. I hope that opposition to the scheme, even if the scheme has to be modified—the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) has made some perfectly good points—does not derail this important initiative.
Martin Vickers: I accept the right hon. Gentleman’s point. Anything that can advance economic regeneration of the Yorkshire and Humber region is obviously welcome, and anything that we can do to get visitors from his area to Cleethorpes, is also welcome.

Cleethorpes and the area more generally is desperate for a direct route to London, and one worry is that HS2 will suck up all investment resources. The minor infrastructure changes that would improve capacity on the east coast main line, and therefore provide capacity for a direct service to the Cleethorpes area, may be lost. Perhaps the Minister will reassure me on that.

The other brief point that I want to make in my allotted two and a half minutes concerns the supply chain. I am encouraged by what the Secretary of State said after the Bombardier announcement about how we must ensure that the supply chain involves British manufacturers, if possible. Many of my constituents who work at the steel works in the neighbouring constituency of Scunthorpe are under threat of redundancy. Tata Steel in Scunthorpe has benefited greatly in recent years from the worldwide renaissance of railways, and I would like some reassurance. Perhaps the Minister can build on what the Secretary of State said about ensuring that the benefits of production are retained in this country.

10.18 am

Albert Owen (Ynys Môn) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) on initiating this debate, and on her contribution, which set the right tone. I agree with the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), who said that we need an evidence-based debate. We also need a debate that is led by hon. Members from throughout the United Kingdom, and this debate has provided that opportunity. It is hugely important to include peripheral areas such as the Isle of Anglesey, which I represent.

I will heed your advice, Mr Gray, and limit my contribution. I will not go into the full details of the history of the Irish mail from Euston to Kingstown via Holyhead, which started, as you will know, in 1848, when it took some 10 hours to get the mail from the centre of London to the centre of Holyhead, and then on fast ferries to the Republic of Ireland, which took two days.

Over the past 10 years, we have seen a huge reduction in the journey time between my constituency and London. When I was first elected some 10 years ago, it took more than five hours to get from Holyhead to Euston. It now takes three hours and 40 minutes, which is the result of investment in the west coast main line. We have more frequent—indeed hourly—trains to Chester, and although that is the wrong side of Offa’s Dyke, it provides a connection to north Wales, linking it with the major cities of Manchester and Birmingham via Crewe, and getting people and trade—which is vitally important—from the south-east to periphery areas. That is a sort of evidence base. I do not have the data, but when I make that journey of three hours and 40 minutes, I often speak with business people—many of them travel in first class and I travel in standard class, but we have the opportunity to speak. Organisations such as the CBI and others mention the benefits that investment in the west coast main line has brought to periphery areas such as north-west Wales. It is important to use that evidence and collate more data for the future to make a stronger case for high-speed rail, which I greatly support in principle.

I want to raise two issues with the Minister. I had the opportunity to speak to her about these matters a couple of weeks ago, but I would like her to respond on the record. In her opening remarks, my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South pointed to the position of the Secretary of State for Wales. I do not want to personalise the issue, but we need a strong voice at the Cabinet table to represent Wales and to set out the benefits that a high-speed network throughout the United Kingdom would bring to Wales. I hope that the Minister will ask her colleagues in government whether an analysis has been made of those benefits by the Wales Office, because that is its role. We are talking about strategic rail travel in the United Kingdom, and it is important that the people of Wales have a voice at the Cabinet table.

Steve Baker (Wycombe) (Con): Perhaps I have not followed the hon. Gentleman’s argument, but it is not clear why the proposed Y-shape route will benefit Wales. Will he recap his point?

Albert Owen: I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman was not listening; I was providing evidence that investment in the west coast main line has benefitted the peripheries. Joining up periphery areas with main lines and having faster trains will get people and trade to those areas. I thought that the Government were in favour of that; I have supported them in that and in the idea of spreading wealth and prosperity throughout the United Kingdom. The idea is not new—it happened in Victorian times, which is why I gave the example of the Irish mail. The Victorians recognised the importance of Dublin. This Government have bailed out the Irish Government because they understand the importance of trade links with Ireland. It is important to have full integration between all parts of the United Kingdom and our near neighbours.

Andrea Leadsom (South Northamptonshire) (Con): Does the hon. Gentleman agree, as he seems to suggest, that there is not enough evidence to prove the benefits of regeneration outside the areas at the two ends of the proposed initial line, and that far more work needs to be done to provide evidence of those benefits? If the issue is about curing the north-south divide, the case is simply not proven.

Albert Owen: The hon. Lady is coming at the matter from the wrong angle. I am saying that the huge investment over the past 10 years has brought benefits to periphery areas but that the data have not been put into one package to make the case.

Andrea Leadsom rose—

Albert Owen: I am not going to give way again, because of the time restraint. We need to look thoroughly at the benefits to the whole United Kingdom, but there is no doubt that connecting periphery areas with main line stations works. We have seen that in Europe and in other areas.
Andrea Leadsom rose—

Albert Owen: I am not going to give way again. I appreciate that the hon. Lady has her opinion, but I am trying to make my views heard. I hope that she and the hon. Member for Wycombe (Steve Baker) have understood my argument. I will move on, but I believe that the Minister should press the Secretary of State for Wales and the Wales Office to make a proper analysis of the benefits of high-speed rail for Wales.

My second point is more negative, because we should also look at the disadvantages of the scheme. Will the Minister look at the issue in the context of Euston station, where the redevelopment for the high-speed rail link would take place? I know that the Transport Committee heard evidence about that yesterday, but the case for high-speed rail would be slightly undermined if there were to be a long period of redevelopment at Euston. As was said yesterday, it would take up to eight years to redevelop that station, and services to the north-west and north Wales would be cut during that period. I know that the Minister will look at all the options, but perhaps she could look at underpinning or some other way to alleviate the problem with main line stations such as Euston in the future. I know that the Minister is keen for the project to proceed; she has listened and is in tune with what hon. Members are saying throughout the United Kingdom. I ask her, however, to look at the issue of Euston and put pressure on her colleague, the Secretary of State for Wales, to make the case for Wales.

10.25 am

Stuart Andrew (Pudsey) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I will try to be brief because I have taken part in debates about this issue in the past.

I congratulate the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) on securing this debate. I like the fact that the debate’s title as set out on the Order Paper is positive, and I will resist joining in the accusations against the Secretary of State for Wales—I will wait for her performance this afternoon before the Welsh Affairs Committee.

I want to keep the debate positive because it is important that those of us in favour of High Speed 2 galvanise a campaign in support of it. I have seen the comments of business leaders in the Yorkshire Post in support of the scheme, but that is not enough and we need to bang the drum much louder. A high-speed rail link will not solve the north-south divide, but it will go a long way to remedy some of the problems. It will help us to rebalance the economy so that growth is moved across the country and is not only in the south-east of England. As has been mentioned, we must start dealing with problems of capacity. The west coast main line is already creaking; passenger numbers have doubled over the past six years, with 28 million passengers a year on that line alone. From a personal point of view, it is predicted that 40% more passengers will travel through Leeds station. We must start planning now, and it is time to start looking at high-speed rail. I believe that faster journey times will increase the prospect of investment in other parts of the country.

Andrea Leadsom: My hon. Friend and I have had many discussions about this issue. The most recent Government papers suggest that up to 73% of the line’s usage will be for leisure travel. How will that contribute to curing the north-south divide?

Stuart Andrew: I think that the Government are being conservative in their estimates of passenger numbers and who will use the high-speed network. I was about to say that even with our current creaking transport network, Leeds enjoys the second largest financial sector in the country. If we have a high-speed route to Leeds, the prospect of increasing and expanding that financial sector could become a reality.

Figures suggest that current proposals for a line between London and Birmingham will generate 40,000 jobs. When we move to the Y-shape, there will be greater prosperity and more jobs. Globalisation means that we need to start meeting the demands of a much smaller world so that those of us on the periphery, as the hon. Member for Ynys Môn (Albert Owen) said, can also enjoy the benefits of that.

Let me refer to some of the criticisms of the scheme. Too often we hear people referring only to the line to Birmingham. The whole point about HS2 is that it will go beyond that. The Y-shape route was the best decision made by the Government. If they had chosen only the line that went to Manchester and then Leeds, I, too, would be a critic, but the fact is that the Y-shape will bring benefits to the whole country, as was confirmed by the Prime Minister on 22 June. I have heard critics say that the line will never get that far north, but the Prime Minister has been clear on the issue.

David Mowat: My hon. Friend makes an important point about the consultation being for only the leg between London and Birmingham, which is the hardest part to achieve and the part with the weakest business case. The business case for the entire project is much better, because the line becomes easier to build as we go north. Does he agree that even though the business case for the initial part is stronger than those for Crossrail and Thameslink, it is a problem that there is consideration of only that first part?

Stuart Andrew: I completely agree. That is why I say that we must consider the project in its entirety and think about going beyond what is currently proposed and on to Scotland. We must think of the very long term, not just the short term. On the one hand, people say, “Oh, this is too many years in advance. It’s not worth doing,” but there is no excuse for doing nothing and we have to plan now to deal with the problem. On the other hand, however, people say, “We shouldn’t be spending this amount of money when times are hard,” but construction will not happen until 2017 and it will take place over two decades. I believe that the cost will be about £2 billion a year, which is similar to the cost for Crossrail, and if that was good enough for London, it is good enough for the rest of the country.

Yesterday, I sat for a short while at the back of the room in which the sitting of the Transport Committee was taking place and I heard the arguments against HS2. They seemed to centre on the claim that existing infrastructure would miss out. In fairness to the Department for Transport, it has invested lots of extra money for projects. When the people appearing before the Committee were asked what they wanted instead, they said, “Roads.” Well, we have seen what has happened before in that
respect. They said that the M25 junctions could be improved, which would be very helpful to those of us in the north—thanks very much.

HS2 is not a panacea, but it will dovetail into the northern hub so that we can get people to the north and around the north, and so that business can thrive. That is something that we cannot wait for and Britain needs to catch up.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. We have nine minutes for six speakers.

10.31 am

Dr Julian Huppert (Cambridge) (LD): It is a pleasure to be able to speak in this high-speed debate, Mr Gray. I congratulate the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) on securing it and on her excellent speech.

My party has long supported high-speed rail as an essential part of the development of Britain’s public transport infrastructure. Such investment is vital to create a society in which people are free to pursue their ambitions. Economic growth has been too concentrated in London and the south-east. If the rate of growth in that area had been replicated in other areas in the past decade, the UK would have been £38 billion better off. High-speed rail is a vital investment to ensure that we manage to rebalance the economy along more equal regional lines.

One of the other arguments for high-speed rail is that it represents the type of sustainable, environmentally conscious economic growth that we need. High-speed rail is not in itself a low-carbon form of transport, as should be obvious, because machines that run at very high speeds need more power than machines that run at low speeds. However, the modal shift to which many hon. Members have referred makes it much more environmentally sustainable. In fact, that makes it vital for the long-term sustainability of our country’s infrastructure. We have heard about the likely effects for Scotland of a move from air to rail. We have also heard that long-distance services on the high-speed line would free up capacity on other major rail routes. In addition, it is important to remember that the carbon benefits of rail over aviation are likely to improve, and to continue improving, as we develop new ways of decarbonising the electricity supply.

Andrea Leadsom: I have to take issue with what the hon. Gentleman is saying, because the Government’s own figures suggest that the shift from air to rail is likely to be only about 7% and a number of airlines have said that that would give them the capacity to put on more long-haul flights, so it is not at all clear that there is any modal shift from air to rail. In addition, traffic flow on the M1 is expected to reduce by only 2%. Not even the Government are trying to advance the green argument.

Dr Huppert: I agree, in that I wish that the Government would advance environmental arguments more often. I do not have all the figures available, but we have heard the figures on links with Scotland. With a full Y-shaped network, about half the 7 million passenger trips that are currently made would be captured by High Speed 2 and I think that we would continue to make greater progress on that.

The nature of the route is not the only thing that matters. When we talk to people about the state of our public transport, a number of themes crop up. People find it hard to get the right information, to get the right connection at the right time and to buy the ticket that best suits their needs. I want the Government to make doubly sure that this new venture is not what some have said that it will be—a costly train for the well-off. The Liberal Democrats have long called for rail fares to be reviewed and, if possible, cut or refunded in the case of delays or bus replacement services. We must ensure that the same principles apply to High Speed 2. It is essential that, alongside the planning of the route, the Government adopt an approach that is designed to ensure a gradual improvement in terms and conditions for passengers on both bus and rail.

I want to see more commitment from the Government on what will happen in the longer term with regard to Scotland. I want to know whether they have a vision to ensure that the Y-shaped route will eventually run all the way to Glasgow and Edinburgh. We have the prospect of an exciting scheme that will be very good for the economy and for the environment. I look forward to working closely with the Department for Transport, the Minister and other stakeholders as we try to ensure that the project provides value for money, environmental and economic benefits and a public transport infrastructure that works and is in the best interests of passengers.

10.35 am

Eric Ollerenshaw (Lancaster and Fleetwood) (Con): For the benefit of hon. Members, I will try not to repeat points that have already been made. I will also try to obey the strictures of my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) about the north-south divide, although I do want to say something about that.

Like others, I will avoid references to long history, although I shall mention the original high-speed line—the west coast main line in the 19th century. It went from Euston station in London to the Euston hotel in Fleetwood. We also had at one time a ferry to Scotland and to Northern Ireland, so the Scots and the Northern Irish had the benefits of coming to Fleetwood. Unfortunately, we have no ferry now. We still have a railway line in Fleetwood, but we have no trains on it. Nevertheless, we are supporters of High Speed 2, and that is despite the fact that most of my constituency is 50 miles away from Greater Manchester. For the benefit of those who are not north-west MPs, I should point out that the north-west is not just Greater Manchester and Merseyside.

For us, the issue is the capacity that the project will release on the west coast main line. According to the figures that I have seen, the only increase in capacity that we are going to get in the next 10 years is one of 12%. However, the passenger load has already hit that figure, as anyone who travels on the line will know. We need capacity to be released.

There is a solution to all our problems and the debate about where the line should go in the south: we should start the other way round by building now from Glasgow to Edinburgh, and then slowly build downwards while there is a discussion in the south about where the line should end up. However, I am not sure whether civil servants could cope with that thinking.
Let us consider the figures and the real issue about the north-south divide with reference to my own county of Lancashire. If we look at gross value added in terms of what we contribute to the national economy, we see that it has been going down for the past 10 years. In 1995, the gross value added figure for Lancashire was about 88.7% of the average. By 2008, we had gone down by 10 points—that is the real issue. When the average transport spend per head in London is £802 yet it is £333 in the north-west, people rightly ask questions. For me, the key is capacity and maintaining what the coalition Government promised, which was to try to rebalance the growth in the regions, which were clearly failed by the previous Government in the past 10 years.

I want to finish by putting a technicality to the Minister. I understand that the hybrid Bill—I am not an expert on such measures—will deal with only the route from London to Birmingham. We desperately need to maintain support for the project. Somewhere in the Bill, there needs to be a mention that that is a first step that will lead to a second step to Manchester and Leeds and then, we hope, a third step to Glasgow and Edinburgh.

10.38 am

Graham Evans (Weaver Vale) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) on securing the debate. I have not hidden my full backing for the proposed high-speed rail link, and I certainly cannot be accused of hiding my disdain for some of the bogus arguments made by its opponents, who have now given up even pretending that they are not nimbys. Take the hon. Member for Coventry North West (Mr Robinson), for example, who just this week said:

“There’s nothing wrong with being a Nimby, openly and absolutely.”

However, I do not intend to waste any more time on them.

The last time that we had a debate on this issue in Westminster Hall, I focused on busting the myths of the opponents. In this debate, I shall explain how my constituents and the constituents of the hon. Member for Coventry North West—indeed, all our constituents—will massively benefit from a high-speed rail link between London, Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester. When I say “our constituents”, I really mean our constituents’ children and grandchildren, because this is a long-term decision, not an election gimmick or a vanity project. Most of us in the Chamber will not be around to take the credit when the first high-speed trains arrive in Manchester. This is about taking the right decision now so that our economy can compete in the decades ahead so that the next generation, which has already been saddled with huge levels of debt thanks to the previous Government, is not also stuck with a jammed-up rail network, which would have crippling effects on our international competitiveness. After all, we would not want to run a 21st-century economy on A and B roads when we could build motorways.

All our major global competitors already have high-speed rail lines and are investing in them right now. If we do not go ahead with High Speed 2, we will be left behind. Network Rail estimates that London-Manchester passenger demand will grow by 61% by 2024. It is clear that “upgrading is not enough” and that “incremental improvements in the existing network are unlikely to be able to keep up with rapidly growing passenger demand”. That should be a warning to opponents.

David Mowat: I want to touch on one quick point that my hon. Friend and others have made in error. They suggest that this is all about Manchester to London, Leeds to London or Edinburgh to London, but it is not—it is about getting to Europe as well. The links to High Speed 1 are fundamental to our communities, and we must not let the debate become polarised so that it focuses only on London.

Graham Evans: I am most grateful for my hon. Friend’s intervention and I take his point.

Network Rail is clear about what the solution should be. It says that High Speed 2 “solves the capacity challenge” and that the proposed line would “deliver a very large increase in capacity, including freeing up capacity on the existing network for freight, more frequent services for cities not served by the high-speed line and increased commuter services.”

That means that the constituents of the most earnest opponents of High Speed 2 will benefit directly from the plans. The point about freight is also crucial. If we are to rebalance our economy, with more northern-based manufacturing—figures show the Government are already making strong progress on that—that will involve demands for additional freight capacity.

High Speed 2 therefore directly benefits a wide range of people, from commuters in Cheshire to manufacturers in Coventry. A lot of flim-flam will be spoken about the business case for high-speed rail by its opponents, but the business case is strong. The estimated benefit to the economy is more than £40 billion pounds.

Andrea Leadsom: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Graham Evans: No, I need to finish.

More than 40,000 new jobs will be created, with an additional 30,000 jobs created at the ends of the line and around the new stations. The taxpayer will enjoy benefits worth more than double what the project will cost. However, hon. Members should not just take it from me or the Government that the business case is strong. Hundreds of leading businesses across the country back the plans, and Network Rail, having carefully examined all the different options, said that it “found the business case for a new high speed network was robust.”

Steve Baker: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Graham Evans: No, I need to finish.

Hon. Members will forgive me if put more stock in the words of Network Rail and Britain’s business leaders than in those of, say, the South Northants Action Group Against HS2. High Speed 2 will help to deliver economic growth.

Andrea Leadsom: Will my hon. Friend give way?

Graham Evans: No; I am sorry, but I need to finish. My hon. Friend should have come earlier.
High Speed 2 will deliver low-carbon economic growth, dramatically reducing the demand for domestic flights and shifting 6 million journeys from aviation to rail. Finally, let me try to humanise the benefits. In the previous debate, I talked about how High Speed 2 will give businesses and families—

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. I call Andrew Gwynne.

10.42 am

Andrew Gwynne (Denton and Reddish) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) on securing the debate and on putting her case. She added a distinctively Welsh dimension to the debate on high-speed rail. As someone who studied at college in north-east Wales, and who travelled weekly from the Shotton and Wrexham stations to Manchester for a good three years, I fully understand the issues she raised about connectivity, particularly with north-west England.

Across the world, our major competitors are investing in high-speed rail, and it is important that Britain not be left behind in the race for faster connectivity. As my hon. Friend said, the prospect of bringing our major cities closer together brings with it the potential to boost investment and economic growth in the regions of England—and particularly in the north of England—Scotland and Wales.

During its period in government, the Labour party began the process of moving Britain into the high-speed age. Through electrification, more advanced trains and investment in new technology, we cut journey times on our major inter-city routes. Where there was a need for a new line, we delivered it, constructing the first major new railway for more than 100 years, between London and the channel tunnel.

Before we left office, we began to plan the next stages of the process of moving our rail network into its high-speed future. We prepared for the next phase of electrification and the procurement of the new generation of more advanced inter-city trains. We began to work with Network Rail to identify the next priorities for investment to increase capacity and reduce journey times, such as the northern hub proposal.

We therefore welcome the Government’s decision to take forward much of the electrification that we planned, although we are disappointed at the decision not to stick to our commitment to electrify the final part of the great western main line between Cardiff and Swansea. A commitment should also have been made to ensuring that the midland main line is the next important priority for electrification. We also welcome the decision to proceed with the inter-city express programme following the further review carried out by the Secretary of State, although we still have to hear an adequate explanation of why the number of new trains has been scaled back so considerably.

Of course, Labour Members also welcome the Government’s decision to continue to plan for the new high-speed line that is proposed to address the capacity issues on the west coast main line, which will get worse in later years, as we have heard from the hon. Members for Northampton South (Mr Binley), for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Eric Ollerenshaw), for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew) and for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans). Within the next 20 years, the average long-distance west coast main line train is projected to be 80% full and routinely to have very severe overcrowding for much of the time. The new line will also bring reductions in journey times.

We welcome the Government’s decision to drop their pre-election insistence that passengers should have to go via Manchester to get to Leeds, which the hon. Member for Pudsey mentioned. We also welcome the alterations that have been made to the route to do more to mitigate the scheme’s impact on local communities and the environment, although there is still concern about the impact of the new line, and that needs to be addressed.

Thanks to the decision to take only the powers needed for the route from London to Birmingham, there is considerable scepticism about the Government’s commitment to take a new line further north. Labour’s plan was always to have one hybrid Bill for the entire new Y-shaped line. Of course, that would have meant that the Bill was delayed—perhaps by a year—but it would have saved considerable parliamentary time across the project. I therefore urge the Minister, as I did in a previous contribution, to think again about that.

The Minister cannot be surprised at the scepticism that exists, when even her own MPs are giving the game away about the true reason for the Government’s conversion to high speed. Only yesterday, writing on ConservativeHome, the hon. Member for Cities of London and Westminster (Mr Field), who was here for the debate earlier, said:

“Indeed, the genesis of the project was a response to relentless business criticism of the Party’s decision to oppose a third runway at Heathrow. HS2 allowed the Conservatives in Opposition to cloak itself in a visionary, environmentally friendly, long-term transport policy.”

That suggests that, for the Government, the policy is not necessarily about narrowing the north-south divide, but a fig leaf for their lack of an aviation policy and, I might even add, a growth policy.

In contrast, the Labour party’s support for increasing speed and capacity is something we delivered on in government and is rooted in our genuine commitment to the rail network. It is vital that we think it terms of a single high-speed rail network across Britain, and that we achieve reduced journey times and increased capacity through a programme of electrification, new advanced trains and new lines, where that is the best way to address capacity issues.

In the policy review we are carrying out, we are looking at what the future strategy should be for rail in Britain as a whole. It makes no sense to look at proposed new lines in isolation or to preclude them from our review. A number of issues are being raised with us as part of our review, and the same is no doubt true of the Government’s consultation. I would therefore welcome the Minister’s response to a number of those issues.

First, there is considerable concern that any new lines should be fully integrated into the existing rail network. We must ensure that we can maximise the benefits of the proposed new lines, with rail all over the country and with major London projects such as Crossrail and Thameslink.
There is a view that the precise alignment of the route the Government have chosen is driven very much by the very high top speeds proposed for the new line. That speed is considerably above that on high-speed lines in use across the world, and some countries—notably China—are even slowing down their high-speed trains to address cost, energy use, safety and environmental concerns. Some believe that the need for the route to go through a sensitive part of the Chilterns is entirely down to the speed calculations that have been made. It would be helpful if we had some clarity on that.

Andrea Leadsom: Do the Opposition intend to respond to the consultation by 29 July?

Andrew Gwynne: The Opposition will take full part in all these debates, I assure the hon. Lady of that.

There is widespread incredulity at the fact that the cost of actually using the new lines does not feature at all in the current consultation, when, surely, that is a critical factor. If the whole point is that passengers will make the switch from the existing lines to reduce overcrowding on them, how can any assessment have been made of the likelihood of that happening without any knowledge of the likely difference in ticket price between the two lines? We know that it costs more to travel on High Speed 1 than on other services along that route, and there is no reason to believe that the proposed new line will be any different. Speaking of HS1, the Secretary of State for Transport announced in an interview in the Financial Times a few days ago that, just as with HS1, he proposes to sell the new line even before it has been built—something I would have hoped he might announce to Parliament.

A further issue that comes up frequently in our policy review is the decision not to join up the new line to Heathrow from the start, as my hon. Friend the Member for Hayes and Harlington (John McDonnell) suggested. That is of course our only major hub airport. In opposition to the consultation by 29 July?

Andrew Gwynne: Do the Opposition intend to respond to the consultation by 29 July?

Mrs Theresa Villiers: It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Gray. I congratulate the hon. Member for Clwyd South (Susan Elan Jones) on securing a debate on this important issue, and I welcome the widespread support for the Government’s plans, expressed from both sides of the House by a clear majority of the hon. Members present. I hope that all colleagues who attended, including those who did not choose to stay to the end, will encourage all their constituents to take part in the consultation, which closes on 29 July, and make their support for the Government’s proposals clear.

In answer to the questions, there is no delay; the timetable that we are taking forward is the same as the one proposed by the previous Government. On the allegation of the shadow Minister, the hon. Member for Denton and Reddish (Andrew Gwynne), repeated yet again, that we are not serious about going to the north of England, we supported a link to the north of England before Labour did. We supported a national network while Labour’s 30-year strategy for the railways ruled out high-speed rail at all. They are the people who are late to the party on high-speed rail, so the hon. Gentleman is in no position to criticise us. Nor is he in any position to criticise our approach to international connections. Labour had no connection to Heathrow in its plans, and nor did it put forward proposals to connect HS2 to HS1. Both those facts show that Labour was not serious about international connections. In response to questions on this point, and the points made by my hon. Friend the Member for Lancaster and Fleetwood (Eric Ollerenshaw), I repeat my support for taking high-speed rail to the north of England.

Questions were asked about a hybrid Bill and yes, the first hybrid Bill will cover the first phase, but we hope to go on in due course to an informal consultation next year on phase 2 to the north of England, with a hybrid Bill in due course in the next Parliament. I emphasise that the Government entirely recognise the concerns of communities about the preferred route and the potential impact on their local environment. We are listening to all those concerns. We have already made changes to about half the route that we inherited from our predecessors. As has already been mentioned, while our preferred route passes through the sensitive Chilterns area, all but 1.2 miles of it is in either a tunnel or a cutting, or alongside a main transport corridor—the A413 being a particular example. I am convinced that the result of the extensive process of consultation on the hybrid Bill will not be nearly as negative for communities as they fear. I am confident that with careful mitigation we can address the most serious local impacts, as happened so successfully with HS1. Intense controversy surrounded that first stretch of high-speed rail for the UK. Because of the hard work that went into getting the right route and the right mitigation, HS1 has not had the disruptive impact that communities feared it would. We can do the same with the route for HS2.

On what my hon. Friend the Member for Gillingham and Rainham (Rehman Chishti) said about HS1 somehow pushing up fares on the conventional service, the fares decisions taken by the previous Government were related to capacity enhancements and improvements on the conventional existing line, and not to HS1. The hon. Members for Clwyd South and for Ynys Môn...
Albert Owen: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Villiers: No.

Several points were made—

Albert Owen: Will the Minister give way?

Mrs Villiers: I am afraid I really do not have time. We have had a good debate.

Albert Owen: On the Welsh Office.

Mrs Villiers: I am sorry; I have many points to respond to, and only about another seven minutes— [Hon. Members: “Four minutes.”]—four minutes.

There was strong support from my hon. Friends the Members for Weaver Vale (Graham Evans), for Warrington South (David Mowat), and for Pudsey (Stuart Andrew). I also note the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Elmet and Rothwell (Alec Shelbrooke). A fundamental reason for our need for high-speed rail is to deliver the capacity we need to meet the growing demand for inter-city travel. Despite significant capacity upgrades in recent years, with more to come on the west coast, Network Rail predicts that the line will be pretty much full by 2024. That saturation point could come earlier. If we fail to provide the capacity we need, we will significantly hinder economic growth and worsen the north-south divide. No Government can afford to sit back and ignore that. High-speed rail can provide the capacity we need, as well as shrinking journey times between our major population centres, spreading prosperity and creating jobs, without a net increase in carbon emissions. As the hon. Member for Cambridge (Dr Huppert) said, that is just the sort of sustainable growth we need.

High-speed rail will reshape our economic geography and start to tackle and reduce the economic divide between north and south, as my hon. Friends the Members for Lancaster and Fleetwood and for Pudsey pointed out. The full Y-shaped network is expected to generate about £44 billion for the economy. We are convinced that high-speed rail will do a tremendous amount to integrate the economies of Manchester, Sheffield and Leeds, and to spread prosperity well beyond the cities that are directly served by the line, including destinations in north Wales. As the hon. Member for Clwyd South pointed out, examples such as Lille show that those regeneration benefits are felt well beyond the cities that are directly served by the stations. We believe that the country should aspire for the future to a genuinely national network, which we hope, of course, will include Wales and Scotland. However, long before that point, passengers in Scotland are expected to benefit significantly from shorter journey times resulting from the Y-shaped network, with journeys of 3.5 hours from Glasgow and Edinburgh to London providing an attractive alternative to flights, as highlighted by the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Tom Greatrex).

North Wales is also likely to benefit as a result of the project we are considering today, because of a GDP boost resulting from taking high-speed rail to Birmingham and then on to the north-west, with benefits in inward investment and tourism. We are determined to do as much as we can to respond to the points that have been made today about the importance of ensuring good connections from the conventional network into new HS2 services. That is one way in which we will succeed in spreading the benefits as widely as possible. Such good connections should enable north Wales passengers to benefit from faster journey times. HS2 would also release capacity on the existing network, benefiting north Wales and destinations in the west and east midlands and the north of England, including Northampton—

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): Order. I apologise for interrupting the Minister. I congratulate hon. Members on the fact that 14 of them have been able to speak in the debate, which is a pretty reasonable number.
11 am

Siobhain McDonagh (Mitcham and Morden) (Lab): I am delighted to have been given the chance to speak in Westminster Hall, but I am sorry about the circumstances that led to my asking for this debate.

In my constituency of Mitcham and Morden, which the Minister will know well, the number of unemployed jobseeker’s allowance claimants has reached 2,776. From the moment when I was elected in 1997, it looked as though unemployment had slipped off the agenda, because it fell during my first 12 years as a Member. In April 1997, weeks before I was elected, the unemployment rate in Mitcham and Morden was 5.4%. Even in April 2009, at the height of the recession, it was only 3.7%. However, it is now back up to 5.2%.

The effect of unemployment is perhaps greatest on our young people. If they cannot get work early in life and learn the discipline of the workplace, it becomes harder to find work. For older people, gaps in a CV can make life difficult when applying for jobs, but for young people it is much worse. After a decade during which we invested enormously in education, exam grades have risen and young people’s aspirations are high, but their aspirations cannot be met.

Nationally, unemployment among 16 to 24-year-olds has risen to 895,000. In Mitcham and Morden, the unemployment rate for the under-24s has shot up to 11.6% in the past year. Today, only 39 constituencies have a worse ratio of vacancies to JSA claimants than in my constituency. In May, our local jobcentre had only 124 jobs.

The scarcity of jobs has made life more difficult for young people looking for work. They have the disadvantage of lacking experience. We must not allow a return to the 1980s, when a whole generation of young people lost out and many drifted into a life of benefit dependency, which affected not only them but their children. We still feel the social effects of that period of long-term unemployment.

For many communities, the jobs have returned, but on some estates a culture of worklessness has taken hold. A generation on, we are still dealing with the consequences of young people having been unemployed in the 1980s—I say, never again. In the 1980s, youth unemployment continued to rise for four years after the recession was over. I want to stop another generation of young people in Mitcham and Morden having to go through that.

When the coalition Government were elected, their first steps were like a war against young people: they increased student fees; they abolished the education maintenance allowance; and they slashed the future jobs fund. It is true that youth unemployment across the country rose as a direct consequence of the recession, but a year ago it started to fall, and many believed that the future jobs fund was helping unemployed young people to gain opportunities that would help them into work.

Just over a year ago, however, the Prime Minister described the future jobs fund as a “good scheme”, and the Liberal Democrat spokesperson said that “more help is needed for young people, not less.” It is baffling that the fund has been scrapped. Last summer, I met a group of young people who had enrolled through the future jobs fund and who were getting good work experience at a local charity, the Commonsides community development trust. I wanted to hear about their experience.

There were nine youngsters on the scheme—one dropped out, but the others had a better time. They were given a range of things to do, from helping to run a community centre to dealing with older people in the lunch club and undertaking basic admin duties. I am told that, a year on, four are now in work, and three have gone back into education. I see one of those young people regularly at my advice surgery every Friday—not, I hasten to add, because he needs to see me about problems, but because he has a full-time job on the ground floor of the same council building. His name is Kyle Bryant, and he believes that the future jobs fund helped him to get his current job. It certainly showed that he was willing, and his experience there gave him a better CV.

I take this opportunity to congratulate Kyle and his fellow graduates of Commonsides’s future jobs fund programme. They did the right thing by helping out a worthwhile local charity, and getting some good experience, and many are now reaping the rewards. I am sure that other hon. Members have similar tales, but for me, meeting young people like Kyle brought home just how difficult it is for young people who cannot find work to get the necessary experience without extra help. Now that the future jobs fund has been scrapped, the opportunity to gain good experience is even harder to come by.

Internships have been seen as a way to get ahead. However, the Deputy Prime Minister rightly criticised the way in which internships often favour those who already have good connections. Indeed, he has used privileged access, through his family, to secure top-notch work experience. However, that is not an option for many in Mitcham and Morden. We tend not to have many people with connections to top jobs in the public sector, let alone to senior bankers or business people. I therefore wondered what sort of role I might play.

In some respects, Members of Parliament are the hub of their community. We have no real power on our own and we do not have access to public funds, but we know our constituencies and the people and businesses that make them tick. I therefore decided to facilitate a work experience programme in Mitcham and Morden for our unemployed young people. The idea came after chatting with the Stranks of Strank Roofing, a successful local firm that I know through the charities that it supports and through its sponsorship of our local football team, AFC Wimbledon. I hope, Mr Gray, that you will not add, because he needs to see me about problems, but because he has a full-time job on the ground floor of the same council building. His name is Kyle Bryant, and he believes that the future jobs fund helped him to get his current job. It certainly showed that he was willing, and his experience there gave him a better CV.

Irene and Paul Strank told me that they wanted to help young people who could not find work, but that they found Government schemes a little too prescriptive and bureaucratic. For instance, the new Government work experience scheme that began in January requires

Mr James Gray (in the Chair): They are no longer unemployed.

Siobhain McDonagh: They were not unemployed before, but they are now in the full-time league.

Irene and Paul Strank told me that they wanted to help young people who could not find work, but that they found Government schemes a little too prescriptive and bureaucratic. For instance, the new Government work experience scheme that began in January requires
employers to sign service level agreements, complete health and safety questionnaires, and to receive visits from the jobcentre. Those requirements often put off people such as the Stranks.

Anyone who has offered work experience to schoolchildren—many Members do so, including me—will know what a hassle it can be. I perfectly understand why employers are reluctant to participate in Government schemes. However, the Stranks were sure that other firms would feel the same as they did and would want to train young people—if they were any good, there might be a job at the end of it—but without the hassle, the form-filling or the sense of being monitored by the authorities.

I therefore decided to contact every local business and voluntary group in Mitcham and Morden, and a few others just outside our borders, to see whether they would offer work experience for a couple of months to unemployed youngsters from my constituency. Thanks to Anna in my office and some amazing volunteers from my local Labour party, particularly Ross Garrod, who has been trying to build up a new set of skills after leaving university, I have been able to convince nearly 40 organisations to take on at least one young person.

These organisations cover a wide spectrum, and include many organisations that I thought would not have wanted to become involved. Indeed, the Minister will know some of the organisations at first hand; they include the premium hotel Cannizaro House and Cosmopolitan, the women's magazine—although he probably knows less about the latter. The youngsters have opportunities from retail to tyre fitting, and from schools to legal firms. The Elective Orthopaedic Centre has offered two placements for people thinking about applying to medical school, but who have no medical contacts in their families. That is extremely exciting for the people in my constituency. Shelley Engineering, a local architectural metal work company, is a family firm that employs 20 people. It said that it is desperately looking for the right young person, and if it finds one it will happily award an apprenticeship. In short, there is something for a wide range of abilities and interests.

I also contacted all the companies that infamously auctioned internships to raise funds for the Conservative party. I explained that not everyone in Mitcham and Morden could afford to bid thousands of pounds for the sorts of privileged opportunities that seemed to be available to Conservative sponsors. I said that, as work experience placements such as Mitcham, where he lives. He said:

"Thank you for your Work Experience booklet. I have been spending the past 4 weeks trying to find work experience that is suitable for Medicine...I received your letter and booklet, earlier today, and I am very thankful."

On the whole, the potential employers have also found the process worthwhile. Jeffrey Ward, the General Manager at Cannizaro House hotel said, “It’s great.” Nilmini Roelens of Roelens Solicitors said:

“We hope to accommodate at least two or three applicants over the summer and to provide the young people concerned with what I hope will be valuable insight into the work at a firm of solicitors. It may be that, from the two or three people we will have met, we can consider at least one for a longer term position at some point in the future.”

We have also had positive e-mails from Merton adult college, St Mark’s family centre, the Vine furniture project and the Ursuline high school.
The reason why I asked for this debate today is that I want to encourage more MPs to take a similar approach, especially in areas such as Mitcham and Morden, where youth unemployment is high and where there are few people who can find opportunities through their daddies or who can afford to enter auctions to support political parties. I recognise that many Members will need help on this, and I hope that the Department for Work and Pensions will be able to offer it.

It is a terrible mistake to have ended the future jobs fund and to have taken away opportunities for people like Kyle in Mitcham and Morden and elsewhere. I am concerned that any new scheme will be so bureaucratic and inflexible that few organisations will want to participate. I understand that Jobcentre Plus will run the scheme. Rather than being hands-off facilitators as I am, jobcentres will hold lists of potential employers and send work experience people to them.

From this summer, it will be mandatory for jobseekers to take placements, so even those who do not want a placement will be placed. I do not think that many people will want to take on an unwilling conscript for work experience. Moreover, as the work experience that is being foisted upon jobseekers could be for as little as just two weeks on the new Government programme, it is hard to see what anyone will get out of it.

In my own experience, such short placements often create more work than they save. An employer spends two weeks showing someone how to do a job, but by the time the jobseeker has learned how to do it, they have left. Then the employer themselves has all their own work to catch up on. Worst of all, though, the new Government programme suffers from exactly the same pitfalls of bureaucracy and inflexibility that the Stranks complained about. Participating employers will have to fill out service level agreements and health and safety questionnaires, and there will be visits from Jobcentre Plus-appointed employer advisers. Firms also have to provide a dedicated mentor or supervisor. As a result, small firms, which make up the majority of employers in my constituency, are unlikely to want to participate, and the quality of work is also likely to be compromised.

Those that want to participate will very much be in a minority. We need high quality organisations, big and small, offering a variety of opportunities to young people who want to find an internship, but who cannot afford it or do not have the right connections.

I am not saying that my scheme is perfect. It is not an alternative to investment in jobs or to the economic growth that we need to create jobs. Of course my party believes the coalition's cuts are too soon and too hard, and that that will endanger jobs and growth. None the less, I hope that my model of flexibility, with MPs or other community leaders acting as a hub for local organisations and local people, will be looked at and learned from. I hope that this debate has been helpful for the Minister.

I will divide my remarks into two halves. First, I congratulate the hon. Lady on a project that is very big society, and exactly the kind of thing local MPs should be doing. She is right to describe our ability to open doors in constituencies, to secure involvement in community projects and to go places other individuals and groups perhaps cannot go. She has clearly done that in her constituency and I praise her for it. I will talk a bit more about that in a moment.

Much of the rest of what the hon. Lady said was complete hokum. She is rewriting history and misrepresenting some of the realities of our work. None the less, I praise her for her sincerity in calling this debate and for the work she is doing; it is absolutely right. I am delighted that Jobcentre Plus is working well with her, but that is no accident. It has specific instructions to do just that. In particular, she talks about the issue of two weeks versus eight. Under the previous Government, a jobseeker lost their benefits if they did work experience for more than two weeks. It was a crazy situation.

One of the first things I received on becoming a Minister was an e-mail from the mother of a young woman who said that her daughter had arranged a month's work experience for herself with a local firm, but the Jobcentre Plus office had told her that if she did it she would lose her benefits. That is clearly a crazy situation, and one that we moved quickly to change. A jobseeker can now do work experience for up to eight weeks while on benefits. If they are moving from that eight weeks into employment or an apprenticeship, that programme can be extended to 12 weeks. Therefore, it is down to the policies of this Government that the hon. Lady can deliver her scheme. Under the previous Government, that would not have been the case. Those young people would have lost their benefits after two weeks.

Siobhain McDonagh: My scheme came about because the future jobs fund had been scrapped. The future jobs fund, for me, was the way forward. I was looking for an alternative and I came up with this idea; it does not replace the future jobs fund.

Chris Grayling: I will come back to that in a moment. The hon. Lady is right to say that it does not replace the future jobs fund; it is part of a package very different from what we had before. My point is that it would have been impossible for her to put together a scheme under the rules that operated under the previous Government. Her scheme is worth while and valuable and I commend her for it.

Let me give some context to the youth unemployment challenge. Youth unemployment today is lower than it was at the general election. The picture of youth unemployment has been building up over a decade. One of the myths is that it is a problem simply linked to recession. If we look at the trends in youth unemployment, we see that it began to rise in 2003 and the problem became more and more significant as the years went by. It was becoming a problem through good times as well as bad.

Siobhain McDonagh: Since the general election, youth unemployment in my constituency has risen, not fallen. The problems are greater now than they were before the general election.
Chris Grayling: The hon. Lady is right to say that; there are now 95 more young people on jobseeker’s allowance in her constituency than at the time of the general election. I accept that point and I accept that she has challenges in her constituency, but I am making a more general point. A number of her colleagues have said—although she has not—that they see youth unemployment as a crisis of the current Government. I am simply making the point that, happily, youth unemployment today is lower—not by a lot, but it is still lower—than at the time of the general election. It is a big challenge for us to bring youth unemployment down, and I regard it as a big problem that we must address, deal with and solve.

Of course, there are different challenges within the overall headline figure of 895,000 young unemployed people that the hon. Lady referred to. Some 300,000 are actually in full-time education, and they show up in the unemployment figures simply because they are looking for a part-time job. The actual figure for young people who are not in education or employment is around 650,000 at the moment. That figure is much too high, but the reality is that within it is a core of young people who represent a real challenge, and I suspect that among them are the young people in the hon. Lady’s constituency whom she described. To me, that core represents one of our biggest employment challenges.

The approach we have taken to tackling youth unemployment has three dimensions. I will walk the hon. Lady through them, step by step. To begin with, however, let me address head-on the issue of the future jobs fund. The future jobs fund was an extremely expensive scheme that provided work placement opportunities in the public and voluntary sectors, not in the private sector. It had virtually no private sector involvement at all. All of the jobs created in this country in the last 12 months—all of the increase in employment—have come in the private sector. The future jobs fund is some three or four times more expensive per job outcome than even the new deal for young people under the previous Government. Apprenticeships are a really powerful tool that will make a big difference in the years ahead.

Alongside that approach, we are dealing with what I have described as shorter-term youth unemployment. The reality is that the vast majority of young people who are unemployed move off JSA within nine months; there is a pretty steady off-flow and after nine months there is a much smaller core of young people who are struggling to get into employment. First and foremost, I want to see that shorter-term group move into employment more quickly, because, even a few months without employment is too long in my view. So we designed the work experience scheme to provide a bridge for young people who did not have previous experience in the labour market or the workplace, to get them into the workplace and give them an extended period of working opportunity of up to eight weeks. The hon. Lady and I are absolutely of like mind about the need to give people an extended opportunity in the workplace and a chance to demonstrate to employers what they can do, so that hopefully—at least in some cases—those employers can offer them jobs. That has certainly happened in many parts of the country.

The hon. Lady is not right about the nature of the rules for the work experience scheme. The scheme is voluntary. The “bureaucracy” that she described is on one sheet of A4 paper. It simply involves signing a piece of paper that says, “I will treat this person responsibly, in the way that I treat my own employees”. That is important, because we do not want excessive bureaucracy. I have been through those forms personally and I can assure her that that is the case.

There will be contact between a Jobcentre Plus employment team member and the employer because that is what the team member is there to do. We have tasked Jobcentre Plus staff not only with changing the rules about the number of weeks someone can do work experience without losing benefits, but with finding work experience opportunities. That is why I am really pleased that the Jobcentre Plus staff in Mitcham and Morden are working in partnership with the hon. Lady. I expect and want our Jobcentre Plus staff to continue to provide her with every support they can provide, because having an engaged local MP working with local employers to increase the number of work experience opportunities is hugely valuable. I commend her for the work she is doing, and I hope it continues and that the Jobcentre Plus staff will be there to work with her to help ensure that the work experience scheme is happening.

Around the country, Jobcentre Plus staff are looking for opportunities. There are now some 35,000 committed work experience places for young people, and thousands
of young people are in work experience placements as we speak. Many have succeeded in going into apprenticeships or full-time employment, and I hope that the number doing so will increase as the months go by. We hope to build the work experience scheme over the next two years, so that we provide 100,000 places to deliver the kind of benefits the hon. Lady has rightly described today.

Then, there is the third leg of our stool. The hon. Lady rightly mentioned the challenges that some young people face. There are many young people who have grown up in difficult circumstances and have been on benefits for a long time, and for whom getting into the workplace is a bigger challenge than for other young people. Perhaps they also lack the right qualifications, motivation and experience, and the knowledge of how to get into the workplace. That is where the work programme comes in. It is designed to deliver much more specialised, personalised and tailored support than has been provided in the past.

Young people who do not have significant issues in their lives will enter the work programme after nine months, which is sooner than under the previous, and much less substantial, new deal programmes. However, young people with particular challenges will enter the work programme after three months and will receive personalised support to help them identify the right opportunities: providers who will secure placements for them, work trials, work experience, training courses and other things that will better equip them to enter the workplace.

Of course, the great benefit of the work programme is that we do not seek to design it from the centre. The hon. Lady talked about bureaucracy earlier, but the whole point about the work programme is that bureaucracy is not there. We are saying to the providers, “You do what you think is best. You develop the right programmes to support these young people and others into the workplace. We’ll pay you when you’re successful.” In each area up and down the country, there are teams of specialists led by prime contractors, including organisations that have real expertise in working with young people, such as the Prince’s Trust.

Chris Grayling: Of course, the whole structure of the work programme is designed to reward excellence. Any organisation that is really good at its job of getting people into work will find a willing entrée with the providers. A whole mix of organisations is involved—from the largest voluntary sector organisations, such as the Prince’s Trust, through to a walled garden project in Yorkshire. We have a whole mix of different organisations providing the support. What matters is what works and that we have solutions that deliver real options for young people, getting those who are unemployed—particularly the long-term unemployed—into the workplace. For me, that is the challenge.

I accept the hon. Lady’s analysis: that we have a problem, in that many young people are stranded and struggling and need to be given a helping hand into the workplace. I hope and believe that the mix of programmes we have put in place—increased numbers of apprenticeships and the work experience scheme, helped by big society projects such as hers, and the intense support provided through the work programme—will start to make a difference, and in a way that I must say is much more affordable to Government than the future jobs fund was. In addition, those programmes will steer young people to where the jobs really are: in the private sector businesses that represent our employment hope for the future.

I believe that that is the right approach. The hon. Lady and I share a commitment to tackling the problem of youth unemployment. We may not agree on all the solutions, but she should know that the Government are committed to solving that problem.

11.30 am

Sitting suspended.
Gypsy and Traveller Planning

2.30 pm

Priti Patel (Witham) (Con): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Weir. I am delighted that the Speaker has granted this debate, and I am thrilled to see so many colleagues here who clearly have a similar interest in the subject. That demonstrates the extent of the significant problems with the issue across the country.

It has been seven months since the debate on 7 December about Gypsy and Traveller sites. Given the Government’s decision to extend until August the consultation on the proposed new planning circulars on Traveller sites, this is an opportune moment to discuss the matter directly with the Minister—I am grateful for his time.

The issue has taken on additional importance in the county of Essex after the decision to evict the occupants of Dale farm, a large site in Basildon. The decision could have a knock-on effect as those evicted seek places to live in other parts of Essex, and probably across the east of England. This is likely to be the last opportunity to debate the matter in Parliament before the consultation period ends, so I know that the Minister will listen closely to the views expressed and the representations made today.

I have a constituency interest in the subject. During the past 14 months, I have heard about several cases of significant concern about the planning system for Gypsy and Traveller sites. Those cases have involved the Planning Inspectorate overturning the decisions of local authorities and granting permission for unauthorised sites. Although I appreciate that those incidents were caused by the inadequate planning system that was inherited from the previous Labour Government—a system that epitomised their culture of top-down targets, particularly through the infamous planning circulars 01/06 and 04/07—this is an opportunity to get it right. People throughout the country have put their faith in the Government to rebalance the planning system through the localism agenda, and it is imperative that the Government do not let them down, so they must take prompt and significant action.

Rehman Chishti (Gillingham and Rainham) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend. On securing the debate. On her point about the top-down culture, the Medway local authority was faced with a regional body saying that we had to take an extortionate quota of Gypsy and Traveller sites, which was completely wrong. I urge the Minister to take on board the fact that it is absolutely right and proper for residents and local authorities to be able to determine need where it arises, rather than having a quota imposed on them.

Priti Patel: I agree absolutely with my hon. Friend. I will mention some local examples before I move to the substantial points to which I would like to draw the Minister’s attention.

The Minister will be aware from a vast amount of correspondence that I have several such sites in my constituency, including Pattiswick. A few weeks ago, the Planning Inspectorate decided to impose a Gypsy site on Pattiswick retrospectively. The site has been an unauthorised development since last autumn, when the occupants arrived—this might sound familiar to colleagues—over a weekend, which is the time when local authorities are least able to respond. The local community in Pattiswick then came together to press Braintree district council to take action. I pay tribute to the local residents of Pattiswick, who worked hard and rallied a lot of resources to start a good campaign. Dozens of letters were sent by members of the community and a petition was started opposing the development. That petition received widespread support, and in the absence of a planning application, Braintree district council began enforcement proceedings against the occupants of the site.

The case went to the High Court. The council had some success in the Court, but the occupants of the site appealed to the Planning Inspectorate against the original enforcement action. A subsequent hearing with the Planning Inspectorate took place in Braintree during the Whitsun recess. I attended it, and I must say that it was quite an eye opener and an education. Although the occupants had shown absolutely no regard for the planning process, the inspectorate gave them planning permission.

Two reasons were given for the decision. First, the inspectorate claimed that permission had to be granted due to a lack of any suitable alternative sites. It then concluded that unless the occupants continued to live on the site, their human rights would be violated. The inspectorate wrote that the “dismissal of the appeal would have a disproportionate effect upon the rights of the appellants under Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights”, which deals with the right to a private and family life. According to the inspectorate, requiring the appellants to vacate the site “would represent a significant interference with their home and family life which…outweighs the limited harm caused by the development in terms of its effect upon the public interest.”

However, it is clear to me that any disruption caused to the occupants by requiring them to leave would be no more than the disruption that they caused themselves when they came and occupied the site in the first place. Such a use of the European convention on human rights is clearly misplaced and wrong.

It is wholly unjust to local residents of Pattiswick that although the Planning Inspectorate gave significant weight to what it felt were the human rights of the occupants, it failed—colleagues will not be surprised to hear this—adequately to consider the rights of the local settled community and the disruption that the incident caused them. Although the council did the right thing in supporting the community through an enforcement action, the planning system ultimately failed the community by favouring people who refused to go through the correct planning process to occupy and develop the site, and who then chose deliberately to play the system and cause maximum cost and disruption to the council and community.

Braintree district council contacted me yesterday, because I asked for the figures on how much the incident cost. The council has racked up considerable costs. Including VAT, the fees for counsel for the High Court injunction came to just under £10,000. The cost of getting the injunction was £20,000, and fees relating to
obtaining the breach of stop notice were £14,000. We should not forget that that is hard-pressed taxpayers’ money. Not only did the decision run roughshod over local people’s views, but the costs involved will deter local councils from taking action when other unauthorised Gypsy and Traveller sites appear.

**Philip Davies** (Shipley) (Con): I agree fully with everything that my hon. Friend has said, but does she agree that one thing that causes lots of problems is the fact that the system—whether it is the local authority’s planning system or the Government’s—never seems to be even-handed? If anybody else were to create an illegal development, it would be taken down in five minutes flat, whereas Gypsies appear to get away with anything they like. Does my hon. Friend agree that the system should treat everybody equally in the face of the law?

**Priti Patel**: Absolutely. I thank my hon. Friend for his comments. What is lacking is fairness, transparency and a level playing field.

**Andrew George** (St Ives) (LD): The hon. Lady makes a strong case for the unacceptability of unauthorised development, whether that is a shop, a factory, a house or anything else, including an encampment of the type that she is discussing. Planning law clearly needs to be enforced. However, if Gypsies or Travellers had the opportunity to live on authorised sites, there would be no need for such developments. Does she not agree that the Government and local authorities must concentrate their minds on ensuring that we increase the number of authorised sites available for Gypsies and Travellers throughout the country?

**Priti Patel**: I thank the hon. Gentleman for his remarks. The fact that there are not enough authorised sites is a significant challenge to local authorities.

**Sir Paul Beresford** (Mole Valley) (Con): Does not my hon. Friend agree that the point being made about Travellers and Gypsies also applies to settled organisations? In one area of my constituency, it is difficult to find land to build on, let alone to put caravans on. We need a balanced approach.

**Priti Patel**: I thank my hon. Friend for that contribution. There is no doubt that this is about balance across all our communities. I shall refer to two other cases before I talk about the consultation.

My constituency has had endless cases. In Tolleshunt Knights, a planning application was made for a site for travelling show people in a wholly unsuitable location, but again Maldon district council’s decision was overturned by the Planning Inspectorate on the basis of the requirements in the current planning circulars. The council rightly pursued a localist agenda while the Planning Inspectorate remained wedded to the paradigm of centralist command and control. As the Minister will know from the substantive correspondence I sent to the Secretary of State about the case, it was badly handled by the Planning Inspectorate, which clearly showed no regard for the Government’s planning policies as laid down in the coalition programme for government. There is a problem with the Planning Inspectorate.

The final case is about Lea lane in Braxted, where a planning application for a Gypsy site is pending and is with the Planning Inspectorate. The development is clearly inappropriate for the area, but there is concern that the Planning Inspectorate, which has form, will grant permission on the basis of the applicant’s arguments about limited site provision and, again, human rights, despite serious question marks over the validity of the application and a series of irregularities that have been pointed out. While it is under consideration, I ask the Minister to do everything in his power to ensure that the Planning Inspectorate fully and comprehensively reviews the representations made by Maldon district council and the local community. It would be shocking and appalling if the Planning Inspectorate continued to progress applications and grant permissions for all the wrong reasons.

Many Members have mentioned a common theme that councils and communities still have their hands tied by previous targets, and it seems that the Planning Inspectorate values the human rights of one group over the rights of the settled community. That has created an unsustainable planning system full of problems, which is a big problem because our communities do not trust the system: they have no faith and confidence in it, so they automatically feel discriminated against; and if they do not have a voice, they do not feel represented. Our communities are left feeling pretty disfranchised and our councils feel powerless to act. There is a challenge for the Government, because they have a strong localism agenda that this problem could undermine.

Those are the reasons why we are here and why the system needs substantial reform. I am strongly in favour of giving local communities greater say and ensuring that their voices are heard. At the last general election, I was pleased to stand on my party’s manifesto, which would have addressed many of those fundamental problems through the pledge to give communities greater control over planning, to limit appeals to the Planning Inspectorate and to return decision-making powers on housing and planning to local councils. “Open Source Planning” highlighted that the Conservatives would take action in government to ensure fairness between the settled and the Traveller communities. We need to start to address the problem.

**Andrew George**: On fairness and even-handedness for the settled community and the unsettled community, which includes those who live in squats and caravans who are “settled” but cannot find adequate accommodation, does the hon. Lady agree that all reports have shown that the life expectancy of Travellers and Gypsies is significantly lower than that of the settled community and that infant mortality and maternal mortality are much higher? In addition, Travellers are hugely disadvantaged in education, with 75% of children regularly in education compared with...

**Mr Mike Weir** (in the Chair): Order. Interventions must be brief.

**Priti Patel**: We have touched on the fundamental problem, which is the real unfairness in the planning system. Ultimately, that has to be resolved.

We can see in the detail of the proposed circular some of the problems that local communities and councils will encounter. It still instructs local authorities to set pitch and plot targets for 15 years and to identify
specific plots for the first five years. As now, those targets could be legally challenged in the courts and appealed at the Planning Inspectorate, with people trying to get planning permission or to fight enforcement action by arguing that the targets set are inadequate. It would also force local authorities to consider favourably applications for temporary planning permission if they cannot demonstrate an up-to-date five-year supply of desirable sites. It states that councils should determine applications from Travellers from anywhere, not only those with local connections, and that provision can be given to Gypsy and Traveller developments on green belt land.

Although the emphasis on locally agreed targets is an improvement on the previous Government’s insistence on top-down national and regional targets, I hope that the Minister will look again at the necessity of implementing the draft circular, which will maintain a damaging imbalance in the planning system. That imbalance must be redressed. We need real balance and fairness.

Andrew Percy (Brigg and Goole) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend on her speech. Does not that same policy also require local authorities to take into account historical demand? That could lead to communities such as mine, which have historically had a Traveller population, having an influx of people who have no real local links.

Priti Patel: I absolutely concur.

Returning to the circular, I have talked about the damaging imbalances in the planning system. If Ministers want to continue to have a separate planning circular for Gypsy and Traveller sites, I encourage them to consider including measures to support the rights of settled communities. For example, the circular could contain a presumption against retrospective applications and appeals to the Planning Inspectorate. It could also emphasise the importance of decision makers valuing equally the rights and representations of the settled community and of Gypsies and Travellers. Communities such as those in Pattiswick, Tolleshunt Knights or Braxted are not asking for special treatment or favours: all they want is a planning system that fully represents their views, gives them a fair chance and does not disadvantage them because of their residential status.

I want to impress on the Minister the importance of ensuring that councils and communities are adequately resourced and able to set appropriate pitch allocations. I can tell him now that that is a grave concern to the three local authorities that cover my constituency. They simply do not have the resources they need; when they try to deal with the problem, they come up against endless barriers. Any requirements in future policies on local authorities to set targets must enable them to do so with the confidence that they are in control of developments and not at the mercy of the courts or, in particular, the Planning Inspectorate.

Finally, I would like the Government to tackle what I consider to be an alarming culture in the Planning Inspectorate. From the cases I have come across in the past 14 months, it seems that the inspectorate is too willing to cower down in the face of human rights arguments, which are the first port of call in the cases that I have seen. That is not surprising given that the Planning Inspectorate has held workshops for its inspectors to learn from Gypsy and Traveller groups about their planning needs. In the interests of balance, I ask the Minister to encourage the Planning Inspectorate to hold workshops with our constituents, who have all been disproportionately and inappropriately affected by developments, so that the inspectorate gains a better understanding of their needs and rights. There is a greater than ever need for that now, because we will have neighbourhood plans that our constituents will influence.

Mr Aidan Burley (Cannock Chase) (Con): My hon. Friend is making some powerful points about planning law being applied equally to all people. Does she agree that there are also laws about how people live, whether they are settled in a legal camp or not? Gypsies will not earn the respect of the settled community until they agree to be subject to the same tax laws as everybody else, start paying into the national insurance system, agree to be subject to the same tax laws as everybody else, start paying into the national insurance system, have an address by which they can be contacted, abide by the byelaws of an area and start cleaning up after themselves. They will not earn the respect of the settled community until they live and plan like everyone else.

Priti Patel: I thank my hon. Friend for his remarks. I am about to wrap up—

Mr David Ward (Bradford East) (LD): Will the hon. Lady give way?

Priti Patel: No, I am going to make some final points. My hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Mr Burley) is right: with rights, come responsibilities. I address my final points to the Minister. Will he ensure that Government policies support councils in taking enforcement actions against unauthorised developments and that the planning system is genuinely fair to all parties? Action needs to be taken to end the practice of placing the rights of one group above those of others, and the powers of the Planning Inspectorate to interfere with decisions taken by democratically accountable councils should be limited. Finally, will he guarantee that local communities and councils are in control of future development in their areas and that they have their destinies in their own hands? That is very much at the heart of localism. I thank the Minister for his time today and for listening to me, and I look forward to other contributions from colleagues.

Several hon. Members rose—

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): Order. A large number of Members wish to speak in the debate. I hope to start the wind-ups at about 3.30 pm, so I plead for the briefest possible contributions. I also remind hon. Members that interventions should be brief.

2.50 pm

Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) on securing the debate and on her excellent speech. My constituents would want to be associated with many of her points. I declare an interest as a serving councillor on Kettering borough council.
I would like to tell hon. Members about a village called Braybrooke in my constituency. There are 22 villages in the parliamentary constituency of Kettering. Braybrooke is situated between the towns of Desborough and Market Harborough, right on the edge of my constituency and the edge of the county of Northamptonshire. About 325 residents in Braybrooke are on the electoral roll, so it is a small village. However, it is unique in having the only primary school where the pupils are 100% Traveller children, and where the local settled community do not send their children at all. Such a situation exists because of the increase in settlements—pitches—from the Gypsy and Traveller community around the village.

The planning system’s failure to deal with the spread of unauthorised development means that the demographics of the village are being changed in an unacceptable way. I lay the blame for that on the circulars issued by the previous Government and the previous Deputy Prime Minister, which my hon. Friend the Member for Witham mentioned. However, the coalition Government have a chance to change that. My constituents in Kettering, the residents of Braybrooke and myself are looking to the Minister to do something about the matter. We have been in government for 15 months and a consultation is under way. We need to get a move on because my constituents’ hopes have been raised by initiatives such as the Localism Bill and the consultation. We want the Minister to introduce some appropriate policies to stop these unauthorised developments in the future.

Mr Ward: I would be very surprised if all the children attending the school were living on unauthorised sites. Many schools in Bradford are 100% white or 100% Asian. Is the hon. Gentleman saying that we should not allow those schools to exist?

Mr Hollobone: No. What I am saying is that local primary schools are comprehensive and they should attract children from the local area, regardless of their background. This is not an issue of race; it is an issue of behaviour. When I visited the school recently—it is an excellent school that provides good education—I discovered that one of the big problems was that, especially in the summer term, a lot of the Traveller children do not turn up because they are off travelling. A member of the settled community would be reluctant to send their child to a school with such a disruptive atmosphere. I am trying to approach the subject in a sensitive and thoughtful way without going down the route of saying that this is some kind of racial problem. It is an educational and behavioural problem, which needs to be addressed.

Mr Stewart Jackson (Peterborough) (Con): As usual, my hon. Friend is making a very astute speech. Does he share my concern that the disruption and huge turnover of children in the Traveller community has a massive impact not only on the education of children who are not Traveller children, but on resource allocation for teachers and teaching support staff in those schools? In the long run, that has an impact on standard assessment tests and other results.

Mr Hollobone: My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. He speaks out on behalf of his constituents in Peterborough extremely well. On this issue, I am sure he has the pulse of not only his constituency but the nation. As my hon. Friend the Member for Witham said, Travellers are using the Human Rights Act 1998 in relation to access to local schools and as a way to get permission for their previously unauthorised developments. I am trying to say that we should look at the matter the other way round. What about the rights of the settled community in the village of Braybrooke, who are not sending their children to the local school?

Mike Weatherley (Hove) (Con): After pressure from me and my constituency office, we have managed to persuade Brighton and Hove council to charge some long-term van dwellers at Medina house some rates to pay for the services they use. Does my hon. Friend agree that that is a good way forward and that some councils could consider doing that to make these people integrate more into the community, or at least to get some return for the services they use?

Mr Hollobone: I am most grateful for my hon. Friend’s intervention; he makes an extremely powerful point. As our mutual hon. Friend the Member for Cannock Chase (Mr Burley) said earlier, it is all very well for Travellers and others to jump up and down about their rights, but on the other side of the equation is their responsibilities. My hon. Friend the Member for Hove (Mike Weatherley) makes an excellent point. Everyone else pays their taxes in the normal way, so Travellers should also pay their fair due to society.

Andrew George: As indeed they do on the authorised sites, where those charges and, indeed, local taxes are paid in the proper manner. I do not know about the circumstances in the villages in the hon. Gentleman’s constituency, but the conundrum that we as Parliament and the Government are facing is that we have to accept—the hon. Gentleman said he is looking at the matter in a sensitive and thoughtful way—that there is a significant unfulfilled need for Traveller sites in this country. The question is, how do we fulfil that need in a way that does not involve Travellers taking their rights and demanding to live on unauthorised developments?

We clearly must not allow that to carry on.

Mr Hollobone: I just do not get this point. In the borough of Kettering, lots of people do not have access to the accommodation and housing they need, and thousands of people are on the local authority housing waiting list. It would clearly be wrong to say that, because somebody cannot find the house they need, they can go into the countryside and start building a home of their own. The law would rightly come down on those individuals. Yet members of the Travelling community seem to be able to do exactly that, and they are using the Human Rights Act to get away with it. That is wrong.

My constituents’ fears are being heightened by the latest development around the village of Braybrooke: a site called Greenfields, which is a 37 acre plot. According to the map that has been given to me, the site seems to have been divided up into some 60 plots. It was acquired in the 1990s by a property speculator and the plots are being sold off individually, largely to members of the Travelling community. Buildings—dwellings—are already on some of those plots. The worry is that retrospective planning applications are being made in respect of those dwellings. Given the very poor decisions that are
being made by the Planning Inspectorate, the applicants are pretty confident that they will be given retrospective permission to remain there.

Mark Garnier (Wyre Forest) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend for giving way. Does he agree that one of the ways to deal with the matter is simply not to allow—

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): Order. There is a Division in the House. I suspend the sitting for 15 minutes.

2.59 pm
Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

3.14 pm
On resuming—

Mr Mike Weir (in the Chair): The debate will now continue until 4.15 pm.

Mark Garnier: I thank my hon. Friend again for giving way.

Mr Hollobone: It has been a long intervention.

Mark Garnier: I think it has been one of the longest interventions in the history of Westminster Hall. My hon. Friend mentioned the planning rules in relation to illegal sites. Does he agree with residents of the village of Churchill in my constituency—an illegal Traveller site has been set up there in the way he has described—that one answer would be to get rid of the rule that allows retrospective planning permission? Planning permission would therefore have to be sought before sites were set up, rather than retrospectively, with all the nonsense about human rights and the rest of it that goes with that.

Mr Hollobone: I thank my hon. Friend for that helpful intervention, and I agree with him. The Government need to be far more proactive in tackling the problem of retrospective planning applications, particularly where it applies to the countryside.

There is another issue, which probably affects Wyre Forest as much as Kettering. Those of us with rural or semi-rural constituencies hear all the time about the protections against development in the green belt, but the open countryside in our constituencies seems to have less protection than the green belt. That is sad and regrettable, and it is enhancing the problem of unauthorised development by Gypsy and Traveller groups.

Before the break, I was talking about the new Greenfields site in Braybrooke, which has 60 plots on 37 acres. If it were developed in full, it would be bigger than the village of Braybrooke, near which it is situated, and the local demographics would be changed even more. The difficulty the local council has lies in enforcing the existing planning regulations.

Let me give Members a brief potted history of the site. The land was first acquired in the 1990s by a business that subdivides fields and then sells small parcels of the land via the internet as what it calls leisure plots, or simply as land investments. Early sales resulted in some plots being fenced off, and physical works were undertaken, which were unrelated to agriculture. Caravans were brought on to some plots and used for residential purposes. Wooden buildings were built, and the land was used for keeping horses.

Enforcement notices against such development were issued and served on two specific plots and on the site as a whole. None of the owners appealed the enforcement notices, and those requiring the removal of caravans and associated development are still in force, placing a continuing liability on the landowners. Since the early 1990s, a series of other enforcement notices and stop notices has been served, but the council’s hands are increasingly tied by the guidance on enforcing enforcement notices, which imposes on it the duty to weigh up the likelihood of success, the costs and the proportionality of different courses of action. The end result is that nothing is done.

Simon Kirby (Brighton, Kemptown) (Con): Does my hon. Friend agree that existing enforcement powers in relation to unauthorised encampments such as the recent one at Happy Valley in Woodingdean in my constituency are totally insufficient, and that temporary or permanent sites can be only part of the solution? We need to be clear that councils need more powers to enforce notices on what are clearly unauthorised encampments.

Mr Hollobone: I am grateful for that helpful intervention. We are beginning to get from the debate some specific courses of action that we would like the Minister to take on board. One would be to deal with the issue of retrospective applications; another would be to beef up the enforcement mechanisms. Unless we have an effective enforcement regime, the problem will grow and become even more of a headache.

We have talked a little about whether there should be a requirement for local authorities to plan for authorised Traveller pitches. If the Government make that a requirement, the proposal is for there to be transitional arrangements whereby local authorities will have six months to put in place a five-year land supply for Traveller sites. My local authority, Kettering borough council, says that six months is not enough and it needs at least 12 months to identify suitable places.

Another thing I want to stress is that, even though consultation is under way, I understand that proposals to change planning policy guidance should be treated as emerging legislation as far as local planning authorities are concerned. Yet there seems to be doubt among some Kettering borough council officials about the weight of the advice. I should like the Minister to state clearly that local authorities should heed the direction of emerging planning guidance from the Government when they make decisions on planning applications.

Finally, please can we do something about the planning inspectorate in Bristol? It is not good enough that it has taken some of the decisions it has, especially on Gypsy and Traveller planning applications. Often, the people concerned do not visit the local authority in question. They do not really know about the local area on which they make decisions. If the coalition Government are serious about devolving decision making down to local residents in the communities where they live, we must take those appeal decisions at a more local level, to ensure that the true voice of local opinion is heard loud and clear.
Sir Paul Beresford (Mole Valley) (Con): I shall try to be quick, and will concentrate mostly—directly or indirectly—on enforcement. The Minister can turn to his page on enforcement, so he will be ready.

One thing that I like about the consultation, which has been mentioned already, is the sentence: “Many people think that current planning policy treats traveller sites more favourably than it does other housing and that it is easier for one group of people to gain planning permission particularly on Green Belt land.”

Hear, hear. In my area, Surrey, 87% of the land is green belt. The situation is difficult for Travellers and Traveller sites, and it is also difficult for the settled community. My constituency has a number of official Gypsy sites. There are few or no problems, and the Gypsies are part of the community. Everything is settled and clear. We have two planning authorities in my constituency, Mole Valley and Guildford. Because we are close to Epsom downs we have trouble, particularly with Gypsies who come in from across a little patch of water, with a distinct accent—not mine; not even similar. They come and squat.

The Travellers tend to use expert legal advice. There are a couple of agencies involving solicitors that are expert in such matters, and they are paid for by Travellers’ groups. They enable the Travellers to become the Artful Dodgers of the planning system. One of the techniques, in some of the better areas of my constituency, is to purchase a patch of land where there is no hope of any form of planning permission for residence. Either Travellers or people pretending to be Travellers make those applications, forcing the locals to panic, club together and purchase the land at an outrageous price. If enforcement were sure, and those local people knew that the inevitable refusal of the application would be followed by enforcement that really happened, those scams would fall apart.

The second technique that I want to mention is squatting, something which the Government are, I understand, looking at. Squatting in rural areas is done by Travellers. They do not squat in buildings, but they bring their buildings with them and squat on the land with caravans and so on. In my area, they also squat on the land with their animals—horses. The difficulty is that at the moment when the bailiffs arrive, after a court order has been obtained, at least one mare, if not every one in the paddock, is about to give birth. A human would be put in an ambulance and whisked off to a maternity ward, but if the bailiffs approach a mare that is about to give birth, the rules apparently require the animal to be left there. Whether a birth happens or not is highly speculative—I am quite sure that it does not. However, what happens is that some of the farmers in my constituency—I know of one in particular—cannot use the land, because it is occupied by a couple of dozen horses.

When, finally, enforcement happens, the mess that is generally left behind is unbelievable. Perhaps the way the site is left could be included in consideration of the matter, so the people pushed off by the enforcement order pay for the removal, clean-up and restoration of the site. That would be helpful and might encourage many of those who cover the site with gravel and other things not to do so.

The third technique is to buy the land, generally with cash, from whatever source. That generally happens at the weekend, when the people arrive with caravans, trucks, bulldozers, loads of gravel, piping and so on. By the end of Sunday, they are installed. The electricity and water are tapped in, whether legally or not, and then the nonsense starts—hopeless applications, refusals, appeals and more refusals. To be fair, the Planning Inspectorate in Bristol has been quite good in my area and has backed the local authority, mainly. However, when the enforcement notices are delivered, there is an appeal against the notice. Then, as the Minister is obviously well aware, another, subtly different, application is put in. On and on it continues.

As has been mentioned, the people concerned do not pay council tax or taxes. They use the local system—the schools, health authorities, and so on—and the arguments start. The neighbourhood barneys are horrendous—there are accusations of theft and burglary—but I must be fair; I am sure that in one case, although the people who committed the crime might have been associated with the people on the site, they were not people from the site. Nevertheless, there is, to put it mildly, community disharmony.

I want to outline two cases. The first is in Guildford on the A246. It is a greenfield pasture, which is fenced in. There have been three applications and three refusals, and at least two failed appeals. There are two derelict caravans on the site. As one hon. Member has mentioned, the council are wondering whether it should bother with its enforcement notice, because the cost will be astronomical and it can imagine that, once it gets part of the way there, another application will be made, and it will be back to square one. We need that side of enforcement to be pushed.

Andrew George: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about planning in general, although not particularly about Gypsy encampments; those who want to abuse the planning system often use the ruse of making retrospective applications, then appealing, and then reapplying, exactly as he has described. It is a weakness of the planning system, which is not necessarily the issue before the Chamber.

Sir Paul Beresford: I noticed the nature and the subject of the debate, and have not strayed, although the hon. Gentleman has.

Anyone trying to sell or improve their property finds a big sign on the A246, which is the main road, saying “Romany Stables”. Opportunities to sell property have fallen in number because of that apparent threat. The situation is becoming disgraceful.

The second case involves a Gypsy who does not live in Mole Valley. He lives many miles away and used to—he probably still does—drive a lovely Rolls-Royce. He bought greenfield pasture land in the green belt. He sold it to his wife, who sold it to her cousin, who sold it too, and on it goes. Finally, a small group moved in there in the way in which I have described: gravel, electricity and water were built in over the weekend. There were five caravans, one of which looks like two mobile homes linked together. There was the usual pattern of enforcement notices, appeals and planning applications. The last appeal was quite a clever one. The order was to allow temporary accommodation, while the local authority looked for alternative sites over a period of time.
My concern is my local authority. I am worried that, having looked—not very well and in a limited area—and having weighed up the fact that a sympathy that has no grounds in planning is being generated, the local authority may use a sympathy consideration, not a planning consideration, and allow the application on a greenfield site to go ahead. If someone such as the local farmer had built a house on that site, it would have been bulldozed—even though his children go to the local school and use the local hospital and doctor's service—but that has not happened in this case because, as insinuated by the first sentence I read out, such groups are perceived to have an opportunity and a right that the rest of us do not. I ask the Minister to have a look before my local authority stubs its toes and gives permission, to the fury of many of us.

3.30 pm

Gavin Williamson (South Staffordshire) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) on securing the debate and on an excellent speech. I must confess my utter disappointment that we have to have this debate, the third on Gypsy and Traveller sites in this Parliament: the first was in September, next was the one I secured in December and this one now. What adds to the disappointment is that although during the December debate the Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, the hon. Member for Hazel Grove (Andrew Stunell), made it clear that the planning circular was to be reviewed and that the consultation would start early in the new year, we had to wait until April, I think, for the consultation document. Having read through it, I cannot help but voice my deep disappointment at the changes suggested.

In my constituency, since December's debate on the planning circular and on Gypsy and Traveller sites, another nine pitches have granted in the village of Calf Heath by the Minister. That happened just last week, against the express wishes and desires of local people who do not want those pitches. Why do they not want them? For the simple reason that, in South Staffordshire, more than 40 pitches have been developed in the years since 2007, many of them granted on appeal. It is not a matter of “not in my backyard”. Only the other week, the local planning authority granted planning permission for new Gypsy and Traveller pitches on a site that it believed was appropriate and sensible for such pitches. It is a matter of getting pitches where they are suitable and where there is proven demand—ensuring that they are in the right places. I do not think the Planning Inspectorate gives much consideration to or has much knowledge about where the right places are; nor, I am sorry to say, judging by a decision the Minister made last week, does he seem to have much common sense when looking at this matter or in making the correct decision. Just before this weekend, in the village of Hatherton, we had another invasion on land owned by a Gypsy and Traveller family where hard standings have started to be laid down. Again, it is the taxpayers of South Staffordshire who have to foot the bill to get the enforcement notice to stop the building.

The proposals in the planning circular consultation document are weak-willed and lily-livered and will not deliver on the promises that we made as a party before the general election or in the coalition agreement. I remember quite specifically in the coalition agreement a specific promise to protect the green belt. I must take issue with my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone), who said that the green belt is far more protected than everywhere else; I wish he were correct, but it certainly is not protected when it comes to Gypsy and Traveller policy. More than 60% of applications from Gypsy and Traveller communities on green belt land that go to appeal are granted, compared with 19% of applications from the settled population. Equality for the settled population is not something that the Department for Communities and Local Government understands.

I ask the Minister to deal with protection of green belt land when he winds up the debate. Looking through the consultation document, the only thing that I noticed that seems to be different in the new circular is the removal of the word “usually” from the old circular’s reference to “usually inappropriate development” on green belt land. I am not sure whether that is seen as a dynamic policy shift in Eland house, but in South Staffordshire it certainly is not. I am slightly concerned that the change in the policy will have no effect for residents and for my constituents. We need to make it clearer that inappropriate development on the green belt should not be allowed. Of those sites in South Staffordshire given planning permission by the Planning Inspectorate, every one has been said by the inspectorate to be inappropriate development in the green belt, but it still awards permission. The balance is not right. The policy proposal does not go far enough, it is not strong enough and it is not clear enough.

My hon. Friend the Member for Kettering picked up on the important point about the six-month transition period. I think he was voicing the view of Kettering borough council in saying that 12 months is an adequate time; I think that even 12 months is an incredibly tight period, bearing in mind that the provision is for a five-year period. We need to be looking at between 18 months and two years. I hope that the Minister takes those comments on board.

Temporary pitches are a real problem. Increasingly, the Planning Inspectorate awards sites temporary permission. I never thought I would be in the Chamber defending regional spatial strategies but, ironically, we would almost be better off had we maintained them, compared with where we are now with Government fudge. I am shocked to be giving some support to the Opposition spokesman, the hon. Member for Derby North (Chris Williamson), but the simple reality is that temporary pitches are not being taken into account as part of the provision for accommodation needs in a local area. That is wrong. Can the Minister give us details of how many temporary applications have been granted for Gypsy and Traveller sites over the past 15 years? I am sure his officials, who are busy working away behind me, can provide details of how many of those temporary pitch grants have then been rescinded, enabling them to be got rid of. I hazard a guess—I do not know this, but I am sure your officials will be able to give you the information before you get to your feet—

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill): The Chair has not got to his feet.
Gavin Williamson: I am sure, Mr Weir, when the Minister gets to his feet, he will say that the figure is between zero and five—closer to zero, I imagine.

The simple fact is that when temporary permission is granted, it might as well be permanent permission, because there is no way of getting the sites closed down and cleared off. In his summation, I hope that the Minister can explain how the Government will deal with that, so that temporary permissions are indeed temporary. I very much look forward to welcoming the Minister to South Staffordshire, to talk to the many people affected by the decisions of the Department and to give the people of South Staffordshire a clear understanding of what the Government are striving to do to improve the position.

Andrew George: The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right that the primary purpose is to bear down on the problem of unauthorised sites. Presumably, however, he accepts that there is substantial unfulfilled need. How does he propose that the Government go about meeting it?

Gavin Williamson: I am grateful for the hon. Gentleman’s intervention, although I am curious about how many Gypsy and Traveller pitches there are in St Ives and the extent to which they are a problem. There are many vacant Gypsy and Traveller sites in my constituency of South Staffordshire. What is happening is that some in the Gypsy and Traveller community are using the loophole in the law for personal gain—they are exploiting it. That is costing my taxpayers in South Staffordshire a vast amount of money to pay for enforcement action. There are surplus sites, but unfortunately the good people at the Planning Inspectorate are not able, or do not seem willing to take that into account. What we have is a community exploiting a bad law—a bad planning circular—for personal gain. That is what makes so many people in South Staffordshire so very angry.

Will the Minister ensure that the consultation results in proper protection for the green belt? Will he also ensure that temporary provision is taken into consideration? If he can offer some guidance on how temporary provisions may be removed, that would be greatly pleasing, as would a date when he will visit South Staffordshire. We look forward to welcoming him to the very few green fields that are left after the previous Government’s policy, which remains in place.

3.40 pm

Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) on this timely debate in the light of the current consultation. I want to raise the concerns of villages to the north of my constituency near the urban fringe around Coventry, and to concentrate on the planning issues. Given what we have heard about the planning system, it is entirely right that the Government should set out to change the system. I echo the concerns expressed by my hon. Friend the Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) and for South Staffordshire (Gavin Williamson) about the delays in the Government’s introduction of changes. We spoke about that during the general election campaign and as soon as we came into government. We have raised expectations in communities, but we are failing to realise them. The broad thrust of the Government’s action to deal with such issues is the Localism Bill, which aims to give power back to local communities, and to enable them to shape their areas.

Provisions in the Localism Bill will deal with the existing situation when someone develops land without planning consent. The system is that they are encouraged to apply for retrospective planning consent with a right of appeal against the enforcement notice. The intention in our policy document was that both issues would be dealt with. The purpose of the changes we are introducing is to address the issues of local communities. My communities have raised three reservations, and there are three more that I would like the Minister to respond to.

First, I echo the comments of my hon. Friends the Members for Kettering and for South Staffordshire about the transitional time scale. There is a group in my constituency called BRAID—Barnacle residents against inappropriate development. As at Braybrooke in Kettering, illegal development in Barnacle threatens to overwhelm the village and the host community. I support BRAID’s contention that the imposition of a six-month time scale for councils to put in place a five-year deliverable supply of sites for Travellers is simply too short. BRAID argues that many authorities will not have time to carry out an assessment of needs, and will find themselves having to treat such applications favourably—I will return to that expression—before finalising their five-year plan. Whenever there is a time limit, there may be discussion about it, and my hon. Friend the Member for South Staffordshire referred to a year. My community would like a realistic period of two years for local councils to carry out that task.

The second issue is the presumption to “treat favourably”. The draft policy document states:

“Where a local authority does not have a 5 year deliverable supply of gypsy and Traveller pitches, the authority should take action to address the issues of local communities. My community has raised three reservations, and there are three more that I would like the Minister to respond to.

A third matter, to which my colleagues have referred, is the behaviour of planning inspectors. Rugby borough council in my constituency has for many years had to consider a variety of applications for new sites, and in 2009 it approved its draft core strategy, which included a requirement that future developments should be limited to a maximum of 15 pitches per main rural settlement or parish area. That decision by locally elected councillors was due to the fact that two areas already have substantial Traveller provision.

When that strategy was submitted to the Secretary of State earlier this year, the planning inspector decided to strike out the requirement for a maximum number of pitches, citing as justification the guidance in circular 01/2006. Local representatives are frustrated that that justification is based on five-year-old guidance, when it
I am distinctly unimpressed with some of the Government proposals in the consultation, not least because local authorities that have to deal with the situation.

During the planning process, I hope that the Minister will guard against people contributing to the debate with ongoing prejudice and discriminating against a minority community. Such discrimination leads to all sorts of social difficulties such as kids being bullied at school, people not getting jobs for which they are perfectly qualified, and friends being thrown out of pubs simply because they happen to live on a legitimate Traveller site. I hope the Minister will confirm that such pitfalls will be avoided when the measures for England are set out.

There are, of course, some planning anomalies and difficulties in Wales. There is an ongoing case at Clayford lane near Saundersfoot, and there are some difficulties concerning the definition of a Traveller, what constitutes a Traveller in a legal sense, whether an application for a site has to be in the name of a Traveller, and whether those who may subsequently occupy the site would meet Traveller criteria. That case has resulted in considerable anger on the part of the 60 or more residents in the area. They feel that it is somewhat harder for them to jump through the planning hoops as part of the non-Traveller community than as part of the Traveller community, even though that community includes people who may not even legitimately be part of it. There is no doubt that by making special provision for the Traveller community—albeit for all the right reasons—we have almost by accident created a situation in which we are causing resentment towards a community rather than respect for it, which is the opposite of what we intended. I hope that the Minister will take that into account during the consultation in England.

In short, a balance must be struck between the non-Traveller ratepayer, the legitimate Traveller community that brings—certainly in my constituency—so much value, and the ever-present and often misused and misquoted Human Rights Act that makes up part of the overall mix. Unless we get the balance right, it will not only be bad for the ratepayer, but it will be bad for local authorities that have to deal with the situation. Above all, my main word of caution in the social context is that that will be bad for minority communities which, as we stated in our election manifesto, we seek to respect and welcome where possible.
3.52 pm

Chris Williamson (Derby North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir, and I congratulate the hon. Member for Witham (Priti Patel) on securing the debate. Debates about the Travelling community often tend to generate more heat than light, but today we have heard some useful contributions. I did not agree with everything that hon. Members said, but we heard some helpful pointers to a way forward. Anxiety about the issue clearly exists in a number of communities—that is stating the obvious—and it is incumbent on Members to represent the views and concerns of their constituents. I would like to make it clear, however, that the Opposition Communities and Local Government Front-Bench team believe that the law should apply equally to all sections of our community. There should be no special favours for any community, whether the Travelling or the settled community.

With all due respect to the hon. Member for Witham, her criticism of the previous Administration was a little unfair. They did not get everything right, and some criticisms are legitimate, but a good deal of work was undertaken under the previous Labour Government and a considerable number of additional sites were created. The introduction of temporary stop notices made a useful contribution to the whole issue of dealing with the Travelling community. The hon. Lady’s faith in the Localism Bill could be misplaced because it might not secure the outcomes to which she alluded.

Andrew Percy: The hon. Gentleman reminds me of a point about fairness that I missed out during my intervention. He talks about fairness, but I can give one example of where the system is not working. We have had an application relating to the village green in Brigg for a considerable period of time. A Traveller family has now moved on to that site and we are unable to progress that application properly because the human rights legislation and planning circulars introduced by the previous Government have prevented us from moving that family on. Where is the balance and fairness to both parts of the community?

Chris Williamson: The hon. Gentleman makes a pertinent point and gives an example from his constituency. The Government clearly need to look at such situations and find a way forward. Such things no doubt cause considerable anger in the hon. Gentleman’s community, so he is right to put that on record.

I will return to the point that the hon. Member for Witham made about the Localism Bill because I am not convinced that it will secure the outcomes for which she hopes. The proposition is that there will be no regional targets, and it is expected that each local authority throughout the country will determine what is appropriate for its area. Given today’s discussion, there is a recognition among most—if not all—hon. Members that one of the biggest problems relating to Travellers arises due to inadequate numbers of legitimate official sites. If we were able to provide those additional sites, the problems of unauthorised encampments would be somewhat diminished.

If we put the onus to provide Traveller sites on to individual local authorities, they may take the view that there is no need for such a site in their area. We have already had that problem, and I fear that such situations may be exacerbated by the changes brought in by the Localism Bill. Paradoxically, the Bill could lead to an increase in the unauthorised encampments about which the hon. Lady is so concerned.

Priti Patel: Does the hon. Gentleman accept that, under the Localism Bill, giving local residents opportunities and empowering them to make their views heard will be paramount when it comes to taking such decisions? Surely that would end the lack of balance in a system in which the views of local residents are not heard and a disproportionate voice is given to the Travelling community.

Chris Williamson: I am not sure that the Travelling community is given a disproportionate voice. Hon. Members have outlined examples of abuses and cases in which sections of that community may have exploited loopholes in human rights legislation. I repeat that we all want to ensure that there is adequate provision for the Travelling community, and fairness for the settled and Travelling communities, and we will achieve that only through a significant increase in numbers of legitimate sites. My fear and worry is that localism legislation may make that more difficult to achieve.

The hon. Lady also mentioned workshops for Travellers and suggested—that tongue in cheek, I suspect—that there should be workshops on planning laws for the settled community. That is perhaps a bit unfair. We are talking about a minority community that has real difficulties, and the hon. Member for St Ives (Andrew George) pointed to issues such as planning, and the legislation and the outcomes. It is appropriate and helpful to work with that community and to outline not only its rights, but its responsibilities under planning legislation. That was a positive step by the Department for Communities and Local Government.

Andrew George: On the subject of Government proposals, what is particularly encouraging is the proposal that they will provide £50,000 to support training for councillors in how the relevant legislation works and how to ensure that the problems that have been raised today can be settled within local communities.

Chris Williamson: I am glad that the hon. Gentleman made that intervention because it was one of the points that I intended to touch on if there was time. There are indeed some helpful proposals in the consultation document, and that one is useful. It is important that councillors are given appropriate training and the wherewithal to deal with what is often a thorny and difficult issue when they are on the front line dealing with these complex problems.

I agreed with the point made by the hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) about rights and responsibilities but, again, the antidote would be more authorised sites—I keep returning to that point. He was probably being slightly tongue in cheek when he suggested that there was a comparison between homeless people building unauthorised settlements in the countryside and the way in which Travelling communities establish unauthorised encampments. Clearly, that is totally point, if I may put it that way to him, because where would a homeless family or a homeless individual be able to get the necessary building materials and the wherewithal to
construct a house without planning permission in the countryside? That false comparison does not help to take the argument forward.

The hon. Gentleman also commented about dealing with retrospective planning permission. I think that he is suggesting that the Government should consider eliminating the ability for planning authorities to grant retrospective planning approval. Although that might deal with the problem that we are discussing today, if it ever came to pass, it might involve unforeseen, unintended consequences that could be very detrimental to his constituents in the fullness of time.

Gavin Williamson: I am listening intently to what the hon. Gentleman is saying and trying to understand the position of Opposition Front Benchers. Do they support the old circular? Do they support the proposed new circular? Do they think that it should be tougher or stronger? I would be interested to hear his views about that.

Chris Williamson: We are very clear that there is a need for some improvement in the present situation, which does create difficulties. As I pointed out, the previous Administration took significant steps forward. However, we welcome the consultation exercise in which the present Government are engaged and we will fully co-operate with them when that has concluded. I do not want to state firmly that our position is one thing or another, because we need to wait for the outcome of the consultation. It would be wrong to prejudge what the outcome will be. It might be that helpful improvements could be made, but I do not want to say that we must stick steadfastly with the existing arrangement, or that we should do x, y or z, until we know the outcome of the consultation.

I probably do not have time to deal with all the other points that were made, but I shall touch on a few. The hon. Member for Mole Valley (Sir Paul Beresford) referred to the need for stronger enforcement. Yes, of course there should be enforcement, but until we deal with the root cause of why unauthorised encampments are established in the first place, there will probably always be a need to undertake enforcement, however strong it is. There will always be unlawful encampments unless there is an adequate provision of legitimate, authorised encampments for the Travelling community.

Sir Paul Beresford: I pointed out earlier that the settled community also occasionally tries to do exactly what has been described, and the enforcement goes through quickly and the buildings are knocked down. However, the deviousness with which the planning system is manipulated by the Travelling community in relation to some of the sites in my constituency, where there is a considerable demand from both that community and the settled community, means that it persists beyond what is acceptable.

Chris Williamson: The hon. Gentleman makes a fair point to which the consultation exercise and the Government will need to respond.

I am delighted by the damascene conversion of the hon. Member for South Staffordshire (Gavin Williamson) on the importance of the regional spatial strategies, so I hope that the Government will recognise that.

I concurred with the hon. Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart), who made the very helpful comment that not all Travellers are bad. There is sometimes a dangerous tendency for people to misinterpret these debates and to caricature hon. Members as suggesting that everyone in the Travelling community is a rogue and a bad person—clearly that is not the case. I was delighted that the hon. Gentleman made that comment from the other side of the Chamber.

I conclude by reiterating that we await with interest the outcome of the consultation exercise. We will co-operate fully with the Government when the relevant documentation has been published.

4.6 pm

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill): It is a pleasure to see you in the Chair, Mr Weir. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Witham (Priti Patel) on securing the debate and thank all hon. Members who participated. Every one made legitimate and significant points, because these are areas of real concern. I thank the hon. Member for Derby North (Chris Williamson) for the Opposition’s offer of co-operation once the consultation has concluded.

It is important to put the issue in context and say that we are in the process of consulting. I therefore hope that my hon. Friend will understand if I am at pains to ensure that the Government do not at this stage prejudge the consultation. We are consulting because we recognise that there is a problem. I appreciate, from the observations of a number of hon. Members today, that there is a sense of frustration, but I hope that they, too, will accept that, inevitably, the process of legislation cannot be gone through overnight. Some of the measures that the Government are taking to tackle this issue require primary legislation, which is currently in the other place. In addition, it is necessary to consult before we make changes to policy by way of guidance or regulation.

The Government think that it is more important to ensure that we get this right than attempt to rush it. In the past, things have gone wrong. We do not want a situation like the one that sadly we saw occur under the previous Government, in which the number of caravans on unauthorised developments increased from 887 in 1997 to 2,395 in 2010. No doubt the policies then were not the case. I was delighted that the hon. Gentleman made the very helpful comment that not all Travellers are bad. There is sometimes a dangerous tendency for people to misinterpret these debates and to caricature hon. Members as suggesting that everyone in the Travelling community is a rogue and a bad person—clearly that is not the case. I was delighted that the hon. Gentleman made that comment from the other side of the Chamber.

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I conclude by reiterating that we await with interest the outcome of the consultation exercise. We will co-operate fully with the Government when the relevant documentation has been published.
the speech by my hon. Friend the Member for Carmarthen West and South Pembrokeshire (Simon Hart). It is essential that we have a system that is both fair and workable in the interests of the settled community and of the Traveller community, because it is right to say that the vast majority of Travellers are law-abiding. The majority of Travellers want to live on authorised sites and have social issues that need to be addressed, so it is as much in their interests as anyone else’s that we get something that is fair.

There is a very strong feeling that there is unfairness in the current system, which has caused the Government to take a number of steps to deal with the problem, all of which have been legitimately highlighted by my hon. Friends. Let me make clear what the Government seek to do. I know that time will not permit me to deal with every one of the legitimate points raised by my hon. Friends, but I undertake to write to them setting out some of the specific details for which they have asked.

I start with what the Government are doing, given the background. There is a real problem. There is a genuine sense in the country that the system is not fair and that it works against everyone’s interests. What are the Government seeking to do? First, we are committed to abolishing the regional strategies under the Localism Bill, which clearly requires primary legislation. It is frustrating for many that it should be necessary to take decisions in accordance with existing policies until they are revoked, but that is the law. When dealing with planning casework, Ministers have to act in a quasi-judicial fashion, but we are taking steps to abolish the regional strategies and the targets that go with them.

The Localism Bill also contains the primary legislation necessary to provide stronger enforcement powers to tackle unauthorised development. The Bill also contains important proposals to limit the opportunities for the abuse of retrospective planning permission. My hon. Friend the Member for Mole Valley and others have referred to that important point. We are determined to ensure that retrospective permission is available if there has been a genuine mistake but not in cases of cynical manipulation, in which members of any community may be involved—I have come across cynical developers, too. We are taking steps to deal with that.

Simon Kirby rose—

Andrew Percy rose—

Robert Neill: I shall give way once more, but my hon. Friends will appreciate that I need to make progress in fairness to other Members.

Simon Kirby: Does the Minister recommend that the consultation on legislation to deal with squatting should also cover unauthorised encampments? It seems to me that the two are closely linked.

Robert Neill: I hope that all who feel strongly on planning and on squatting will take part in the consultation. Indeed, I hope that all who have spoken in this debate, as well as getting their contributions on the record, will take the opportunity within the extended period of consultation to write on behalf of themselves and of their constituents. The Government take the matter seriously.

We have taken measures to ensure that supply problems are sensibly addressed. We have secured £60 million to help councils and other registered providers build new Traveller sites. The new homes bonus will apply to new Traveller sites to incentivise local authorities. We are applying the Mobile Homes Act 1983 to authorised Traveller sites to give Travellers who play by the rules a better sense of security. At the same time, we seek to deal with areas of abuse. We also want to deal with the fact that, at present, it is possible both to seek retrospective planning permission and to appeal against an enforcement notice. By manipulating the two processes, it is possible to extend the time for compliance almost indefinitely. The Localism Bill will remove that option and close that loophole. We are also considering strengthening enforcement powers.

The hon. Member for Derby North referred to the temporary stop notices introduced by the previous Government. They were a step in the right direction, but I know that concerns have been expressed about how effective they are in practice. We need to consider how they operate. It is critical that local planning authorities have implemented proper plans to deal with the needs of their areas. We are giving them the ability to assess what that need is. Hon. Members have spoken about the tests that should be applied, which is precisely what the consultation is for. We want to hear people’s views on the appropriateness of one test or another, and I hope that Members will feed their views into the consultation.

It is a protection for local authorities to have an up-to-date plan in relation to all planning matters, including the provision of Gypsy and Traveller sites. Our approach, which involves an assessment of need and of supply over a reasonable period of years, will treat Gypsy and Traveller needs in a way that is much more closely aligned to that for housing generally. That greater symmetry of approach is part of our attempt to secure greater fairness for both sides. A number of steps have already been taken.

I appreciate the useful points that have been made by hon. Members, and I shall write in detail on the constituency points that they raised. I also encourage them to participate in the consultation. Once the consultation is closed, the Government will want carefully to consider the points that have been raised on this significant matter. It is therefore our intention to put in place a replacement circular, if we conclude that that is the best way forward, although one option proposed in the consultation is not to replace it. Once we have come to a conclusion, we intend to move swiftly.
Missing Persons (Cyprus)

4.15 pm

Mike Freer (Finchley and Golders Green) (Con): This is the first time that I have spoken under your chairmanship, Mr Weir, and I look forward to this afternoon's debate.

I start by saying what the debate is not about. It is not about the politics of the continued division of Cyprus, nor is it about the rights and wrongs of Turkish troops continuing to occupy part of a European Union member state. It is about the humanitarian issues of families seeking closure on the fate of missing relatives.

It is 37 years, almost to the day, since Turkey invaded Cyprus. Cypriots, both Turkish and Greek, were involved in the fighting. Many were captured and never seen again. Even today, about 1,500 people are still unaccounted for. Young army conscripts of the Cypriot national guard, reservists and civilians, including women and children, are among their number.

Families have a right to know what happened, whether their relatives are dead and, if so, where their graves are to be found. If those people are dead, why cannot the location of their remains be disclosed and their remains returned? What about those imprisoned in Turkey? Could they still be alive after 37 years and still be in prison? If those who were imprisoned in Turkey are dead, where are they buried?

What about the missing children, such as Christaki Georgiou, the brother of Mrs Hatjoullis, a constituent of mine? He was last seen alive at the age of five in 1974 being taken away by a doctor at a hospital controlled by the Turkish army, but the press recently reported that he is still alive. Do the families not have a right to know? How many other children might have been placed with Turkish families and still be alive in mainland Turkey?

The tragedy of missing persons is a human rights problem with implications for human rights and international humanitarian law. The Cypriot Government comply with efforts to identify the missing on both sides, and it is time that Turkey followed suit. The committee operating under careful supervision of Cyprus to obtain regular meetings in the UK with the representatives of the Turkish army, the reservists and civilians, including women and children, are among their number.

The operation of Missing Persons access to military bases. That is despite the commission's efforts in locating and identifying the missing should have full access to the archives of all organisations, both civilian and military. To date, Turkey has refused to allow the International Commission on Missing Persons access to military bases. That is despite the commission's efforts to find the fate of their missing relatives, including their whereabouts and the circumstances and cause of their disappearance. The obligation to carry out an effective investigation into the circumstances surrounding a disappearance is required by international human rights law and international humanitarian law. When focusing on the humanitarian dimension of missing persons in armed conflicts, it is necessary to bear in mind that cases of missing persons can sometimes constitute criminal offences, including war crimes or crimes against humanity. Perhaps that is why Turkey is dragging its feet.

States should ensure the effective investigation and prosecution of all human rights violations linked to missing persons. Turkey continues to flout international law. I know that Turkey claims that the Republic of Cyprus is not co-operating, but I do not believe that to be true. Turkey has repeatedly been found in breach of articles 2, 3 and 5 of the European convention on human rights.

In the case of Cyprus v. Turkey 10 May 2001, the European Court of Human Rights examined Turkey's obligation to protect the right to life under article 2 of the convention, reading it in conjunction with the state's general duty under article 1 to "secure to everyone within its jurisdiction the rights and freedoms defined in the conventions."

The court confirmed that "this requires by implication that there should be some form of effective official investigation when individuals have been killed as a result of the use of force by agents of the State".

Jim Sheridan (Paisley and Renfrewshire North) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this extremely important debate. Will he confirm beyond any shadow of doubt that the campaign for missing persons covers both Turkish and Greek Cypriots and that it is not one or the other?

Mike Freer: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. The Committee on Missing Persons, which the EU generously funds—that is why its effectiveness should be a matter of grave concern for our Foreign Office—investigates the cases of both Turkish and Greek Cypriots who are missing. It makes no distinction between the two, and it is important to put that on record.

Nick de Bois (Enfield North) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing this debate. This issue affects families right across the island. Does he not think that with the right level of commitment and a speedy resolution, massive confidence-building measures could be delivered for the future?

Mike Freer: My hon. Friend makes a good point. This is not specifically about the politics of the negotiations over the reunification of Cyprus. Both sides in that negotiation are looking to build confidence. There could be no better confidence-building measure than the return of the remains of the 1,500 missing people or information on what happened to them.

Sir Alan Meale (Mansfield) (Lab): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on acquiring this debate. He has shown by his knowledge of the Cypriot problem and by his advocacy on this matter, which is heard in the House and in the Committee, how good a representative he is for the area. I have known about the case of the Georgiou boy for many years. As the hon. Gentleman has said, he is just one of many people who are missing. More than 500 of whom are the relatives of British citizens. Will he comment on how difficult it seems to be for the President of Cyprus to obtain regular meetings in the UK with the British Government? For the life of me, I cannot understand why that should be so difficult, particularly because we are a guarantor power and have bases there and because more than 70,000 British citizens live on the island.

Mike Freer: The hon. Gentleman has made an extremely strong point. It is disappointing that the Foreign Office, in seeking to be even-handed, has forgotten that on this particular issue we cannot be even-handed. We wish to see equal treatment, but we have a duty to British
citizens and the descendants of British citizens lost in the conflict. Indeed, the issue also affects hon. Members. My hon. Friend the Member for Dudley South (Chris Kelly), who has apologised for not being able to attend today’s debate, wanted to speak, because his mother lost four cousins in the conflict. I urge the Minister to take the cross-party views very seriously and try to apply further pressure to resolve this matter.

4.23 pm
Sitting suspended for a Division in the House.

4.37 pm
On resuming—

Mike Freer: I was talking about the decision in the European Court of Human Rights case of Cyprus against Turkey of 10 May 2001. In fact, the Court’s judgment stated:

“The Court cannot but note that the authorities of the respondent State”—

that is, Turkey—

“have never undertaken any investigation into the claims made by the relatives of the missing persons that the latter had disappeared after being detained in circumstances in which there was real cause to fear for their welfare.”

Sir Alan Meale: Bearing that in mind and the fact that Cyprus has the presidency of the Council of Ministers, would it not be appropriate to ask the Minister if he would ask—in his good time—for this issue to be pushed back on to the agenda of the Council of Ministers, to give it more force than it has had in recent times?

Mike Freer: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point. I am sure the Minister heard his intervention and will seek to address that point in his remarks.

I want to return to the role—or lack of—of the Turkish forces. The ECHR judgment continued:

“No attempt was made to identify the names of the persons who were reportedly released from Turkish custody into the hands of Turkish-Cypriot paramilitaries or to inquire into the whereabouts of the places where the bodies were disposed of. It does not appear either that any official inquiry was made into the claim that Greek-Cypriot prisoners were transferred to Turkey.”

Ian Lavery (Wansbeck) (Lab): Like others, I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing such an important and emotive debate. He mentioned Cypriot prisoners in Turkish prisons. Has he any idea what percentage of the 1,500 could still be in prison in Turkey?

Mike Freer: The hon. Gentleman makes a good point about the numbers. There is no definitive answer, because the Turkish will not release that information. It is estimated that between 500 and 800 people were imprisoned in Turkey. The whereabouts and fate of those people remain unknown.

We talked about the Court’s determination of article 1. The Court also concluded that there had been a “continuing violation of article 2, on account of the failure of the authorities of the respondent state to conduct an effective investigation aimed at clarifying the whereabouts and fate of Greek-Cypriot missing persons who disappeared in life-threatening circumstances.”

I appreciate that hon. Members may think that the use of words in some of these articles—2 and 3; and 5, which I will talk about—constitutes shades of grey. However, it is important in establishing a pattern of behaviour that unfortunately, Turkey is repeatedly failing to comply with those various articles.

In dealing with article 2, the Court stressed at the outset that

“the unacknowledged detention of an individual is a complete negation of the guarantees of liberty and security of the person, that is contained in article 5 of the convention and [is] a most grave violation of that article. Having assumed control over a given individual, it is incumbent on the authorities to account for his or her whereabouts. It is for this reason that article 5 must be seen as requiring the authorities to take effective measures to safeguard against the risk of disappearance and to conduct a prompt and effective investigation into any arguable claim that a person has been taken into custody and not seen since.”

The Court referred to the irrefutable evidence that Greek Cypriots were held by Turkish or Turkish Cypriot forces without keeping appropriate records. From any humanitarian point of view, that failing cannot be excused. Confusion during a conflict is not an excuse. Fighting during a conflict is not an excuse.

The absence of information and the deafening silence from Turkey have made it impossible to allay the concerns of the relatives of the missing persons about their fate. There has been no official reaction to new evidence that Greek Cypriot missing persons were taken into Turkish custody. The Court concluded that there has been a continuing violation of article 5, because Turkey has continued to fail to respond or to conduct an effective investigation.

The lack of an investigation by Turkey into the fate of those who went missing has condemned relatives to live in a prolonged state of acute anxiety. Time has not lessened that anxiety, as anyone who has met the relatives can testify. I have many times been to the green line in Cyprus and met relatives, and I can testify to the daily heartbreak that the mothers, fathers, brothers and sisters still endure. No one who has visited and walked up to the buffer zone and met the families, with the pictures around their necks, can fail to be moved by the anxiety and stress the relatives continue to endure. The memories remain vivid in the minds of the relatives, and they endure the agony of not knowing whether family members were killed in the conflict or are still in detention, or, if detained, have since died. The families just want to know what has happened; they want to be able to grieve and to lay their relatives to rest.

The provision of such information is the responsibility of the authorities of the respondent state, and that is Turkey. It has been found to be consistently unco-operative. The silence of Turkish authorities has been classified as a continuing violation of article 5. The Court of Human Rights found no indication that the Committee on Missing Persons is going beyond its limited terms of reference. That committee works under very careful supervision.

It is important to stress that the search for information by the relatives of Greek Cypriot missing persons is not partisan. In fact, the Secretary-General of the United Nations said:

“Determining the fate of missing persons occupies an increasingly prominent role in peace-making…and post conflict peace-building. Handled properly, it can build trust and promote reconciliation…The Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus has been a model of successful co-operation between the Greek-Cypriot and the Turkish-Cypriot communities.”

This humanitarian issue must be resolved and, although the resolution should not be mired in the political solution, there is inevitably some linkage. If we are to see a re-united Cyprus, both Turkish Cypriots and Greek Cypriots have to have trust and faith in each
other. If Turkey is to take its place in the EU, it must be seen to be open, transparent and democratic. A transparent return and identification of the missing would be a welcome confidence-building measure. The UK and the EU have significant influence. We contribute handsomely to the work of the Committee on Missing Persons, but Cypriots are EU citizens, and as such, member states have a duty to intervene. We intervene and apply pressure throughout the world; we must do more on our own European doorstep.

Mr Weir, thank you for giving me the opportunity to raise the concerns of many of my constituents. My constituency has a very large Greek Cypriot community, and it has been my privilege to raise its concerns today.

4.46 pm

Mr David Burrowes (Enfield, Southgate) (Con): Along with colleagues, I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) on securing what I believe is the first specific debate on missing persons. I welcome that important focus. I am sure the Minister has noted the cross-party involvement in the issue, which is of fundamental importance to all Cypriots, British citizens, parliamentarians and all concerned about basic human rights.

I speak as the chair of the British-Cypriot all-party parliamentary group, which will continue to scrutinise the role of the Government in ensuring progress on the issue. Yesterday, the Organisation of Relatives of Missing Cypriots conducted a lobby outside Parliament. It is a lobby with a difference: it is campaigning not on a one-off issue, but on a matter that has been of concern for 37 years or more. These relatives come year in, year out. They remind us that this issue, which we talk about in terms of human rights, is based in humanity. They hang around their necks pictures of loved ones, some of whom we have heard about today. It is important to realise that we are talking about individuals and loved ones who have been lost for many years.

The attention of Cypriots is rightly focused today on those who were lost in the tragic incident at the naval base in Cyprus, when 12 lives were lost and 62 people injured. We take this opportunity to express our condolences and heartfelt concern. The loss of those loved ones this week is just the same as that of those lost all those years ago. It is still as acute for those who lobbied yesterday outside Parliament. We do not want them to be here next year; we do not want them to say that they still do not know where their loved ones are. We want to ensure we have made progress by this time next year, and that they are no longer in agony.

We would all endorse the robust case made by my hon. Friend the Member for Finchley and Golders Green. Those relatives, who are citizens of this country, feel they are ignored. They feel that these basic issues are not taken as seriously as they should be. They do not want to be tolerated with a “see you next year”. They want to ensure that we and the Government are doing what we can in a number of ways. The contribution through the European Union to the CMP is welcome, as is the important bi-communal work that will now make more rapid progress and receive more funding.

As can be heard from across the community, the basic issue is that the CMP is not being given access and information. The state that must be held to account is Turkey. Turkish military bases know the whereabouts of missing individuals. We implore the Government to do all they can in their negotiations and contact with the Turkish Government to ensure proper access and the basic answers that the relatives wish to have. That can be ensured in various ways. This country holds the presidency of the Council of Ministers. That is an important opportunity to hold a debate on missing persons. I invite the Government to consider how it can be done.

It is plain that this basic issue of human rights must be dealt with before progress can be made on European accession. The questions of information and access must be answered. It is also an international obligation. The Minister is responsible for international human rights issues; no doubt he is concerned about such flagrant breaches of human rights, which remain unanswered since May 2001. They must be answered. This is happening on European soil. We would not tolerate a divided island with troops from Turkey on it, and we must not tolerate this, nor park the issue while awaiting the outcome of the negotiations. It is an issue of not only European rights but basic human rights.

The relatives of missing Cypriots were campaigning outside yesterday. We do not want to go back to them next year and say that progress has not been made. Yes, it is the province of Turkey, but our Government must also do all they can to ensure basic justice, truth and reconciliation for the relatives of missing Cypriots.

4.51 pm

The Minister of State, Foreign and Commonwealth Office (Mr Jeremy Browne): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I thank and commend the hon. Member for Finchley and Golders Green (Mike Freer) for initiating this important debate and giving Members from all parties, as has rightly been said, the opportunity to contribute. I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Enfield, Southgate (Mr Burrowes) for his contribution. Before I start, I ought to mention the terrible explosion of which he rightly reminded us, which happened in the early hours of Monday morning in Cyprus. We now know that it has led to the loss of 12 lives and to numerous injuries, as well as having a major impact on Cyprus’s infrastructure. The sovereign base areas have offered their assistance to the Government in the form of firefighters, ambulances, helicopters and any other help that might be required. Explosives experts from the bases have visited the site of the explosion, and a large number of SBA personnel have donated blood to the local hospital. I am sure that everybody wishes to send the House’s sympathies to all those involved and to their families.

The issue of the missing people of Cyprus is another tragic subject, and one that continues to affect Cypriots from both communities. Many families still do not know the fate of their loved ones, nor have they been able to bury them. We understand that it is an important and sensitive issue for all Cypriots and recognise that it needs to be resolved. The work of the Committee on Missing Persons in Cyprus is of great significance. Since its establishment in April 1981, it has been one of the only institutionalised, bi-communal committees in
Cyprus. The work of the 64 Greek and Turkish Cypriot scientists involved in excavations and anthropological analysis is a shining example of co-operation between the two communities on the island. The committee is all the more remarkable, given the sensitivity of the work that it carries out. Its mandate remains to investigate cases of persons reported missing in inter-communal fighting and the events of July 1974 and afterwards. Once remains have been identified, they are handed over to the family, in an emotional moment that requires and receives sensitive and respectful handling.

The committee does not attempt to establish the cause of death or attribute responsibility for the death of missing persons. I appreciate that that limitation has been criticised, but the committee relies on information to carry out its work, and much of that information is provided by members of the public who might not come forward if there were a threat of a criminal investigation. There are legitimate differences of opinion on the matter, but current practices might be the most likely to reach the desirable objective of bringing the situation to a resolution.

The UK fully supports and welcomes the excellent work of the Committee on Missing Persons. Although the UK has no control over its work, I hope the committee will conclude its work only after the cases of all the missing on both sides have been investigated fully. To achieve that, the CMP must be granted access to all areas where it needs to excavate. I urge all those in control of such areas, including the Turkish military, to co-operate fully with the committee and allow it to complete its vital work. Similarly, I encourage anyone with information that might be of use to pass it on to the committee.

My right hon. Friend the Minister for Europe visited the committee’s laboratory during his recent trip to Cyprus and was impressed by the progress being made. He met the Greek Cypriot and Turkish Cypriot employees and members of the committee, and it was clear that they work together with confidence. He also discussed the committee’s work with the Elders earlier this year just after their visit to Cyprus in February. To date, there have been 797 exhumations, and 286 remains have been identified. Of those 286, 226 were Greek Cypriots and 60 Turkish Cypriots. However, there is still much work to be done before all the families affected finally have a chance to close, in some manner, this tragic chapter in their lives and that of their island.

Jim Sheridan: In the few moments left, will the Minister tell us whether he will make direct representations to the Turkish authorities on behalf of the missing persons?

Mr Browne: I have heard the point the hon. Gentleman has made, and I will undertake to see what representations we can make to further the objectives I have just outlined. It is the position of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Government as a whole that we wish to bring the process to a conclusion that will be satisfactory to the families involved.

Sir Alan Meale: Perhaps I can help the Minister slightly. He said a few moments ago that he would call on the Turkish authorities in the north of Cyprus and on the Turkish military to give access to all sites that might contain the remains of people who were killed. Perhaps one way is for the Foreign Office to approach the Turkish Government regarding allowing the CMP to access sites on the Turkish mainland, rather than on the island. That might be a way to express our view that the matter should be cleared up.

Mr Browne: I am grateful for the intervention. I underline again the point that the British Government wish this unhappy period of history to be resolved to the satisfaction of the families involved. In our view, barriers to that resolution ought to be removed. Where there are obstacles to exhumations and proper investigations, we wish to see progress made.

As a sign of our support, the UK has made four donations to the committee in the last seven years, totalling more than £100,000. The United Kingdom also donates to the committee’s annual budget through the European Union and recognises that contribution as both important and necessary. The UK will continue to support the work of the committee. It is an excellent example of bi-communal co-operation on the island, as Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots work side by side in the laboratory and on the sites being excavated.

I express again my gratitude to everybody who has contributed to this debate and make an open offer. If Members wish to raise concerns about the issue, the Minister for Europe, who leads on the subject in the Foreign Office, will be more than happy to receive those representations as the British Government try to play our part in bringing the matter to a satisfactory conclusion.
Worklessness (Wales)

5 pm

Hywel Williams (Arfon) (PC): I am pleased to have secured a debate on a pressing issue at an opportune time. Unemployment in Wales, particularly unemployment among young people, is worrying. The valleys, for example, have the highest benefit claimant count not only in Wales but in the United Kingdom. The report, "Tackling Worklessness in Wales", by Sheffield Hallam university, is therefore timely, and I commend it to hon. Members. It is makes for interesting reading, and it is condensed both in the introduction and the conclusion for easy reading—for some hon. Members.

Unemployment is only one side of the coin, as the titles of the debate and of the report indicate. Unemployment is in some ways merely a consequence of the lack of a job. That sounds self-evident, of course, but I sometimes get the feeling that some commentators—not all, by any means, on the Government side—see unemployment only as an aspect of a personal failing. Reading the tabloid press, it is sometimes portrayed as an aspect of personal wickedness, but obviously people cannot work if the jobs are not there or if their personal circumstances make it difficult or impossible for them to set up on their own. I left a secure job at a university to set up on my own six years before I was elected as an MP and fell in with a bad lot here. Six years of self-employment taught me a great deal.

There are two themes to my contribution: first, I will discuss the dire unemployment and economic activity figures; and, secondly and significantly, I will examine the need to take robust steps to create work. Sheffield Hallam university estimates that we need 170,000 extra people in work in Wales to bring us up to the standard of the best parts of the UK. That is a huge challenge. I immediately accept that the previous Government took great steps to increase the number of people in work. I know that this Government have that aim, but it is a huge number to reach.

Jessica Morden (Newport East) (Lab): In the Select Committee on Welsh Affairs, which just met upstairs, the Secretary of State for Wales could not answer the question posed by the Sheffield Hallam report of where the private sector jobs will come from for the thousands of people coming off incapacity benefit due to the Government’s welfare changes. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that the Government should slow down and look at the dire consequences of what they are doing?

Hywel Williams: I agree with the hon. Lady. The changes in welfare are being brought forward too quickly, but I am also concerned that the work on the other side of the coin—creating jobs for people who will hopefully be leaving the benefits system or unfortunately be moving to lower levels of benefit—is not being prosecuted sufficiently.

Figures were released in the report today, and the situation in Wales is particularly worrying. I hope that referring to only some of them will mean that I am not tediously repetitive, but they make for interesting reading. The total number of jobseeker’s allowance claimants in my constituency is 1,245, and there were 364 jobs available at the jobcentre in the month in which the figures were collected, which is 3.42 claimants per job. If one adds in everyone who is on Department for Work and Pensions benefits, the total figure goes up to 5,590. I share the Government’s ambition of moving people who have been long-term sick or disabled back towards work. I agree entirely with that, because work is good for everyone, but it is a huge challenge just in my constituency.

In the most dire example in Wales—Rhondda—there are 2,315 claimants, which is 28.23 claimants per job, so there are 28 or 29 people chasing every job. I accept that some jobs are not advertised, but are available elsewhere. [Interruption.]/The hon. Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb) is smiling. Hopefully, I have drawn one of his teeth. I accept that statistics can be misleading, but there are 12,540 DWP benefit recipients, which means 152.93 claimants per job. The challenge is enormous. Incidentally, if, Mr Weir, you were sad enough to have looked at the debate on my ten-minute rule Bill about three weeks ago, you would have seen that the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant) claimed that the figure is 84 per job. Presumably, he knows his constituency better than I do, and possibly the official statistician, but he says 84 and I say 152.93. The challenge is enormous.

I am afraid that the situation is the same throughout the valleys. For example, Cynon Valley has 122 DWP benefit recipients per job. Interestingly, when one looks at the other side of the coin—where the jobs are—Alynn and Deeside has more than 1,000 jobs posted, so the figure there is 1.55 claimants per job, which is almost a job for everyone who is claiming JSA. That is a good situation to be in, but it stands out in Wales as the exception rather than the rule.

Guto Bebb (Aberconwy) (Con): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate. Does he agree that the situation in Deeside, for example, is indicative of the fact that the manufacturing base there is extremely strong? The Government will emphasise developing the manufacturing sector rather than depending on state-created jobs, as the previous Administration did.

Hywel Williams: I agree with the first part of the hon. Gentleman’s intervention. I have long been a supporter of manufacturing, although it is not a prominent sector in large parts of rural Wales. The situation in Alyn and Deeside is helped by the fact that it is immediately adjacent to the Cheshire plain, where there are many jobs, and the huge investment in Airbus. There are lots of reasons, but it is a situation to which some people in the valleys might aspire. Alynn and Deeside has had a lot of Government help to reach that position.

The final column of figures is striking. It shows that there are nearly 72,000 JSA claimants, which is nearly 4.5 claimants per job, and more than 350,000 people on DWP benefits, which is nearly 22 claimants per job. The figures are breathtakingly difficult to cope with for any Government, either here or in Cardiff. The total Jobcentre Plus jobs available in June was a little over 16,000. We are talking about an enormous problem, and I do not envy the Minister or the Welsh Assembly Government, who are of a different political stripe but who have the same sort of aim, their jobs.

Some groups are hit particularly hard, and there is an issue of gender. There are now more women claiming JSA than at any point since the previous Conservative
Government were in power in 1996. Across the UK, the number of women claiming JSA rose by 9,300 last month to a 15-year high of 493,000. That shows that there is an issue for women. The figures are expected to worsen, because the coming cuts are to the public sector, where there is a preponderance female employment, so women will be hit harder again. About two thirds of people employed in the public sector in the UK are women, so there is a differential effect.

The cuts come at the same time as a report from the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development notes that unemployment will remain high across the UK until 2015. The report was produced by crystal-ball gazers, so one has to take the figures with a pinch of salt, but that is their prediction. A real fact, which I think the hon. Member for Aberconwy has referred to, is that we know that 77,000 Welsh people have been claiming out-of-work benefits for 10 years or more. That is a startling and unhappy fact.

The Government’s welfare reforms are predicated on the assumption that jobs will be there for those who move off higher benefits. Welfare reform was originally partly introduced to encourage more people into work during a period of high unemployment, but it is now one of the more controversial aspects of the Government’s policies. The figures show clearly that the jobs are not available. I will not stray too far down this road but, in passing, there is a real danger that the net effect of job cuts, welfare reform and so on will be to force many people not into work but on to lower benefits.

Of course, the Government hope that the private sector will grow and take up the slack, but unfortunately growth is weak in the Welsh economy. In Wales, the private sector is weak and previous jobs growth in Wales was mainly in the public sector. I do not know whether there is a causal relationship and whether growth in the public sector leads to a weak private sector or the other way around—the private sector is weak and so public sector jobs take up the slack. We are talking about a complicated relationship.

We all agree that we must aim for jobs growth in the private sector. I do not blame the private sector in Wales, because we have to accept that the economy in Wales has been dealt successive blows for many years with the closure of heavy industry and the legacy of long-term illness and disability. As someone who belongs to a party that was in government until recently, I say that we must accept that economic policy in Wales, as conducted by Governments of every party, has not been as successful as we all hoped that it would be.

I hardly need to say therefore that I am in favour of developing the private sector. However, the private sector in Wales is intertwined closely with the public sector, and cuts in the public sector might endanger or even hamper growth in the private sector. The picture is complicated. The Sheffield Hallam university report states:

“The loss of public sector jobs will exacerbate the situation.”

We are looking at a complicated picture. Employment in the public sector is important but, of course, those sorts of jobs are going in the cuts. There might be a double blow to the Welsh economy of fewer public sector jobs and less business for the Welsh private sector.

I have long believed that we need to have better integration between job finding, job placements provided through Jobcentre Plus and the Work programme, and those Welsh Assembly Government Departments that can have a profound effect on people’s ability to take up jobs. I refer hon. Members to my ten-minute rule Bill, which I introduced a few weeks ago but that did not get a Second Reading. I do not want to repeat the arguments that I made then, except to say that the Welsh Assembly Government have responsibility for services such as education and training, further and higher education, skills development, health and social services and child care—I could go on—and that a certain synergy could be achieved by better co-ordination with Jobcentre Plus and the Work programme. I have no doubt that those services could be better combined and co-ordinated to enhance jobseekers’ hopes of finding work.

The crux of my argument today is that we need not only to equip and motivate jobseekers better, but to introduce a variety of other policies that will provide jobs. We need a concerted effort at job creation and to provide long-term jobs rather than stop-gap placements that disappear after the target has been reached. That has been a feature of job creation in Wales over the past few years.

Guto Bebb: I could not agree more on the issue of creating long-term jobs. One of the sad facts of the situation in Wales is, in the 1990s, we were consistently at the top—or very close to the top—of the United Kingdom regional league table in terms of creating self-employment. In the past five years, we have consistently been in the bottom part of that league table and have, in fact, been in last position. The fact that the Government are introducing the enterprise allowance scheme again is a positive development, because a significant number of businesses in north-west Wales that were founded under the old enterprise allowance scheme still survive.

Hywel Williams: The hon. Gentleman makes a good and pertinent point. As I said, I am very much in favour of encouraging self-employers, and there are steps that we can take to do so. My entry into self-employment could not have been more disastrous. I left university and tried to claim a bit of benefit, as someone who supposedly knew something about the system, only to find that when I was down in Cardiff job hunting, I should have been at home signing on. I was therefore denied a bit of money that I might have claimed because I was not idle at home; I was out searching for that illusive job.

Other measures for which we in Plaid have argued in the past include a temporary cut in VAT to kick-start the economy. Of course, we recently had a vote on that. The Government parties voted against the proposals and I am afraid to say that the Labour party abstained. Some hon. Members will know that, since 2008, we have campaigned alongside the Federation of Master Builders and others for a specific cut in VAT on repair and renovation. Following last year’s ECOFIN decision, VAT on repair and renovation could go down to 5%. Other countries have followed that path by reducing VAT on labour-intensive industries, and they have had effective results. Many pre-1919 houses are in a particularly dire state and need fixing. That is peculiar to some parts of Wales, particularly the valleys. The work is available and there are, of course, the workers. What we need is a more favourable tax regime to encourage those workers to do the work. The Federation of Master Builders estimates that we could create about 100,000 jobs.
Guto Bebb rose—

Hywel Williams: I will give way once more, but I am anxious to hear what the Minister has to say.

Guto Bebb: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman. May I concur with the comments that have been made? As a Member for an area that is very dependent on tourism, I have also heard the argument for a reduction in VAT for the tourism sector. Any Government who want to create enterprise and employment should look carefully at using the tax system to do that although, obviously, that has to be put in place once we have the public finances in order.

Hywel Williams: That is a moot point. I do not have the figures at my fingertips, but when VAT on construction services was reduced in Italy, a large number of people who were working cash in hand realised that becoming legal and paying a lower rate of VAT was worth while. Allegedly, the tax take went up, so given the Government’s current situation, it might be useful to consider that. I have not seen the operation of the famous Laffer curve being proven in such a way before but, allegedly, that was the case in Italy at least.

The 100,000 jobs that it is estimated that such an approach could create would be local, but there is also a strong equality case in favour of the policy. I put this question rhetorically rather than to the Minister: why should a young couple pay more for renovating their terraced house when a banker who retired early with a big pension pot does not pay VAT on his newly built ranch-style property in the south-east? I had to get that one in. There is an equality issue, and lots of young people are trying to renovate their houses, so the proposal would be a great help to them.

Lastly, as I realise that time is moving on, we also need to boost self-employment. I agree with the FSB, which estimates that the self-employed contribute £21 billion to the UK economy every year. It argues persuasively that self-employment is a key driver to achieving economic growth. That is particularly the case in Wales, as self-employment is a feature of much of rural Wales.

I agree with the hon. Member for Aberconwy when he argues for enterprise zones, particularly enterprise zones themed around certain types of activity. The only thing I worry about is whether we have enterprise zones throughout the UK—not just in Wales—they will not act as an incentive hub for a wider economic picture. In some places in the early 1980s, jobs were poached from other areas and the net effect was less than one had hoped for because, rather than creating new jobs, companies moved in to benefit from the improved climate within the enterprise zones. That is a particular worry. I understand that the Government intend to have such an enterprise zone somewhere in the north-west. I am not sure what is going to happen, but I will certainly keep an interest in the matter.

Irrespective of welfare reform, we need in Wales to boost the private sector, to equip our workers and workless people better, and to improve the integration of services to ensure that there are jobs for our people and a capacity for our country to use and a works creation programme—that is the missing part of the jigsaw. If that sounds a bit like the case for a future jobs funds 2, so be it, particularly if that is aimed at those who are inevitably at the end of the queue when jobs are being handed out—the long-term unemployed, and those incapacitated by illness or long-term disability.

5.20 pm

The Minister of State, Department for Work and Pensions (Chris Grayling): I congratulate the hon. Member for Arfon (Hywel Williams) on securing the debate. I will have to respond to him relatively briefly because I think I have only nine minutes in which to speak.

The hon. Gentleman made his points extensively and thoughtfully, but I do not recognise the degree of bleakness in the picture that he portrays. I recognise that unemployment remains a major challenge for us around the country—it is one of the most difficult parts of our inheritance. I accept that a number of areas of Wales, like a number of areas of England, Scotland and Northern Ireland, are affected by deep-rooted problems of worklessness. However, Wales has been one of the brighter spots in the labour market in recent times.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the private sector. In Wales in the past 12 months, the truth is that 31,000 net new jobs have been created. In reality, that represents a higher number of jobs in the private sector because the figure also takes into account job losses in the public sector. In the past year, Wales has proved that it is possible to grow private sector employment. Unemployment in Wales has fallen by 16,000. He asked whether the jobs would come from. The truth is that in Jobcentre Plus in the past three months, nearly 48,000 vacancies have been taken in across Wales.

The total number of people on jobseeker’s allowance in Wales as a whole is 71,600. While I recognise that we have a challenge, and I particularly accept that we have a challenge in individual areas of Wales, the picture is not as bleak as the hon. Gentleman suggests. I certainly do not think that it is as bleak as is portrayed by the Sheffield Hallam research, which argues that, in the valleys alone, 70,000 more jobs would be needed. As the total JSA count for the whole of Wales is 71,000, I would have to say that its view is on the pessimistic side.

The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right—my hon. Friend the Member for Aberconwy (Guto Bebb) is also right—to say that we really need to support the growth of self-employment in Wales. A central part of the task of encouraging and fostering economic and employment growth in Wales is supporting the self-employed. That is why I am committed to the success of the new enterprise allowance in Wales, which will help people off benefits and into self-employment, and it is why I hope that the new Administration in Cardiff will make self-employment a particular focus of its work with business.

If I was replying to a debate about an English region, I would be setting out a number of other areas in which the Government are taking steps to try and deal with the unemployment and worklessness challenge, including through apprenticeships, which are an essential part of our strategy. Particularly for the young unemployed, apprenticeships are a much more cost-effective way of delivering support and opportunity than the extremely expensive future jobs fund, which provided six-month placements in public and voluntary sector organisations at a time when the best job opportunities were arising in the private sector. The cost of that scheme was three to
four times more than even the new deal for young people under the previous Government. The scheme was not affordable and did not deliver clearly improved results on either value or outcomes in comparison with other schemes. Investment in apprenticeships delivers a much better alternative, so I hope that the new Administration in Cardiff will pursue that route.

It is also important that the new Administration in Cardiff do a good job on economic development. If we were talking about another part of the UK, I would be talking to the hon. Gentleman about the importance of the regional growth fund to invest in manufacturing, and research and development facilities, in those areas of the country that have lower levels of private sector employment and bigger employment challenges. Again, I hope that the new Administration in Cardiff will take the lead set by the coalition Government in Westminster to set up a similar mechanism to the regional growth fund to invest in precisely the kind of opportunities that he rightly says that Wales needs.

We are taking clear steps to try and deal with the issue of worklessness in Wales. Alongside the introduction of the new enterprise allowance, that is being done through two particular schemes. The first is our work experience scheme, which is designed to address the challenge that young people face to get a first foothold in the workplace. All too often, they face the challenge of not having the experience to get a job, and not being able to get such experience without a job. One thing I learned quickly on becoming a Minister was that the previous Government’s rules said that if people did more than two weeks’ work experience, they lost their benefits. That was crazy. We have now changed that rule and it is possible to do up to eight weeks on benefits while doing work experience.

In addition, we have turned the whole system on its head and are now actively looking for work experience opportunities for young people across England, Scotland and Wales in an approach that will give young people an opportunity to gain initial experience in the workplace and show potential employers what they can do. I hope that that will prove to be a route into apprenticeships. Again, I hope that the Government in Cardiff will work with us to ensure that there is a clear link between the work experience opportunities for which we are looking through Jobcentre Plus, those first few weeks in the workplace, and an opportunity for those young people to move into an apprenticeship.

The other part of our strategy to help the long-term unemployed is the Work programme, which is now operating throughout the whole country. In Wales, we have two providers: Working Links and Rehab Group. Rehab Group is one of our two part-voluntary sector prime contractor groups. Alongside those two prime contractors, there is a network of different organisations around Wales helping to provide specialist support for the long-term unemployed. What makes the Work programme different is that it is all about delivering much more personalised and tailored support to the long-term unemployed and those who are moving off incapacity benefit.

I would take another issue with the Sheffield Hallam report. As a result of the changes we are making to incapacity benefit, no one will lose benefits except those who are currently in receipt of contributory employment and support allowance, which will be time-limited, and those who have other financial means. If people do not have an alternative form of support, they are not suddenly going to be cast on to the streets, but that is a point about which the report gives a slightly misleading impression.

I describe the Work programme as a giant employment dating service. It is about matching individuals to the right job opportunity, and a job opportunity in which they are likely to stay. It is important to the providers that they deliver because we do not pay them unless they get people into sustained long-term employment. They cannot earn their full fees for a conventional jobseeker for 18 months after that person has entered work, so if someone ends up in the wrong job and is likely to drop out, the provider will inevitably lose out financially. The providers therefore have every incentive to ensure that they match individuals to the right job opportunity in which they have the best chance of staying.

The Work programme will deliver a much better support than has previously been the case. It unleashes best practice. It will succeed the most if it delivers what works the best. There are no diktats from Whitehall—no instructions about how to do this—because it is all about delivering what works for individuals. I am confident that the Work programme will take back-to-work support to a new level and help many of those people who are trapped in pockets of long-term unemployment in Wales to find and move into opportunities that arise.

I am confident that we will see economic growth across the country. The independent Office for Budget Responsibility is forecasting significant growth in private sector employment in the next few years, and that has already been happening in Wales. The key is to ensure—that was not happening under the schemes that we inherited from the previous Government—that those who are trapped on JSA and other benefits have, when possible, the opportunity to take advantage of vacancies when they arrive. Our reforms are all about making work pay, supporting people into work and trying to create an environment across the UK in which business can flourish, grow and develop. In Wales, with the additional contributions that I hope will come from Cardiff to work with us on economic development and creating opportunities for business to grow and develop, I hope that that will provide a solution to the very real challenges of worklessness in Wales that the hon. Gentleman rightly identified.

Question put and agreed to.

5.29 pm

Sitting adjourned.
ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Ratcliffe-on-Soar Power Station

The Solicitor-General (Mr Edward Garnier); On 18 April 2011, Keir Starmer QC, the Director of Public Prosecutions, announced that following a review by Clare Montgomery QC, the safety of the convictions of the individuals who protested at Ratcliffe-on-Soar power station, should be considered by the Court of Appeal as soon as possible.

During that review, the CPS had been conducting an internal investigation into its own handling of the case. However, in light of growing concerns about the non-disclosure of material relating to the activities of an undercover police officer in this case and, following discussion with the Attorney-General and myself, the DPP said last month that he would establish an independent inquiry conducted by a senior legal figure. The DPP has now confirmed that retired Court of Appeal judge, Sir Christopher Rose will conduct this inquiry.

The terms of reference have been agreed with Sir Christopher and are as follows:

The independent inquiry will examine and make findings in respect of the following matters:

a. Whether the CPS approach to charging in this case was right, bearing in mind the known existence of an undercover police officer in the operation.

b. Whether the CPS and prosecution counsel complied with their disclosure duties properly in relation to the known existence of an undercover police officer in this case.

c. Whether the CPS arrangements in place for handling the known existence of an undercover police officer, including arrangements between the police and the CPS, the CPS and counsel and the local prosecuting team and the national co-ordinator, were adequate and properly followed in this case.

d. Whether the CPS followed all relevant guidance and policy in relation to the known existence of an undercover police officer in this case.

The independent inquiry will also make such recommendations it feels appropriate in light of the examination and findings set out above, including, if appropriate, recommendations about CPS policy and/or guidance and CPS arrangements for handling cases involving undercover police officers.

The independent inquiry has been established by, and will report its findings and recommendations to the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Sir Christopher will have full access to all the available evidence and will work in tandem with the IPCC inquiry into this matter. Both organisations are committed to sharing all relevant information and arrangements are being made to ensure there is meaningful liaison between the two inquiries. Inevitably this work will take time but will be completed as soon as is practicable. The Director of Public Prosecutions intends to make public the findings and recommendations of the independent inquiry.

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20th Armoured Brigade Headquarters and Signal Squadron (200)
Elements of 19th Light Brigade Headquarters and Signal Squadron (209)
Headquarters 101 Logistic Brigade
Elements of 845 Naval Air Squadron including members of the Maritime Reserve
Elements of 846 Naval Air Squadron
857 Naval Air Squadron
1st The Queen’s Dragoon Guards
The Queen’s Royal Hussars (The Queen’s Own and Royal Irish)
Elements of 5th Regiment Royal Artillery
Elements of 16th Regiment Royal Artillery
Elements of 26th Regiment Royal Artillery
Elements of 39th Regiment Royal Artillery
Elements of 40th Regiment Royal Artillery
Elements of 47th Regiment Royal Artillery
Elements of 25 Engineer Regiment
35 Engineer Regiment
Elements of 38 Engineer Regiment
Elements of 71 Engineer Regiment (Volunteers)
Elements of 12 (Air Support) Engineer Group
Elements of 170 (Infrastructure Support) Engineer Group
Elements of 1st (United Kingdom) Armoured Division Headquarters and Signal Regiment
Elements of 10th Signal Regiment
Elements of 14th Signal Regiment (Electronic Warfare)
Elements of 21st Signal Regiment (Air Support)
Elements of 22nd Signal Regiment
3rd Battalion The Royal Regiment of Scotland (The Black Watch)
1st Battalion The Princess of Wales’s Royal Regiment (Queen’s and Royal Hampshires)
1st Battalion The Yorkshire Regiment (Prince of Wales’s Own)
2nd Battalion The Mercian Regiment (Worcesters and Foresters)
2nd Battalion The Rifles
5th Battalion The Rifles
Elements of 1 Regiment Army Air Corps
Elements of 3 Regiment Army Air Corps
Elements of 4 Regiment Army Air Corps
Elements of 9 Regiment Army Air Corps
Elements of Joint Helicopter Support Squadron
Elements of Allied Rapid Reaction Corps Support Battalion
1 Logistic Support Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps
Elements of 6 Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps
Elements of 7 Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps
Elements of 8 Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps
Elements of 9 Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps
Elements of 11 Explosive Ordnance Disposal Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps
Elements of 17 Port and Maritime Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps
Elements of 23 Pioneer Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps
Elements of 29 Regiment The Royal Logistic Corps
1 Medical Regiment
Elements of 201 Field Hospital (Volunteers)
Elements of 208 Field Hospital (Volunteers)
3 Close Support Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
Elements of 19 Light Brigade Combat Service Support Battalion
Elements of 101 Force Support Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
Elements of 104 Force Support Battalion Royal Electrical and Mechanical Engineers
110 Provost Company Royal Military Police
Elements of 173 Provost Company Royal Military Police
Elements of Special Investigation Branch United Kingdom
Elements of 1 Military Working Dogs Regiment
Elements of 1 Military Intelligence Brigade
Elements of 15 Psychological Operations Group
Elements of 88 Postal and Courier Regiment (Volunteers), The Royal Logistic Corps
Elements of 148 Expeditionary Force Institute Squadron (Volunteers), The Royal Logistic Corps
Elements of 156 Transport Regiment (Volunteers), The Royal Logistic Corps
Elements of 159 Supply Regiment (Volunteers), The Royal Logistic Corps
Elements of 162 Postal Courier and Movement Regiment (Volunteers), The Royal Logistic Corps
Elements of 166 Supply Regiment (Volunteers), The Royal Logistic Corps
602 Tactical Air Control Party
603 Tactical Air Control Party
606 Tactical Air Control Party
618 Tactical Air Control Party
Number 3 Royal Air Force, Force Protection Wing Headquarters
Elements of Number 2 Royal Air Force Police Wing
Elements of Number 3 Royal Air Force Police Wing
2 Squadron, Royal Air Force Regiment
Elements of 101 Squadron Royal Air Force
Elements of 39 Squadron Royal Air Force
31 Squadron, Royal Air Force
IX(B) Squadron, Royal Air Force
2 (Army Co-Operation) Squadron, Royal Air Force
Elements of 5 (Army Co-Operation) Squadron, Royal Air Force
Elements of 18 Squadron, Royal Air Force
Elements of 24 Squadron, Royal Air Force
Elements of 27 Squadron, Royal Air Force
Elements of 28 Squadron, Royal Air Force
Elements of 30 Squadron, Royal Air Force
Elements of 78 Squadron, Royal Air Force
Elements of the Tactical Supply Wing, Royal Air Force
Elements of 1 Air Mobility Wing, Royal Air Force
Elements of 1 Air Control Centre, Royal Air Force
Elements of 90 Signals Unit, Royal Air Force
Elements of 2 (Mechanical Transport) Squadron, Royal Air Force
Elements of 5001 Squadron, Royal Air Force
Elements of 3 Mobile Catering Squadron
Elements of Tactical Medical Wing
Elements of 1 (Expeditionary Logistics) Squadron
Elements of 93 (Expeditionary Armaments) Squadron
Elements of Tactical Imagery Wing
Elements of 5131(BD) Sqn

Volunteer and ex-regular members of the reserve forces will continue to deploy to Afghanistan as part of this integrated force package, and we expect to issue around 530 call-out notices. On completion of their mobilisation procedures the reservists will undertake a period of training and, where applicable, integration with their respective receiving units. The majority will serve on operations for around six months. As part of this commitment we expect up to 24 members of the sponsored reserves to be in theatre at any one time.

The UK’s conventional force level will remain at 9,500 for the duration of the deployment.

I shall make a further statement on the units we expect to serve under 20th Armoured Brigade’s planned replacement formation, 12 Mechanized Brigade, nearer the time of their deployment.

Operational Allowances

The Secretary of State for Defence (Dr Liam Fox):
Our forces currently on operations in Libya are performing brilliantly and at considerable risk to themselves. We regularly review the payment of the operational allowance (OA) that recognises the risk and hardships faced by our forces on operations.

We have recently completed such a review, and have decided it is only appropriate to extend the OA to all those serving this country on operations in Libya.

This will result in the payment of OA to anyone operating within the land mass, airspace and territorial waters of Libya, including all aircrew operating over the Libyan land mass and to ships and submarines within 12 nm of the coast. Payment is based on the number of days within the specified areas, and will be backdated until 18 March 2011 with funding coming from the reserve.

In accordance with the agreed policy, those engaged in operations for which they are in receipt of OA on the day that individuals are notified—1 September 2011 for the Army and the RAF, 30 September 2011 for the Royal Navy—will be excluded from the redundancy programme. Similarly, those on a dedicated operational work-up package, of up to six months, or post-operational tour leave on the day of notifications will also be excluded.

DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

Electoral Administration Provisions

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office (Mr Mark Harper): I am announcing today the publication of draft legislation on three electoral administration provisions for pre-legislative scrutiny.

The draft legislation is intended to form part of a larger package of measures which will also include draft legislation on individual electoral registration (IER) which has been published separately for pre-legislative scrutiny.

The draft legislation addresses particular issues that have been raised by MPs and peers, and by electoral stakeholders, and proposes practical and sensible changes that will help to deliver more effective electoral administration.

The draft legislation includes provisions which extend the timetable for UK parliamentary elections from 17 to 25 days and similarly extends the timetable for UK
parliamentary by-elections. The existing timetable for UK parliamentary elections and by-elections is considerably shorter than the electoral timetable for all other UK polls. The very limited time available for the postal vote process compromises effective participation in elections by certain types of voter, particularly overseas and service voters. Moreover, the existing timetable puts considerable pressure on administrative processes by compressing a large number of tasks into a short period, which represents significant risks to the effective conduct of elections.

Extending the timetable for UK parliamentary elections and by-elections will bring benefits for voters and administrators, as well as adding to the robustness and integrity of the electoral process. The Government propose that, within this extended timetable:

- the deadline for parties to nominate candidates should continue to be six days after the start of the timetable, so parties will have the same time as now to put forward candidates to stand for election. In practice this will now be 19, rather than 11, days before the date of poll, which will allow administrators to begin printing ballot papers further in advance of polling day;
- provision should be made for updated versions of the electoral register to be created at an earlier point in the timetable to allow postal votes to be distributed to new registration applicants earlier than is currently possible.

We also propose to address an oversight in existing legislation passed during the previous Government’s time in office which allows a candidate standing for a single party in a UK parliamentary election to use an emblem on their ballot paper, but does not allow jointly nominated candidates to do so. This issue has primarily affected candidates standing on behalf of the Labour party and the Co-operative party. The proposal will ensure that electoral law is consistent on this issue.

The draft legislation also makes changes to the existing system for reviews of polling districts and places in Great Britain for UK parliamentary elections to bring them in line with the five-year cycle for UK parliamentary boundary reviews implemented by the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011 and the proposed cycle of parliamentary terms under the Fixed-term Parliaments Bill.

I am today sending the draft legislation to the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee for pre-legislative scrutiny.

A Command Paper setting out the draft legislation and associated explanatory notes will be laid before the House.

EDUCATION

Munro Review of Child Protection

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Tim Loughton): On 10 June 2010, I informed the House that the Government was commissioning the Munro review of child protection. This was the very first review established in the Department for Education, underlining the Government’s priority this Government place on getting child protection right.

From the start, we wanted the Munro review of child protection to be different. That is why, unlike its predecessors, it was not commissioned as an immediate response to a specific crisis. That is why Professor Munro’s final report—published in May—recommended that regulation and prescription are reduced rather than increased. And, most importantly of all, that is why it focused on the child, rather than the system.

I am extremely grateful to Professor Munro for undertaking a wide-ranging and in-depth review. I am also grateful to all the organisations in the sector, the child protection work force and the wider public, including children and young people themselves, who contributed to the review. Their experience, insights and expertise have helped make her final report so well informed, and so widely welcomed.

Just as Professor Munro conducted her review openly and collaboratively, the Government have worked with the sector to develop the Government’s response. An implementation working group, drawing on expertise from local authority children’s services, the social work profession, the police and, in particular, education and the health service, advised on the Government’s response to Professor Munro’s recommendations.

The Government commend Professor Munro’s thorough analysis of the issues and accepts her fundamental argument that the child protection system has lost its focus on the thing that matters most: the views and experience of children themselves. We believe we need to move towards a child protection system with less central prescription and interference, where we place greater trust and responsibility in skilled professionals at the front line.

The Government’s response is not a one-off set of recommended solutions to be imposed from the centre. Rather it is the start of a shift in mindset and relationship between central Government, local agencies and front-line professionals, working in partnership. Change will evolve and best practice will develop based on experience, innovation and evidence. Our aim will be to create the conditions for sustained, long-term reform which enables and inspires professionals to do their best for vulnerable children and their families.

Professor Munro will continue to advise the Government and will undertake an interim assessment of progress in spring 2012. I have placed copies of the Government’s response in the Libraries of both Houses.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Pesticide Residues Committee

The Minister of State, Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Mr James Paice): On 14 October 2010, the Government announced the outcome of their review of non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs). This reported that the majority of DEFRA’s scientific and technical advisory bodies were to be abolished and reconstituted as expert Scientific Committees to provide advice on specific areas. As part of implementing these reforms, the Pesticide Residues Committee (PRC), which was a non-statutory advisory NDPB, has been abolished and replaced by an expert Scientific Committee from 1 July 2011. The new Committee will be called the Expert Committee on Pesticide Residues in Food (PRiF) to more accurately reflect its remit.
The PRiF Committee will continue to support DEFRA, the devolved Administrations and the Food Standards Agency on the scope and operation of surveillance for residues of pesticides in food and the significance to consumers of any residues detected.

The new Committee's membership and terms of reference can be found on the PRiF website: http://www.pesticides.gov.uk/prc_home.asp.

HOME DEPARTMENT

Scientific Procedures on Living Animals

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Lynne Featherstone): The “Statistics of Scientific Procedures on Living Animals—Great Britain—2010” (HC 1263), was laid before the House today. Copies will be available in the Vote office.

This annual statistical report meets the requirement in the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 to inform Parliament about the licensed use of animals for experimental or other scientific purposes. It also forms the basis for meeting periodic reporting requirements at EU-level. Supplementary information with additional tables is also available on the Home Office website.

The 2010 statistical report shows that the number of licensed procedures started in 2010 increased slightly over 2009 to just over 3.7 million scientific procedures and constituted a rise of 105,000 (3%). This rise follows a slight fall in the 2009 statistical report. A number of factors, such as investment in research and development and strategic funding priorities, determine the overall level of scientific procedures.

The Home Office, as regulatory authority under the 1986 Act, ensures that its provisions are rigorously applied and only authorises work that is scientifically justified and minimises the numbers of animals used and the animal suffering that may be caused.

The statistical report and supplementary information can be found at: http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/science-research/research-statistics/.

I am pleased to inform the House that I have also today placed in the Library the annual report of the Home Office “Animals Scientific Procedures Division and Inspectorate” for the year 2010.

Publication of the report honours a commitment given in response to a recommendation of the House of Lords Select Committee on Animals in Scientific Procedures in July 2002 that more information should be made available about the implementation of the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and reporting non-compliance.

As in previous years, the report explains what Home Office inspectors do and how they do it and the inspectorate’s role in assessing and advising on applications for personal and project licences and certificates of designation under the Animals (Scientific Procedures) Act 1986 and reporting non-compliance.

The report also contains information on the work of the ASPD policy and licensing teams: it explains how, in partnership with ASPI, ASPD have continued to work towards delivering our better regulation programme and new IT system; includes a section setting out the reporting of cases of non-compliance and infringements of ASPA and the outcomes of these cases (see annex D), and records progress with the adoption of European Directive 2010/63/EU on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes, which came into force on 9 November 2010.

Independent Safeguarding Authority

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Home Department (Lynne Featherstone): I am pleased to announce that the annual report 2010-11 and accounts of the Independent Safeguarding Authority (ISA) will be laid before Parliament and published today.

Copies will be available in the Vote Office.

Family Migration

The Minister for Immigration (Damian Green): Today, I am publishing a consultation on family migration. Immigration has enriched our culture and strengthened our economy, but uncontrolled immigration places pressure on our public services and on community cohesion. The Government have already introduced a limit on non-European economic area economic migrants entering the UK; have reshaped tiers 1 and 2 of the points-based system to increase selectivity and skills requirements; have started implementing changes to tier 4, the student visa system; and are currently consulting on breaking the link between economic migration and settlement, and on other temporary work routes. These policies will reduce net migration, but we need to take action across all routes to ensure this returns to sustainable levels and we bring a sense of fairness back to our immigration system.

This consultation on family migration is the next in our programme of immigration reforms. In the year to September 2010, family migration accounted for around 17% of all non-EU immigration to the UK.

The proposals included in the family consultation are aimed at tackling abuse, promoting integration and reducing burdens on the taxpayer. A contribution to reduced net migration would be welcome but is not the primary goal. The focus is on delivering better family migration: better for migrants, for communities and for the UK as a whole.

The consultation concentrates on the family route: those non-EEA nationals entering, remaining in or settling in the UK on the basis of a relationship with a British citizen or person settled in the UK. This includes fiancée(e)s, proposed civil partners, spouses, civil partners, unmarried or same-sex partners, dependent children and adult and elderly dependent relatives. In 2010, 48,900 visas were granted to people on the family route, of which 40,500 were issued to dependants.

We set out firm proposals for reform of the family route. The key elements are: a minimum income threshold for sponsors to provide appropriate maintenance, on which we have asked the Migration Advisory Committee
to advise; in line with other routes, extending the probationary period from two years to five years before a spouse or partner can apply for settlement (and before which they also explore the use of English as an entry requirement in the UK). Access to the labour market, to the NHS and to schooling will be unaffected by this change); and a requirement to understand everyday English before settlement is granted. We propose that all those seeking settlement or citizenship should demonstrate an appropriate level of English, and we will consider whether changes to the current testing regime could further assist integration.

We also propose to help UK Border Agency caseworkers consider spouse and partner applications by defining what we mean under the rules by a genuine and continuing relationship, marriage or partnership; to end immediate settlement, and immediate access to benefits, on entry for spouses and partners who have been married or in a relationship for at least four years before coming to the UK, and for adult dependent relatives, including those aged 65 or over, and to require both groups to complete a five-year probationary period; and to look at arrangements for dependent relatives aged 65 or over to settle in the UK, reflecting health and social care costs to the taxpayer.

The consultation also invites discussion on some broader propositions, particularly in relation to tackling sham marriages and forced marriages. On sham marriages these build on existing joint work between the UK Border Agency and the General Register Offices across the UK, local registration services and the Anglican Church. They also explore the case for legislative change in England and Wales, including making “sham” an impediment to marriage and allowing a marriage to be delayed while a suspected sham is investigated.

It is important that we look at family migration in the round and so the consultation also deals with other family migration issues.

In 2010, 45,200 dependants under the points-based system were granted a visa with a route to settlement in the UK. The consultation proposes moving to a five-year probationary period and everyday English for settlement for the spouses and civil and other partners of points-based system migrants, in line with other groups.

Many British citizens and persons settled in the UK have family members living outside the UK. This results in a high volume of visa applications from people wishing to visit family here. In 2010, 350,300 family visit visas were issued, with around 73% granted on initial decision by the visa officer. In 2010-11, 95% of family visit visa applications were decided by the UK Border Agency within 15 working days.

We have reviewed the arrangements for the operation of the family visit visa. We are concerned that taxpayer funding of around £40 million per year is being spent on appeals where appellants are commonly misusing the appeals system, by submitting information on appeal which should have been put forward as part of the original application, or where a second application (costing another £76) is the most appropriate route for securing a visa. We are also concerned that this is a disproportionately high use of taxpayer funding for an appeal process which can take up to 3 weeks to be concluded) for the benefit sought: a short-term visit to the UK. Greater priority should be given to appeal cases that have far-reaching impacts for the individuals concerned and for the public at large, for example asylum claims, settlement applications and the deportation of foreign criminals.

In the light of this, we are reviewing the full right of appeal for family visit visas and we invite views on whether there are circumstances in which an appeal right should be retained, beyond the race discrimination and human rights grounds which, in line with other categories of temporary entry clearance, will continue to be available.

Finally, the consultation invites discussion on the balance to be struck on article 8 of the European convention on human rights (the right to respect for private and family life) between individual rights and the public interest in public protection and maintaining immigration controls. Article 8 is not an absolute right and our proposals aim to set out requirements that must be satisfied in family migration cases which are consistent with our ECHR obligations. We also want to be clear about the circumstances in which the public interest will outweigh an individual’s article 8 right.

Details of the public consultation can be found on the Home Office website and a copy will also be placed in the Library of the House.

The consultation will run for 12 weeks, until 6 October 2011, and we will announce our firm plans in due course, with a view to implementing changes during 2012.

Identity and Passport Service

The Minister for Immigration (Damian Green): The Identity and Passport Service annual report and accounts 2010-11 have been laid before the House today.

Copies will be available in the Vote Office.

Serious Organised Crime Agency

The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May): The Serious Organised Crime Agency (SOCA) has today published its annual report and accounts for 2010-11. I have laid a copy before the House and made arrangements to place copies in the Vote Office.

UK Border Agency

The Minister for Immigration (Damian Green): The UK Border Agency annual report and accounts 2010-11 has been laid before the House today.

Copies will be made available in the Vote Office.

JUSTICE

Squatters

The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Crispin Blunt): The Government have become increasingly concerned about the distress and misery that squatters can cause. Law-abiding property owners or occupiers who work hard for a living can spend thousands of pounds evicting squatters from their properties, repairing damage and clearing up the debris they have left behind.

I have met with hon. Members and corresponded with members of the public who have expressed concern about the appalling impact squatting has had on their properties or local neighbourhoods.
The Government do not accept the claim that is sometimes made that squatting is a reasonable recourse of the homeless resulting from social deprivation. There are options open to those who are genuinely destitute and who need shelter which do not involve occupying somebody else’s property without authority. No matter how compelling or difficult the squatter’s own circumstances are claimed to be, it is wrong that legitimate occupants should be deprived of the use of their property.

There should be no doubt about the seriousness with which the Government treat this problem or our determination to tackle it. The Housing Minister and I have already published new guidance on the direct.gov website for property owners on evicting squatters under existing legislation.

The consultation paper we are publishing today invites views on whether more should be done to strengthen the criminal law or its enforcement. We could do this, for example, by introducing a new offence of squatting; by strengthening existing offences that currently apply to squatters; or by working with the enforcement authorities to identify and overcome barriers to enforcement of existing offences that may be committed by squatters.

The Government acknowledge that some of the options they are proposing may have an impact on the enforcement authorities, local authorities, homelessness charities and other organisations. Any option we decide to pursue as a result of this consultation will need to be workable and affordable, taking account of the current economic climate and reduction in Government expenditure.

Of course, we must also tackle problems affecting the wider housing market and bring more empty homes back into productive use. The Government intend to publish an empty homes strategy over the summer and as part of that, £100 million to bring new affordable housing through the affordable homes programme and as part of that, £100 million to bring empty homes back into use.

I am placing copies of the consultation paper in the Libraries of both Houses, but it can also be viewed on the Ministry of Justice website: www.justice.gov.uk.

Prison and Probation Services (England and Wales)

The Lord Chancellor and Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Kenneth Clarke): In the response to the Green Paper, “Breaking the Cycle: Effective Punishment, Rehabilitation and Sentencing of Offenders”, I set out a vision for a transformed justice system that will focus on public protection and cutting crime. An important part of delivering the changes I am committed to is ensuring that the services we provide are focused on delivering the best possible outcomes and the greatest value for money.

Competition between providers of our services can help us to meet these challenges as the previous Government recognised when they made contestability a feature of offender services when setting up the National Offender Management Service in 2004. The “Competition Strategy for Offender Services”, which I have published today, sets out how we will change the way we use competition to meet these aims. My approach is based on ensuring an effective balance between making services more efficient while reforming them so that they provide better outcomes for the public. In doing so, we will draw on a wide range of expertise from the private and voluntary sector, which will work in partnership with a strong public sector.

For offender services, I intend to employ the principle that competition will apply at some stage to all those services not currently bound to public sector delivery by statute. This will mean the benefits of competition can be felt much more widely, contrasting with the previous approach of only using competition when procuring new services or as a way of managing poor performance.

Underpinning this approach will be our commitment to apply more widely the principles of payment by results to services which reduce reoffending. By paying some or all of a contract value on the basis of the reduced reoffending levels achieved, we can focus service providers’ efforts on what works. This will ensure that money spent on rehabilitation is spent effectively. We intend to run a number of pilot exercises and competition will be a key mechanism in deciding which models we adopt.

In practice, this will mean taking a different approach for both custodial and non-custodial services. The use of competition in custodial services is now well established, as most recently demonstrated by the successful outcome of the competition for four prisons which I announced in March this year.

To ensure that we build on this strong record I am announcing today my intention to launch competitions for the management of a further nine prisons in the autumn. These are Lindholme, Moorland, Hatfield and The Wolds in Yorkshire, Acklington and Castington in Northumberland, Durham, Onley in Northamptonshire and Coldingley in Surrey. The Wolds is a prison run by G4S that has come to the end of its current contract; the other eight prisons are public sector establishments being competed for the first time. The public sector will have the opportunity to compete in all of these prison competitions.

These prisons have been selected by the National Offender Management Service to balance our need to increase efficiency and to make real the policy intent of the Green Paper.

Looking to the future, there is a need to consider the future shape of probation services in England and Wales to improve justice outcomes and to make the justice system more efficient and effective. I have asked my officials to explore the possible options for service improvements and different models of delivering offender services within the community. I will set out my preferred approach in the autumn. Alongside this, and supporting it, I will set out in detail my competition strategy for non-custodial services, which will also encompass the recently launched competition for community payback services, the competition for electronic monitoring contracts I am announcing today, and payment-by-results pilots in the community.

A further important element of our drive for greater efficiency is to ensure we have a modern, fit-for-purpose prison estate which can deliver high-quality, cost-effective
and secure regimes. With the prison population not growing at the rate predicted by the last Government, we have an opportunity to close some of our more inefficient places.

I am therefore announcing the closure of HMPs Latchmere House and Brockhill. This will see a reduction of 377 prison spaces. This is part of an overall programme which includes a further 2,500 new prison places becoming available over the next 12 months. This will ensure that our operational capacity continues to handle the projected prison population in a way which meets the need both for greater efficiency and ability to support a strengthened focus on protection of the public and rehabilitation.

The closure of these places will provide estimated cost savings of £4.9 million this year and an on-going annual saving of £11.4 million. We also anticipate capital receipts from sale of the land at Latchmere House, which is in a prime location. We will transfer resettlement provision from that establishment to HMP Brixton to maintain our focus on reducing reoffending. We expect to be able to absorb staff displaced by this process elsewhere in the system and to avoid the use of compulsory redundancies.

The public have a right to expect continuing improvement in the quality and efficiency of public services, without compromising public safety. The competition strategy and adjustments to the prison estate I have outlined today will help ensure that this is the case.

Copies of the “Offender Services Competition Strategy” have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses. The document is also available online, at www.justice.gov.uk/publications/corporate-reports/moj/oscs.htm.

PRIME MINISTER

Intelligence and Security Committee

The Prime Minister (Mr David Cameron): I am grateful to the Intelligence and Security Committee for its valuable work and its latest annual report, Cm. 8114. Following consultation with the committee over matters that could not be published without prejudicing the work of the intelligence and security agencies, I have today laid the report before the House.

The Government’s response to this report will be laid before the House after the summer recess.

Copies of the report have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

TRANSPORT

Crossrail

The Minister of State, Department for Transport (Mrs Theresa Villiers): Crossrail will support economic growth for London and the UK. As part of the comprehensive spending review in October 2010, the coalition Government confirmed their commitment to the full Crossrail scheme. A re-phased programme of delivery means that Crossrail services will commence from 2018. We expect Crossrail to cost no more than £14.5 billion. Forecasts continue to suggest that Crossrail will be delivered within its existing funding.

Crossrail has made significant progress since the last annual update to Parliament. Crossrail Ltd has now let all of its key tunnelling contracts, and enabling works are continuing at a number of sites across central London.

Construction is well advanced at Canary Wharf Crossrail station, and tunnel boring machines are expected to be launched in spring 2012. In April 2011, Crossrail passed through the final project review point, at which point the Department and TfL delegated full contractual authority to Crossrail Ltd to deliver the scheme. The new chief executive of Crossrail Ltd, Andrew Wolstenholme, was appointed in May 2011.

During the passage of the Crossrail Act through Parliament, a commitment was given that a statement would be published at least every 12 months until the completion of the construction of Crossrail, setting out information about the project’s funding and finances.

In line with this commitment, this statement comes within 12 months of my last one which was published on 15 July 2010. The relevant information is as follows:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Amount</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total funding amounts provided to Crossrail Ltd by the Department for Transport and TfL in relation to the construction of Crossrail to the end of the period (22 July 2008 to 29 May 2011) (excluding recoverable VAT on land and property purchases)</td>
<td>£1,484,605,000</td>
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<tr>
<td>Expenditure incurred (including committed land and property spend not yet paid out) by Crossrail Ltd in relation to the construction of Crossrail in the period (30 May 2010 to 29 May 2011) (excluding recoverable VAT on land and property purchases)</td>
<td>£723,475,000</td>
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<td>Total expenditure incurred (including committed land and property spend not yet paid out) by Crossrail Ltd in relation to the construction of Crossrail to the end of the period (22 July 2008 to 29 May 2011) (excluding recoverable VAT on land and property purchases)</td>
<td>£1,884,254,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amounts realised by the disposal of any land or property for the purposes of the construction of Crossrail by the Secretary of State, TfL or Crossrail Ltd in the period covered by the statement</td>
<td>Nil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The numbers above are drawn from Crossrail Ltd’s books of account and have been prepared on a consistent basis with the update provided last year. The figure for expenditure incurred includes moneys already paid out in relevant periods, including committed land and property expenditure where this has not yet been paid. It does not include future expenditure on construction contracts that have been awarded.
Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 13 July 2011

ATTORNEY-GENERAL

Human Trafficking

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Attorney-General what contribution he is making to Government action to combat human trafficking; and if he will make a statement. [65774]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) vigorously prosecutes defendants who have been charged with human trafficking offences. In addition, the CPS plays an important role in preventing harm from trafficking from reaching the UK, through prosecutors working with source countries to improve the ability of overseas investigators and prosecutors in case building and prosecution to disrupt human trafficking at source. The CPS is also working with source countries to improve international co-operation to assist in the provision of information and evidence to support prosecutions in the UK. The CPS published a new policy statement on the prosecution of cases of Human Trafficking on 2 June 2011 that explains the prosecution process to those who support victims of trafficking.

I am also a member of the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Human Trafficking which takes a strategic interest in human trafficking issues across Government.

Rape: Prosecutions

Catherine McKinnell: To ask the Attorney-General (1) how many serial rape offenders were convicted in cases where the prosecution used records from the National DNA Database in each of the last five years; [65666]

(2) how many convictions for offences involving multiple rapes were secured where the prosecution used DNA evidence in each of the last five years; [65667]

(3) how many convictions for rape were secured where the prosecution used records from the National DNA Database in each of the last five years. [65668]

The Solicitor-General: The Crown Prosecution Service (CPS) maintains no central record of the number of serial or multiple rape offenders prosecuted, nor does it record the number of these cases where National DNA Database or DNA evidence was used.

This information is held on individual case files and could be retrieved only by locating and examining every relevant file in each CPS office in England and Wales which would incur a disproportionate cost.

Official statistics in respect of the volume and percentage of rape convictions are held by the Ministry of Justice.

The CPS plays an important role in preventing harm from trafficking from reaching the UK, through prosecutors working with source countries to improve the ability of overseas investigators and prosecutors in case building and prosecution to disrupt human trafficking at source. The CPS is also working with source countries to improve international co-operation to assist in the provision of information and evidence to support prosecutions in the UK. The CPS published a new policy statement on the prosecution of cases of Human Trafficking on 2 June 2011 that explains the prosecution process to those who support victims of trafficking.

I am also a member of the Inter-Departmental Ministerial Group on Human Trafficking which takes a strategic interest in human trafficking issues across Government.

JUSTICE

Alcoholic Drinks: Rehabilitation

Nick Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people subject to an alcohol treatment requirement were registered as (a) homeless or (b) of no fixed address in the last five years for which figures are available. [65567]

Mr Blunt: The following table presents, for the last five financial years, the number and percentage of offenders subject to an alcohol treatment requirement who were recorded as being of no fixed abode or in transient accommodation.

This information is recorded within the Offender Assessment System (OASys). The data are drawn from administrative IT systems and are subject to the inaccuracies inherent in any large-scale assessment and recording system.

<table>
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<th>Financial year</th>
<th>Number of assessments with ATR recorded</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
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<td>2,803</td>
<td>512</td>
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<td>2007-08</td>
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<td>8,037</td>
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<td>12,063</td>
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<td>2010-11</td>
<td>12,779</td>
<td>1,685</td>
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Nick Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what the average cost to the public purse was of an alcohol treatment requirement in the latest period for which figures are available; how many such requirements were in force on the latest date for which figures are available; and how many such requirements made in respect of persons of each (a) sex and (b) age group were (i) made, (ii) completed in full and (iii) breached by non-compliance in each of the last three years. [65568]

Mr Blunt: The alcohol treatment requirement (ATR) of a community order or suspended sentence order is available to courts for offenders who are dependent on alcohol and whose dependency requires and is susceptible to treatment. Treatment costs are generally funded by primary care trusts (PCTs) in England and Substance Misuse Area Planning Boards in Wales and the costs of supporting delivery of the requirement are funded by NOMS through Probation Trusts.

Significant local variations in commissioning practice and costs of treatment modalities have made it difficult to establish the average cost of treatment delivered through an ATR.

Detailed work to cost the services funded by NOMS estimates the average direct cost of supporting delivery of an ATR at £373 per completion. This estimate is subject to a number of assumptions which are detailed in published information that has been placed in both Libraries.

The most recent analysis of the caseload found that on 31 December 2010 there were 5,391 community orders with an ATR and 2,733 suspended sentence orders with an ATR in force.
The following table shows the number of ATR commencements, successful completions, and revocations for non-compliance following breach proceedings broken down by age and gender in each of the last three years for which full information is available. Data on the number of applications made for a summons or warrant to return the offender to court for breach is not collected centrally by type of requirement.

72% of offenders successfully completed ATRs in 2009-10. This Government will create greater flexibility for the provision of ATRs to ensure that people who meet the threshold receive the treatment and rehabilitation they need to tackle their substance misuse.

1 These figures have been drawn from administrative data systems which may be amended at any time. 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.


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<th>Year</th>
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<th>25-29</th>
<th>30-39</th>
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<th>50-59</th>
<th>60+</th>
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13 JULY 2011

Written Answers
### Bail

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how much was collected from people who breached their bail conditions where a surety was given in order for bail to be granted in the most recent year for which information is available.  

**Mr Blunt:** During financial year April 2010 to March 2011, there were a total of 45 breaches of bail conditions (securities only) amounting to forfeiture of £179,560.86. There were no forfeitures of bail conditions where surety was given.

This was recovered in full from bail deposits (lodged) paid directly into the HMCTS Bail Deposit bank account.

**Ian Austin:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) what estimate he has made of the number of people currently released on bail in (a) England, (b) the west midlands and (c) Dudley borough.  

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of people bailed between 19 May 2011 and 5 July 2011 in (a) England, (b) Dudley borough and (c) the west midlands.

**Mr Blunt:** The latest data on bail published by the Ministry of Justice are available up to December 2010. A quarterly update of the main findings up to March 2011 will be published on 25 August 2011.

The Court Proceedings Database held by the Ministry of Justice holds information on defendants proceeded against, found guilty and sentenced for criminal offences in England and Wales. It also holds information on whether those defendants were remanded in custody or granted bail during proceedings at magistrates courts and the Crown court. It is not possible to determine from these data how many defendants are released on bail at any particular point in time.

### Birmingham Prison: Redundancy

**Shabana Mahmood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what steps he is taking to enable those who lose their jobs at HMP Birmingham to access alternative vacancies at HMP Birmingham.

**Mr Blunt:** Staff at HMP Birmingham are subject to TUPE transfer to the new provider, G4S, with effect from 1 October 2011. Discussions with recognised trades unions on the detail of this transfer are on-going. For a time-limited period ahead of the transfer date, staff at HMP Birmingham are entitled to apply for any advertised vacancy in other public sector prisons or civil service locations. G4S is also discussing redeployment opportunities within G4S with staff and trades unions.

### Courts: Manpower

**Lisa Nandy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many court enforcement officers were employed by HM Courts Service in each year since 2005.

**Mr Djanogly:** The number of court enforcement officers employed in HM Courts Service in at the start of each financial year since 2005 is shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>561</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>575</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>541</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>492</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>497</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>453</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>396</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Departmental Carbon Emissions

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice pursuant to the answer of 4 July 2011, Official Report, column 1018W, on departmental carbon emissions, what the installed kilowatt capacity will be of the two solar photovoltaic installations at Leeds Combined Court Centre and Aberystwyth Law Courts.

**Mr Kenneth Clarke:** The Ministry of Justice installed a solar photovoltaic installation at Leeds Combined Court Centre in 2010. The installed kilowatt capacity of the installation is 15.12 kW with a declared net capacity for the purposes of the feed in tariff of 13.5 kW. Between 1 June 2010 and 30 May 2011 Leeds Combined Courthouse has generated 9.5 MW of electricity, for onsite consumption, from its solar photovoltaic array.
The project situated in a city centre location, involved placing free standing self cleaning solar panels on a recently refurbished roof making use of areas not affected by shade.

The building at Y Lanfa, which is to become the new Aberystwyth Law Courts, is currently undergoing a period of extensive refurbishment. Because of the roof lights and dormer windows, we are unable to use solar capture but in order to minimise energy consumption, in conjunction with the preferred contractor, alternative sustainable options are being considered.

**Departmental Dismissal**

*Stephen Barclay:* To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many officials in his Department were dismissed for under-performance as a result of the procedures arising from his Department’s staff appraisal system in each of the last three years.

*Mr Kenneth Clarke:* The number of Ministry of Justice officials who have been dismissed for under-performance are as follows: 86 officials in financial year 2008-09; 97 officials in financial year 2009-10 and 59 officials in financial year 2010-11.

**Departmental Regulation**

*Mr Umunna:* To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many regulations his Department has introduced (a) in the six months prior to 1 September 2010 and (b) in the six months after 1 September 2010 which it has determined do not impose costs on businesses;

(2) how many regulations that impose costs on businesses his Department has (a) introduced and (b) removed since 1 September 2010; what the net effect on the costs on businesses of such introductions and removals was; and what regulations have been excluded from the one-in one-out system because they address (i) emergencies and (ii) systemic financial risks since 1 September 2010;

(3) how many regulations that impose costs on businesses his Department has (a) introduced and (b) removed in the six months prior to 1 September 2010; and what the net effect on the costs on businesses of such introductions and removals was.

*Mr Djanogly:* In the six months prior to 1 September 2010 my Department neither introduced nor removed any regulations with regulatory impact.

In the six months after 1 September my Department introduced one regulatory measure with regulatory impact that imposes costs on business: The Legal Services Act 2007 (Levy) (No.2) Rules 2010.

The running costs of the Legal Services Board for 2010-11 are around £4.7 million. These costs are apportioned to Approved Regulators in accordance with the number of authorised persons they regulate.

The funding of these costs is entirely at the discretion of the Approved Regulators, whether they treat it as a fixed overhead or recharge it to members.

The Office for Legal Complaints did not become operational until October 2010, annual costs are estimated to be £19.9 million.

The Ministry of Justice had no regulatory measures within the scope of the one-in, one-out regulatory management system.

**Departmental Responsibilities**

*Chris Ruane:* To ask the Secretary of State for Justice on how many occasions a request for a meeting by an hon. Member of each political party has been refused by (a) a Minister in his Department directly and (b) his Department on behalf of a Minister since May 2010.

*Mr Kenneth Clarke:* Ministers in the Ministry of Justice endeavour to accommodate requests to meet with hon. Members of the House wherever possible and appropriate. The Ministry of Justice does not centrally record instances where meeting requests have been declined and the work involved in searching records to attempt to assemble this information would exceed the cost limit for answering PQs.

**Drug Interventions Programme**

*Mr Buckland:* To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assessment he has made of the effect of the Drug Interventions Programme on re-offending rates.

*James Brokenshire:* I have been asked to reply.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), has responsibility for the Drug Interventions Programme (DIP).

The most recently published research from 2007 showed that the level of proven offending of a selected cohort (of 7,727 individuals) identified through DIP declined by 26% when comparing the six months prior to contact with the six months following DIP contact.

More recent information looks at individuals entering the DIP following a positive drug test in police custody. Those testing positive for the Specified Class A drugs (heroin and or cocaine/crack) between January and March 2009 committed on average 1.9 offences during the 12 months following their drug test. This level of offending was 11% lower than for the equivalent group in 2008 (who committed 2.14 offences on average). The majority of those entering DIP do so following a positive drug test result.

**European Court of Human Rights: Reform**

*Oliver Heald:* To ask the Secretary of State for Justice when he expects the Government to outline its proposals for reform of the European Court of Human Rights as part of the UK’s chairmanship agenda for the Council of Europe.

*Mr Kenneth Clarke:* The Government have stated its intention to make reform of the ECtHR a priority for the UK Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which it will assume in November 2011. In particular, as I stated at the Izmir Conference on the future of the ECtHR, we need to strengthen the principle of subsidiarity, recognising that States are primarily responsible for implementing the Convention, and to find better ways for the Court to focus quickly, efficiently and transparently on the important
cases that require its attention. The Government will set out its full proposals for the Chairmanship in due course.

Harassment: Prosecutions

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice (1) how many people who breached an injunction under Section 3 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 were (a) proceeded against and (b) not proceeded against in (i) 2009-10 and (ii) 2010-11; [65721]

(2) how many people proceeded against for breach of an injunction under Section 3 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 were (a) found guilty and (b) found not guilty in (i) 2009-10 and (ii) 2010-11; and what the subsequent outcomes were for those offenders found guilty; [65722]

(3) how many people proceeded against under Section 4 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 where a crime was recorded and subsequently proceeded with in (a) 2009-10 and (b) 2010-11; [65723]

(4) how many people proceeded against under Section 4 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 where a crime was recorded and subsequently not proceeded with in (a) 2009-10 and (b) 2010-11; [65724]

(5) how many people proceeded against under Section 4 of the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 where a crime was recorded were (a) found guilty and (b) found not guilty in (i) 2009-10 and (ii) 2010-11; and what the subsequent outcomes were of those offenders found guilty. [65725]

Mr Blunt: The number of persons proceeded against at magistrates courts, acquitted, found guilty and sentenced at all courts, by result, for offences under the Protection from Harassment Act 1997 in England and Wales for 2009 and 2010 can be viewed in the table.

Police recorded crime statistics come within the remit of The Home Office. Offences recorded under the Protection of Harassment Act 1997 are included within their offence classification of ‘Harassment’ and cannot be separately identified from other offences recorded within that classification. It is therefore not possible to identify those Section 4 offences which are recorded and subsequently not proceeded with.

Court proceedings data for 2011 are planned for publication in the spring, 2011.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statute</th>
<th>Proceeded against</th>
<th>Acquitted1</th>
<th>Found guilty</th>
<th>Sentenced1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Protection from Harassment Act 1997</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 4</td>
<td>1,519</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>787</td>
<td>780</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statute</th>
<th>Protection from Harassment Act 1997</th>
<th>Absolute discharge</th>
<th>Conditional discharge</th>
<th>Fine</th>
<th>Community sentence</th>
<th>Suspended sentence</th>
<th>Immediate custody</th>
<th>Otherwise dealt with</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Section 3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Section 4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 The figures given in the table on court proceedings relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

2 Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

3 Acquitted includes: Discharged and Dismissed at magistrates courts and Acquitted at the Crown Court.

4 The found guilty and sentenced columns may be lower than those proceeded against as, excluding those acquitted, it may be the case that a defendant found guilty, and committed for sentence at the Crown court, may be sentenced in the following year or found guilty of a different offence than that proceeded against.

5 The category Otherwise Deal With (ODW) includes: one day in police cells; disqualification order; restraining order; confiscation order; travel restriction order; disqualification from driving; recommendation for deportation; and other miscellaneous disposals.

Source:
Justice Statistics Analytical Services—Ministry of Justice
Human Trafficking

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what responsibility he has for contributing to Government action against human trafficking; and what recent action he has taken in this regard. [65303]

Mr Blunt: The Ministry of Justice shares responsibility with the Home Office for supporting adult victims of human trafficking.

We have contributed to the forthcoming Government strategy on human trafficking, which places particular emphasis on improving the care offered to victims of this abhorrent crime. Our commitment to this is demonstrated by the fact that funding to support adult victims of trafficking has been secured and set at £2 million a year for the next two years, funded equally between the Ministry of Justice and the Home Office.

We have also introduced a new model for supporting adult victims of trafficking, whereby a central contractor has responsibility for overseeing and co-ordinating the provision of care, contracting with specialist providers as appropriate. This new model, which came into operation on 1 July, will make it easier to provide tailored support to victims, taking account of their particular needs. It will also be easier to track victims through the system and monitor the quality of service provided.

Prison Service: Trade Unions

Mr Raab: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many staff of HM Prison Service were entitled to work (a) full-time as trade union representatives and (b) part-time on trade union activities in the latest period for which figures are available; how many such staff received a salary greater than £25,900 per year; and what the total cost to the public purse was of employing such staff on such duties. [65985]

Mr Blunt: As at 1 July 2011, there are 17 employees of the National Offender Management Service (which includes HM Prison Service) that are entitled to work full-time as trade union representatives, of which 16 receive a salary of greater than £25,900. The total cost of employing these individuals is estimated to be £534,436.

Facility agreements between the National Offender Management Service (NOMS) and each union outline the maximum hours to be made available for staff across NOMS in order to carry out their trade union duties and activities.

The current facility agreement with the Prison Officers Association provides paid facilities for up to eight hours each week for the Chair and Secretary of all local branches.

For the Public and Commercial Services Union, there are 14 employees who are entitled to work part-time on trade union activities for three days a week. There are also other local representatives who are entitled to work part-time on union duties on an ad hoc basis of a number of days a year.

Facility agreements with other unions allow up to 25 days per year for members of union executive committees.

All of these agreements have been recently reviewed and are being renegotiated with trade unions. This work will reduce the total spend on facility time to 0.2% of the NOMS paybill in line with Cabinet Office guidelines and will reduce the number of full-time representatives to zero. These changes will take effect by the end of 2011.

Prisons: Employment

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether a private company bidding for unpaid work will be required to honour existing trade union recognition agreements. [65726]

Mr Blunt: Regulation 6 of the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006 shall apply to any transfer of staff to a private company who is successful in bidding for work previously delivered by another provider.

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice whether private sector providers will be required to provide placements for (a) women, (b) people with disabilities and (c) individuals from ethnic minorities in respect of bidding for unpaid work. [65727]

Mr Blunt: Successful bidders from both the private sector and probation trusts will be required to demonstrate that their proposed operating models are able to meet the particular needs of (a) women, (b) people with disabilities and (c) individuals from ethnic minorities who are sentenced to unpaid work.

The Specification and Community Payback Operating Manual contain mandatory actions and guidance in relation to the provision of Community Payback for women offenders, people with disabilities and individuals from ethnic minorities.

John Cryer: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what assistance the National Offender Management Service has provided to private sector providers in respect of bidding for unpaid work. [65728]

Mr Blunt: The competitions for Community Payback (unpaid work) are being run under Public Contracts Regulations 2006. As such care is taken to ensure that all bidders are treated fairly. Any material advice or information from the Ministry of Justice/NOMS to assist bidders understanding and response is published via the Emptoris Electronic Procurement Sourcing System.

Public Order Offences: Prosecutions

Mike Weatherley: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many people were prosecuted for offences of insulting words or behaviour under Section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 in each year since 2006. [65507]

Mr Blunt: Persons proceeded against at the magistrates courts for offences under section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986 in England and Wales, 2006 to 2010 can be viewed in the following table.

Court proceedings data for 2011 are planned for publication in the spring, 2012.
Persons proceeded against at the magistrates courts for offences under section 5 of the Public Order Act 1986¹, England and Wales, 2006-10²:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statute</th>
<th>2006</th>
<th>2007</th>
<th>2008³</th>
<th>2009</th>
<th>2010</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public Order Act 1986, section 5</td>
<td>29,211</td>
<td>30,932</td>
<td>28,177</td>
<td>26,500</td>
<td>24,248</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ Offences include:
Use threatening words/behaviour likely to cause harassment/alarm/distress
Racially aggravated harassment—writing
Religiously aggravated harassment/alarm/distress—words
Racially/religiously aggravated harassment, alarm or distress—words

² The figures given in the table relate to persons for whom these offences were the principal offences for which they were dealt with. When a defendant has been found guilty of two or more offences it is the offence for which the heaviest penalty is imposed. Where the same disposal is imposed for two or more offences, the offence selected is the offence for which the statutory maximum penalty is the most severe.

³ Every effort is made to ensure that the figures presented are accurate and complete. However, it is important to note that these data have been extracted from large administrative data systems generated by the courts and police forces. As a consequence, care should be taken to ensure data collection processes and their inevitable limitations are taken into account when those data are used.

⁴ Excludes data for Cardiff magistrates court for April, July and August 2008.

Source: Justice Statistics Analytical Services—Ministry of Justice.

Unpaid Fines

Lisa Nandy: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what estimate he has made of the monetary value of outstanding fines for criminal offences imposed by courts in England and Wales.

Mr Djanogly: As at the end of May 2011 the balance outstanding for financial penalties was £609,516,266.

This amount includes fines imposed in the magistrates and Crown courts, prosecutor costs, compensation orders, victims surcharge and the value of unpaid fixed penalty notices and penalty notices which are transferred to HMCTS for enforcement. The amount outstanding also includes the balance of accounts which are being paid by agreed payment plans.

Young Offenders: Death

Mr Slaughter: To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many young people have died while under supervision in the community by youth offending teams in (a) 2011 to date and (b) each of the last five years.

Mr Blunt: The number of deaths in the community during the period 2006 to 2011 are provided in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Deaths in England and Wales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006 and 2007</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008¹</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011 (to 31 May)</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

¹ The figure for 2008 includes one individual who died over the age of 19 but had continued to be under the supervision of a youth offending team.

These figures relate to incidents reported to the YJB from youth offending teams (YOTs) across England and Wales where a young person has died in the community while under the supervision of a YOT.

We have sought information from the Office for National Statistics about the number of deaths of young people aged 10 to 18 in the general population in England and Wales over the same period. As a rough measure these figures indicate that the percentage of deaths of young people under YOT supervision as a proportion of the numbers of young people in the youth justice system and the number of deaths of 10-18 year olds as a proportion of the general 10-18 population are broadly similar.

However, the information provided by the ONS should be treated with caution and is provided by way of context only. It does not provide an exact comparison.

CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

Arts: Carbon Emissions

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport whether he has issued any advice to (a) cultural organisations (b) cultural venues, (c) media organisations, (d) sport organisations and (e) sport venues on the generation of low-carbon energy on their estates.

John Penrose: This Department has not issued any advice to cultural organisations, cultural venues, media organisations, sports organisations and sports venues on the generation of low-carbon energy on their estates.

Arts: Fund Raising

Tristram Hunt: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what steps he plans to take to increase the ability of arts organisations with no previous experience of fundraising to generate such funding.

Mr Vaizey: This Department is working in close partnership with Arts Council England and the Heritage Lottery Fund to boost fundraising skills across the culture sector. I welcome the Arts Council’s announcement on 29 June of the Catalyst Arts fund, which will include £7 million to support arts organisations with less experience to build their fundraising capacity. Awards ranging from £15,000 to £25,000 will provide individual organisations, or those working together, with the tools and skills to begin to raise, or increase, their private income.

Broadband: Rural Areas

Ian Austin: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what recent assessment he has made of the timetable for the roll-out of broadband in rural areas.

Mr Vaizey: The Government remains committed to stimulating commercial investment to provide the best superfast broadband network in Europe by 2015.
Adam Afriyie: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what assessment he has made of the capacity of unused television spectrum devices to (a) provide broadband access to rural areas and (b) offload broadband demand in urban areas.

Mr Vaizey [holding answer 12 July 2011]: I have not made an assessment as this is a matter for Ofcom as the independent spectrum regulator. There are trials of devices that the hon. Member refers to, known as white space devices, which are under way to see if they can safely coexist with existing users. One recently launched in Cambridge. But it would be difficult for Ofcom to make any meaningful assessment of the use of white spaces in assisting with existing broadband coverage or capacity until the results of those trials become known.

Broadband: Satellite Communications

Adam Afriyie: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport (1) what assessment he has made of the potential for satellite broadband technology to meet demand for high-speed internet access; (2) what contribution he expects satellite broadband technology to make to the deployment of super-fast broadband.

Mr Vaizey: No assessment has been made. The Government’s objective of having the best superfast broadband network in Europe, with superfast broadband to 90% of all UK premises, and standard broadband to virtually every community in the UK, would be delivered through a mixed technology solution including satellite.

Departmental Carbon Emissions

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport whether his Department plans to assess the feasibility of low-carbon energy generation on its estate.

John Penrose: This Department has no current plans to assess the feasibility of low-carbon energy generation on its estate.

News Corporation

Steve Rotheram: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport pursuant to the contribution of the Attorney-General of 7 July 2011, Official Report, column 1542, what progress he has made on his considerations of News Corporation’s proposed acquisition of BSkyB.

Mr Jeremy Hunt [holding answer 12 July 2011]: On 25 January 2011, Official Report, columns 3-4WS, I announced that I was minded to refer News Corporation’s proposed merger with BSkyB to the Competition Commission in the absence of any specific undertakings in lieu. News Corporation duly offered undertakings on which I have consulted. On Monday, News Corporation withdrew those undertakings and as a result I have decided to refer the proposed merger to the Competition Commission.

Olympic Games 2012: Carbon Emissions

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport whether the plans for the London 2012 Olympics include the generation of low-carbon energy at any events or venues.

Hugh Robertson: The Games-time energy mix will come from mains electricity, on-site temporary power generation; and local low-carbon energy sources, including photovoltaics (PVs), and small scale wind turbines. The Venues on the Olympic Park have been designed to be energy efficient in operation, maximising use of natural ventilation and lighting. The Park Energy Centre will provide low carbon cooling, heating and power in Games-time, and over the longer term post-Games, from biomass boilers and a combined cooling, heating and power (CCHP) plant which can be converted to use lower and zero carbon fuels as these technologies develop.

Tourism: Coastal Areas

Julie Elliott: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what steps his Department is taking to support the seaside tourism industry.

John Penrose: The seaside remains an important part of the visitor economy, accounting for some 24 million domestic overnight trips and almost £4.6 billion in overnight visitor spend across the UK in 2010. The VisitEngland website gives wide coverage to the coast, and the seaside also features in themed promotions through print and electronic media and related marketing activity. Government’s tourism strategy includes the aim of growing the value of the domestic tourism market, and coastal destinations and attractions can contribute significantly to this objective. The British Resorts and Destinations Association and other industry members have been working with VisitEngland to develop a Coastal Resorts Action Plan. This will focus on transforming perceptions of product and experience; coastal resort infrastructure; co-ordinated activities and events to grow tourism value; and building better intelligence and data.

Tourism: North East

Julie Elliott: To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what steps his Department is taking to promote tourism in the North East.

John Penrose: I had the opportunity to visit the North East in June, during which I held meetings with local industry representatives to discuss the opportunities for tourism growth and development.

Over the next four years VisitBritain will be running the “You’re Invited” programme, which will capitalise on the international interest in the recent royal wedding, as well as next year’s diamond jubilee and Olympic and Paralympic games, and showcase Britain to the world. The programme aims to attract four million extra visitors, spending £2 billion in the UK economy, which will support businesses, jobs and growth. The programme is backed by a £100 million marketing fund, funded by the public and private sector.
VisitEngland is working closely with local areas and destinations, in line with Government’s localism agenda, to grow the value of local tourism economies. This is co-ordinated through the national strategic framework for tourism, which includes an action programme developed in consultation with the tourism sector. VisitEngland is currently working with destinations across the country, including in the North East, on a campaign to deliver economic growth from the domestic market, and to support employment and job creation.

‘The time to be in England’ initiative will maximise the impact of the unique events of 2012, including the Queens diamond jubilee and the Olympic and Paralympic games, helping to spread the benefits of the games beyond London and maintain a legacy of domestic tourism growth. The campaign is the subject of a bid to the second round of the regional growth fund.

Tourism policy seeks to help improve the sector’s productivity and competitiveness, in particular, to address the burden of regulation affecting the industry. The Government’s Red Tape Challenge focused on the hospitality sector in May, inviting the industry and the public to identify regulations holding back the industry and stifling growth. Alongside this, the Government have set up an industry task force, led by senior industry figures, to identify rules, regulations and inspections impeding the sector, and which might be cut, modified or abolished.

The Government’s plans for promoting the growth of the visitor economy are set out in detail in the paper, “Government Tourism Policy” published in March 2011, and available at:


PRIME MINISTER

Andrew Coulson

Helen Goodman: To ask the Prime Minister if he will publish each document relating to the appointment of Mr Andrew Coulson as Director of Communications at 10 Downing street.

The Prime Minister: Special advisers carry out their duties in accordance with the ‘Model Contract for Special Advisers’ and ‘Code of Conduct for Special Advisers’. I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for West Bromwich East (Mr Watson) on 16 June 2010, Official Report, column 423W.

Luciana Berger: To ask the Prime Minister (1) how many emails have been exchanged between officials in his Office and Richard Thaler and since September 2010;

(2) how many letters have been exchanged between officials in his Office and Richard Thaler since September 2010;

(3) how many meetings have taken place between officials in his Office and Richard Thaler since September 2010.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to the list of official meetings by Ministers with external organisations. This list was published for the first time in October 2010 and is published on a quarterly basis, in accordance with the new ministerial code. Officials have meetings and discussions with a wide range of organisations and individuals on a range of subjects.

Members: Correspondence

Sir Gerald Kaufman: To ask the Prime Minister when he plans to answer the letter sent to him by the right hon. Member for Manchester, Gorton on 12 May 2011 with regard to Ms R Hughes; and if he will cause an investigation to be conducted into the way letters to him from honourable Members are dealt with.

The Prime Minister: The Minister for Housing and Local Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), has replied on my behalf to the letter.

Correspondence received by my Office, including correspondence received from hon. Members, is dealt with in accordance with the Cabinet Office guidance on handling correspondence. A copy of this is available on the Cabinet Office website:

http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/resource-library/guidance-handling-government-correspondence

Mr Ivan Lewis: To ask the Prime Minister when he plans to respond to the letter from the hon. Member for Bury South of 1 March 2011.

The Prime Minister: I refer the hon. Member to my letter to him of 17 February 2011 which set out that I do not have a role in this merger.

News Corporation: BSkyB

Helen Goodman: To ask the Prime Minister (1) whether he discussed with Mr Andrew Coulson the allocation of ministerial responsibilities relating to (a) media policy and (b) the proposed acquisition of BSkyB by News Corporation;
(2) whether he discussed (a) media policy and (b) matters relating to the proposed acquisition of BSkyB by News Corporation with Mr Andrew Coulson.

The Prime Minister: Special advisers carry out their duties in accordance with the “Code of Conduct for Special Advisers”.

TRANSPORT

Air Misses

Simon Hart: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many (a) collisions and (b) near-misses of aircraft above London there were in (i) 2009 and (ii) 2010.

Mrs Villiers: There were nil collisions and four near-misses above London investigated by the AAIB in 2009. There were nil collisions and two near-misses above London investigated by the AAIB in 2010.

Airports

Adam Afriyie: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 23 June 2011, Official Report, column 399W, on airports, what proportion of passengers are expected to transfer between flights at any given airport each year for it to be termed a hub airport.

Mrs Villiers: There is no single widely agreed definition of a hub airport. The Department has not sought to provide a precise definition of a hub airport. However, at Heathrow, 38% of terminal passengers in 2009 transferred between flights.

Airports: Retail Trade

Stuart Andrew: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the effects on the economic value of the airport travel retail business in the UK of the refusal by certain airlines to allow passengers to take goods purchased at the airport onboard the aircraft in addition to their normal airline hand baggage allowance; and if he will make a statement.

Mrs Villiers: The Department for Transport has made no such assessment. The size and amount of cabin or hold baggage that a passenger is permitted to take on board a commercial aircraft is a matter for airlines to decide as private commercial companies.

Aviation: Fuels

Mr Gyimah: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assumptions his Department made in respect of the price of aviation fuel from 2011 to 2030 when making forecasts for air traffic in its 2003 Air Transport White Paper.

Mrs Villiers: The air traffic forecasts underpinning the 2003 Air Transport White Paper were set out in “Air Traffic Forecasts for the United Kingdom” published by the previous Government in 2000. Annex 2 of the report provides details of the assumptions used to produce the forecasts, including the assumed price of aviation fuel.

A copy of “Air Traffic Forecasts for the United Kingdom” can be found on the DFT website at:

Cycling: Helmets

Jim Fitzpatrick: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport whether he plans to amend guidance in the Highway Code on the wearing of cycle helmets.

Mike Penning [holding answer 12 July 2011]: No.

Dartford-Thurrock Crossing: Tolls

Ms Angela Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what the cost of procurement is for the introduction of free-flow charging on the Dartford Crossing.

Mike Penning: Decisions on the procurement of free-flow charging at the Dartford-Thurrock river crossing have yet to be taken, and therefore such costs are still to be determined.

Ports: EU Action

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what steps his Department is taking to implement the European State Port Control Directive.

Mike Penning: The Maritime and Coastguard Agency has implemented a risk based inspection scheme for foreign registered vessels calling at UK ports from 1 January 2011 when the directive took effect.

Regulations and supporting documents to transpose provisions of the directive that place duties on the shipping sector have been prepared for consultation with the industry which is expected to begin soon.

Rail Value for Money Review

Caroline Lucas: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment he has made of the long-term effects of the outcomes of the McNulty review on train lines between Brighton and London.

Mrs Villiers: The Department for Transport has received Sir Roy McNulty’s final report on the value for money of the railway. The Department will be working closely with the Office of Rail Regulation and the rail industry over the next few months to analyse Sir Roy’s recommendations and to agree proposals for the reform of the industry. The Government plan to publish their proposals for the future of the rail industry in November.

Railways: Franchises

Kelvin Hopkins: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will make future bids for rail franchises subject to a demonstrable record of efficiency from prospective bidders.
Mrs Villiers: The Secretary of State for Transport, my right hon. Friend the Member for Runnymede and Weybridge (Mr Hammond), addressed this matter in a statement to the House on 19 May 2011, Official Report, columns 520-22, on Sir Roy McNulty’s independent study into value for money in the rail industry.

It was made clear in this statement that as a matter of policy for all future franchise competitions that part of the assessment of bidders’ capability at the pre-qualification stage will be evidence of success in collaborative working and driving down costs:

http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cm Hansrd/cm110519/debtext/110519-0002.htm#11051950001296

Shipping: Taxation

Maria Eagle: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what contribution his Department has made to the European Commission’s review of the European shipping tonnage tax regime. [63970]

Mike Penning: None to date as the Commission has yet to make its proposals known. We await the Commission’s proposals with interest.

Tolls

Mr Offord: To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the effectiveness of traffic congestion charging schemes. [64858]


The Mayor of London established a congestion charging scheme in 2003. The Mayor is responsible for operational matters and continued assessment of the congestion charging scheme in London.

A local congestion charging scheme is also operational in Durham.

NORTHERN IRELAND

Ministerial Meetings

Bill Esterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (1) what (a) meetings and (b) other engagements (i) Ministers and (ii) special advisers in his Department have attended which were also attended by (A) representatives, (B) journalists and (C) other employees of (1) News International and its subsidiary organisations including newspapers, (2) News Corporation and its subsidiary organisations and (3) BSkyB since 12 May 2010;

(2) what (a) meetings and (b) other engagements (i) Ministers and (ii) special advisers in his Department attended with Mr Andrew Coulson (A) between 12 May 2010 and 21 January 2011 and (B) since 21 January 2011. [66008]

Mr Paterson: I refer the hon. Member to the Prime Minister’s statement to the House today.

As has been the practice of previous Administrations information relating to internal meetings, discussions and advice is not normally disclosed.

Independent International Commission on Decommissioning

Mr Gregory Campbell: To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what the cost to the public purse was of the work of the Independent International Commission on Decommissioning since its commencement. [65197]

Mr Paterson: The Independent International Commission for Decommissioning running costs are shared equally between the British and Irish Governments. The total cost to the British and Irish Governments from inception to closure was £12,215,884 with the British Government contributing £6,107,942.

INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

Support for Women: Developing Countries

8. Karl Turner: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what proportion of his Department’s aid was allocated to supporting women and girls in the developing world in the latest period for which figures are available. [65543]

Mr Duncan: The Government have put girls and women at the heart of international development. We are supporting girls and women through our 27 country programmes and we have announced £10 million each year core funding to UN Women, making us the second largest donor. Since achieving results for girls and women spans DFID’s entire portfolio, it is not possible to disaggregate a precise figure for aid allocated to supporting girls and women.

Somalia

9. Mr Jim Cunningham: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development if he will assess the humanitarian situation in Somalia; and if he will make a statement. [65544]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: 2.8 million people—one in three Somalis—are in need of emergency relief. There are around 725,000 refugees in the region. Over 3,000 refugees a day are arriving in camps in Ethiopia and Kenya, and acute child malnutrition among new arrivals is at more than double emergency levels.

13. Sheila Gilmore: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance his Department is giving to Somalia in relation to the drought in the horn of Africa. [65548]

Mr Andrew Mitchell: This year in Somalia we are supporting treatment of acute malnutrition for 100,000 children under five and pregnant or breastfeeding mothers, vaccinations to more than 1.3 million people; clean water for 350,000 people; shelter or non food items for 50,000 people; and emergency agricultural or livelihood
inputs for 250,000 people. We continue to monitor the situation very closely and are considering what further action is needed.

**World Population Day**

10. **Diana Johnson**: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department took to mark world population day on 11 July 2011.  

**Mr O’Brien**: On world population day I spoke at a reception organised by the All Party Parliamentary Group on Population, Development and Reproductive Health.

UNFPA are using this year’s population day to launch “7 billion actions” ahead of the world population reaching 7 billion on 31 October. Dr Babatunde Osotimehin, executive director of UNFPA will visit DFID next week to discuss the issues.

**South Sudan**

11. **Stephen Phillips**: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department is taking to ensure that aid continues to reach South Sudan.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell**: I opened the DFID office in Juba in November. Our programme will deliver education, health, infrastructure, capacity building and humanitarian support to the people of the Republic of South Sudan. We have committed £90 million a year to South Sudan for the next four years.

**Post-conflict Planning: Libya**

12. **Mel Stride**: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what work his Department is undertaking to support post-conflict planning for Libya.

14. **Nicola Blackwood**: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what work his Department is undertaking to support post-conflict planning for Libya.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell**: Post conflict planning must be Libyan owned and UN led. The UK has taken steps to support this process by deploying an International Stabilisation Response Team to Benghazi. We stand ready to respond to the needs of the Libyan people working with international partners in a coordinated and effective way.

**Palestine**

15. **James Morris**: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what his policy is on the provision of development support to the Palestinian Authority.

**Mr Duncan**: The UK strongly supports the efforts of the Palestinian Authority to develop public institutions and deliver essential services to Palestinian people. I was therefore pleased to sign a Memorandum of Understanding last week. This makes a strong UK commitment to supporting the Palestinian Authority, which is committed to non-violent pursuit of a negotiated two state solution.

**Access to Work Programme**

**Mrs McGuire**: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development how many disabled people are being supported in employment in his Department under its access to work programme.

**Mr Duncan**: None of our disabled staff members are being supported under the access to work programme within the Department for International Development.

Ministerial Government Departments are not eligible for access to work funding; all costs of reasonable adjustments to support disabled people are met from DFID’s central administration budget.

**Departmental Consultants**

**Ms Angela Eagle**: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether any external consultants have been engaged for his Department’s aid reviews; and what the cost was of such consultants.

**Mr Andrew Mitchell**: The panel of development experts who helped scrutinise the country offers for the bilateral aid review did so without payment as a public service. Two leading experts in international development were appointed as external peer reviewers for the multilateral aid review at a cost of £20,000.

The humanitarian emergency response review was an independent review chaired by Lord Ashdown who did not receive remuneration for his role. He was supported by an advisory board of 15 experts who did not receive remuneration. The external assistance that involved a cost was limited to a seconded staff member from the Development Assistance Research Associates working on the review 50% of their time at a cost of £52,500; a full-time humanitarian consultant to support the DFID Review Secretariat at a cost of £67,200 and a part-time assistant to Lord Ashdown at a cost of £21,000.

**Departmental Regulation**

**Mr Umunna**: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development (1) how many regulations his Department has introduced (a) in the six months prior to 1 September 2010 and (b) in the six months after 1 September 2010 which it has determined do not impose costs on businesses; (2) how many regulations that impose costs on businesses his Department has (a) introduced and (b) removed since 1 September 2010; what the net effect on the costs on businesses of such introductions and removals was; and what regulations have been excluded from the one-in one-out system because they address (i) emergencies and (ii) systemic financial risks since 1 September 2010; (3) how many regulations that impose costs on businesses his Department (a) introduced and (b) removed in the six months prior to 1 September 2010; and what the net effect on the costs on businesses of such introductions and removals was.
Mr Duncan: The Department for International Development has not introduced any regulations between 1 March 2010 and 1 March 2011. The Secretary of State for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), is not responsible for any regulations that are currently in force.

Developing Countries: Health Services

Mr McCann: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether his Department has assessed the effects of implementation of proposed changes on Employment-Related Settlement, tier 5 and overseas domestic workers on medical trainees and practitioners in developing countries; and what recent discussions he has had on this matter with the (a) Secretary of State for the Home Department, (b) Secretary of Health who lead the consultation to assess potential impact on health professionals coming to the UK.

Mr Duncan: The Department for International Development (DFID) is aware of the proposed changes on Employment-Related Settlement, tier 5 and overseas domestic workers. The consultation document was published on 9 June and represents an agreed Government approach to reviewing the routes by which migrants can enter the UK to work. DFID is working with other Government Departments to consider the effects of implementation, and is liaising closely with the Department of Health who lead the consultation to assess potential impact on health professionals coming to the UK.

East Africa: Droughts

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what estimate he has made of the number of people affected by the drought in East Africa.

Mr Andrew Mitchell: According to UN estimates, around 10 million people in the Horn of Africa are currently in need of humanitarian assistance and emergency levels of acute malnutrition are widespread. About half of those in need of assistance are in Ethiopia, 2.8 million are affected in Somalia and 2.5 million in Kenya. This is the most severe food security emergency in the world today.

Forests: Satellite Communications

Adam Afriyie: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development whether his Department is funding the use of Earth observation satellite technology to monitor and tackle deforestation in the Congo Basin.

Mr O’Brien: The Department for International Development is helping tackle deforestation in the Congo Basin through support to the African Development Bank managed Congo Basin Forest Fund (the CBFF) and the Congo Basin Forestry Start-up Fund.

The Congo Basin Forest Fund (CBFF) is currently funding one project that is using remote-sensing data from satellite technology to determine the carbon stocks of forests in the Republic of Congo. The project is led by be World Resources Institute (WRI), in partnership with Republic of Congo Government and local institutions.

DFID established the Congo Basin Forestry Start-up Fund in 2008, before the CBFF became operational. It was originally intended that support to earth observation satellite technology would be included within its portfolio of activities. However this element of the programme has not been implemented.

HIV Infection: Tuberculosis

Andrew George: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department has taken to (a) integrate HIV and TB services and (b) support testing for HIV and screening for TB in countries where HIV and TB are prevalent.

Mr O’Brien: Scaling up access to HIV and TB diagnosis, treatment, care and support, including early infant diagnosis, within integrated services is listed as one of the UK’s strategic priorities in the recently published position paper on HIV: “Towards zero infections”. We will continue to focus on both HIV and TB in countries where they are prevalent, and on strengthening the underlying health systems in order to improve the way health services diagnose and treat illnesses, including TB and TB-HIV co-infection.

Our multilateral support to the new UNAIDS Unified Budget, Results and Accountability Framework (UBRAF) will also promote the strengthening of country systems to increase access to antiretroviral therapy and implement collaborative TB/HIV activities, including HIV testing for TB patients and TB screening for people living with HIV.

Human Trafficking

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what responsibility he has for contributing to Government action against human trafficking; and what recent action he has taken in this regard.

Mr O’Brien: The Department for International Development (DFID)’s contribution to the Government’s action against human trafficking will be set out in the new human trafficking strategy. DFID’s most important contribution is our work to tackle the root causes of human trafficking in poor countries such as poverty, lack of economic opportunities, and social exclusion. For example, DFID has one of the largest bilateral programmes on social protection, directly helping very poor people in over 15 developing countries.

DFID also supports projects which are specifically designed to prevent human trafficking. We support the Malawi Anti-Child Trafficking Project, run by the Salvation Army, which aims to improve knowledge of and access to rights for children in Malawi who have been trafficked or are vulnerable to being trafficked. In Bangladesh we have supported a police reform programme which has recently established a Human Trafficking Investigations Unit. In Uganda, we have supported UNICEF to help identify and support trafficked women and children in the northern Karamoja region. DFID is currently developing a new regional programme which will aim to reduce the numbers of women and girls trafficked in the south Asia region.
Japan: Earthquakes

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance his Department has provided to Japan following the earthquake and tsunami in March 2011.

Mr Duncan: Following the earthquake and tsunami DFID immediately deployed a 59 strong Search and Rescue team at a cost of £889,174. DFID also provided 100 tonnes of bottled water, sourced from Hong Kong, at a cost of £232,443. These responses helped to fill the gaps in humanitarian need that Japan found difficult to meet itself and were specifically requested by Japan.

Malawi: Overseas Aid

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assessment he has made of the impact of the decision not to increase direct aid to Malawi on food security for that country’s poorest citizens.

Mr O’Brien: In his announcement of DFID’s Bilateral Aid Review to the House on 1 March 2011 the Secretary of State for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), indicated his intention to increase UK aid funding to Malawi over the four years to 2014-15. Since then we have become increasingly concerned about economic management and governance in Malawi. The Secretary of State has raised these concerns with the Government of Malawi, and concluded that, until there are changes in Government of Malawi policy we can no longer justify the provision of general budget support to the Government of Malawi.

However, we are determined to continue funding programmes that protect the poor. DFID support has helped improve food security for over seven million people a year by providing them with high yielding maize and legume seeds via the Farm Input Subsidy Programme. We are currently considering how best to continue support to improve the production of maize crops in Malawi.

Tom Greatrex: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what recent discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs on direct aid to Malawi.

Mr O’Brien: The Secretary of State for International Development, my right hon. Friend the Member for Sutton Coldfield (Mr Mitchell), has had regular contact with the Foreign Secretary in relation to the review of the UK’s relationship with Malawi, including the aid programme.

Overseas Aid

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps he is taking to ensure that aid programmes are directed towards those countries who are in greatest need; and what plans he has for the future of the aid programme to India.

Mr O’Brien: The Department has recently conducted a full review of bilateral aid. Future bilateral support will be focused on twenty seven countries where the need is greatest and we can make the most impact. I have frozen the India programme at current levels (£280 million/year) until 2015. Over the next four years, the India programme will focus more tightly on the need is greatest and we can make the most impact. I have frozen the India programme at current levels (£280 million/year) until 2015. Over the next four years, the India programme will focus more tightly on the needs of the poorest states. Our goal will be to help the poorest women and girls get quality schooling, healthcare, nutrition and jobs to break the cycle of poverty for the next generation. We will also devote a progressively rising proportion of our programme to promoting pro-poor investment through the private sector.
Somalia: Refugees

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what assistance his Department is providing to those in the Dadaab refugee camp on the Kenya-Somalia border.

Mr **Andrew Mitchell:** The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) reports there are now more than 394,000 Somali refugees in Kenya, 90% of them in the Dadaab refugee camps.

The UK, helped to meet the basic relief needs of 20,000 refugees by providing £2 million, to UNHCR during 2010-11. Given the deteriorating situation we are urgently considering increasing our support in 2011.

Tuberculosis

**Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what targets his Department has set for reducing tuberculosis deaths of people with (a) HIV- and (b) non HIV-related tuberculosis.

Mr **O'Brien:** As highlighted in ‘UK aid: Changing lives, delivering results’, the coalition Government are committed to supporting global efforts to halve tuberculosis deaths by 2015. In relation to deaths from TB in people living with HIV, in the coalition Government’s recently launched Towards zero infections: The UK’s position paper on HIV in the developing world we committed to contribute to the UNAIDS and Stop TB Partnership’s goal of reducing HIV-related TB among people living with HIV by 50% by 2015. We will do this through multilateral and bilateral support to help deliver the Global Plan to Stop Tuberculosis 2011-15.

**Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department has set to reduce multi-drug-resistant and extensively drug-resistant tuberculosis in developing countries.

Mr **O'Brien:** The coalition Government recognises that drug resistant strains of tuberculosis (TB) pose serious threats to achieving the goals of the Global Plan to Stop TB 2006-15. We are therefore working with our partners to ensure that prompt quality diagnosis and effective treatment is available to those who need it.

Our support includes a 20 year commitment to UNITAID, the international facility for the purchase of drugs against HIV/AIDS, Malaria and TB, of up to £60 million per year subject to performance. UNITAID aims to triple access to rapid tests for multi-drug resistant TB and to significantly reduce the price of drug resistant TB medicines. We also fund research to: develop easier to use diagnostics for drug resistant TB, new TB medicines; and in the longer-term, effective TB vaccines. We also fund operational research to improve health service delivery to diagnose and treat people with drug resistant TB.

**Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what strategies his Department has to (a) prevent and (b) treat non-HIV related TB.

Mr **O'Brien:** The coalition Government are committed to supporting global efforts to halve tuberculosis (TB) deaths by 2015, as highlighted in ‘UK aid: Changing lives, delivering results’. We will help increase access to effective prevention, diagnosis and treatment of TB through our bilateral and multilateral support, particularly through the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, which is the largest single provider of international funds to fight TB, and through supporting co-ordinated action through the Stop TB Partnership; through our investments in research and product development into more effective treatment and vaccines; through our support to countries to strengthen health systems to deliver quality TB programmes; and working with our partners to tackle the risk factors for TB, including poverty and malnutrition.

UN Women

**Meg Munn:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what support he plans to provide to the UN Women agency; and if he will make a statement.

Mr **Andrew Mitchell:** The UK has strongly supported UN Women from the outset, lobbying hard for its creation, providing transitional funding as it established itself and agreeing to a senior staff secondment. Following adoption of UN Women’s strategic plan on 30 June the UK will provide £10 million in core funding to UN Women for each of the next two years. This will help UN Women achieve results for girls and women that include helping 15 countries adopt legislation to tackle domestic violence, supporting efforts to allow women to participate in political decision-making in 25 countries and holding the UN system to account on gender equality.

Developing Countries: Tuberculosis

**Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for International Development what steps his Department has taken to encourage industrial development of (a) diagnostics, (b) drugs and (c) vaccines for tuberculosis; and what assessment he has made of the effectiveness of these steps.

Mr **O'Brien:** The Department for International Development (DFID) is supporting a number of product development partnerships to encourage industrial development of new diagnostics, drugs and vaccines for tuberculosis. This includes support to the Foundation for Innovative New Diagnostics (FIND); the Global Alliance for TB Drugs; and the Aeras Global TB Vaccine Foundation. These initiatives are making progress. For instance, FIND has helped develop a new diagnostic for rapid detection of TB (‘GenXpert’). This may help shorten the time to diagnosis and cut transmission, thus preventing new cases in future. FIND are also working on how they can adapt these tools for use in more peripheral settings.

Work and Pensions

**Bombardier:** Redundancy

**Chris Williamson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what discussions he has had with ministerial colleagues on support for those to be made redundant from Bombardier in Derby.
Chris Grayling: Following the recent announcement by Bombardier that the company was planning to make job losses at its factory in Derby, an Economic Response taskforce has been set up by the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills. It includes Jobcentre Plus, the Skills Funding Agency, Derby city council and representatives of local training providers.

The taskforce had its first meeting on Friday 8 July and is exploring ways in which those facing redundancy can access other skilled jobs in the region.

Carer's Allowance: Islwyn

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many carers in Islwyn constituency currently in receipt of carers allowance will be affected by the planned introduction of the universal credit.

Maria Miller: The information is not available in this format. We continue to recognise the contribution made by carers and so carer’s allowance is to remain payable as a separate benefit outside of universal credit. We will have an additional element within universal credit to recognise carers, similar to the carer premium currently payable within income-related benefits.

Entitlement to universal credit will depend on a number of factors (such as earnings, family circumstances, housing costs). Departmental modelling estimates that around three-quarters of households where someone is receiving carer’s allowance across Great Britain will be entitled to current benefits replaced by universal credit, or universal credit, in steady-state. However, due to sample size we cannot provide this information at a constituency level.

Departmental ICT

Dr Whiteford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of disabled children who will have their weekly benefits reduced as a result of his welfare reform measures.

Chris Grayling: The information is not available in the format requested and could be provided only at disproportionate cost. This is because the Department for Work and Pensions has a large number of IT systems to support delivery of the Government’s Welfare and Pensions reform agenda, to transact business more efficiently and improve customer service and it is not possible to identify which specific computer system is being referred to.

Disability Living Allowance

Ms Abbott: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what policies and procedures his Department has put in place to ensure timely processing of (a) applications for disability living allowance and (b) appeal tribunals against decisions made regarding disability living allowance.

Maria Miller: We are working to remove unnecessary steps in the disability living allowance (DLA) application process as identified by customers and frontline staff. This has led to substantial improvements in timeliness—at the end of June 2011 the average waiting time to process an application for DLA was 21.7 days. This compares to 25.1 days in June 2010.

We are also working together with Her Majesty’s Courts and Tribunals Service, who has responsibility for appeals tribunals, and the judiciary to improve the appeals process for our customers.

HMCTS has increased capacity and now clears 38% more appeals in April 2011 than April 2010, and 63% more than April 2009.

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the cost to the public purse of abolishing the upper age limit for claiming the mobility component of disability living allowance.

Maria Miller: The information is not available.

There are no reliable data available on which estimates could be made of the number of people 65 and over who might be entitled to the mobility component of disability living allowance, if they were to make a claim. Entitlement to the mobility component of disability living allowance can only be established when a claim is made and the actual mobility needs of the individual are assessed.

Disabled: Children

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what estimate he has made of the number of disabled children who will have their weekly benefits reduced as a result of his welfare reform measures.

Maria Miller: With regard to the universal credit, the Government has agreed a package of transitional protection which will ensure that there are no cash losers at the point of change as a direct result of the migration to universal credit, where circumstances remain the same.

With regard to the introduction of personal independence payments, it is our intention, in the first instance, to only reassess individuals of working age—those aged 16-64. We will not extend personal independence payments to new or existing claims for children from 2013. The needs of children are very different to those of adults and we would want to build on our experience of developing and delivering the assessment for claimants of working age before considering children below the age of 16. We will consult on any substantive changes to the arrangements for children.

Employment Schemes: Disability

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps he is taking to support disabled people into employment.

Maria Miller: We are committed to ensuring that disabled people have the same employment opportunities and chances as everyone else to find and stay in work, regardless of their disability or benefit status.
As part of this commitment, the Department for Work and Pensions is responsible for a range of employment provision specifically aimed at disabled people:

Work Choice, which was launched in October last year, provides tailored support to help disabled people who face the most complex barriers to employment find and stay in work and ultimately help them progress into unsupported employment, where it is appropriate for the individual. Work Choice is voluntary and available regardless of any benefits being claimed.

Access to Work—provides practical advice and financial support to employed disabled people above and beyond what the employer could reasonably provide, to help them overcome obstacles resulting from disability and thus stay in work.

The Department for Work and Pensions also funds residential training for unemployed disabled adults whose needs cannot be met through any other government funded programmes.

Last month the Work programme rolled out across Great Britain, providing personalised back-to-work support for unemployed people, including disabled people. Contributory ESA customers will be able to volunteer for the Work programme, and if they wish, remain on the programme after their benefit has come to an end, ensuring that they receive all the support they need to help them return to work.

The Work programme will be complemented by a new Jobcentre Plus offer which will allow more flexibility to Jobcentre Plus managers and advisers to judge which interventions will help individual customers, including disabled customers, most cost effectively and meet local need. Jobcentre Plus will continue to work closely with local health services, supported by disability employment advisers and work psychologists.

The Sayce review, “Getting in, staying in and getting on”, was published on 9 June 2011. At the time of publication, I confirmed that Government would consult before moving to any decisions on the future strategy for specialist disability employment programmes.

The Government’s response and a separate public consultation have been launched through a written statement to the House on 9 June 2011, Official Report, columns 45-46WS. A programme of consultation events is planned over the summer, involving a wide range of stakeholders.

**Employment Schemes: Richmond**

**Zac Goldsmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what recent progress has been made on the Work programme in Richmond. [65820]

**Chris Grayling:** The Work programme went live in the contract area covering Richmond from 1 June 2011. The programme is being delivered by three prime providers: Ingeus Deloitte and Reed in Partnership who started delivery on 1 June, Maximus who started delivery on 15 June 2011.

Progress is measured by a range of statistics, including customers referred to provision, as well as the number of sustained job outcomes.

The Department is working to guidelines set by the UK Statistics Authority to ensure we are able to publish statistics that meet high quality standards at the earliest opportunity. It is the intention of the Department to publish national statistics on Work programme referrals from spring 2012 and job outcomes from autumn 2012. These timescales take account of the newness of the provision and length of time it will take for sustained job outcomes to be realised.

**Human Trafficking**

**Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what responsibility he has for contributing to Government action against human trafficking; and what recent action he has taken in this regard. [65304]

**Chris Grayling:** The Government are committed to tackling human trafficking, and the Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), will shortly publish a robust new strategy, detailing how we will make further progress. We are determined to build on the UK’s strong track record in supporting victims and fighting traffickers. The UK implements key international agreements aimed at improving anti-trafficking efforts across the world. This includes the UN’s Palermo Protocol and the Council of Europe Convention. Despite the difficult financial climate, Government have also protected funding for victims of trafficking.

The Secretary of State for Work and Pensions, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chingford and Woodford Green (Mr Duncan Smith), chairs the Social Justice Cabinet Committee, which meets regularly to discuss and reach cross-Government consensus on a number of issues relating to poverty, equality and social justice including the issue of human trafficking.

**Jobcentre Plus: Closures**

**Grahame M. Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions whether any closures of jobcentre offices in (a) the North East and (b) England are planned. [65785]

**Chris Grayling:** The administration of Jobcentre Plus is a matter for the chief executive of Jobcentre Plus, Durra Singh, I have asked him to provide the hon. member with the information requested.

**Letter from Durra Singh:**

The Secretary of State has asked me to reply to your question asking whether any closures of jobcentre offices in (a) the North East and (b) England are planned. This falls within the responsibilities delegated to me as Chief Executive of Jobcentre Plus.

The Government has set out an ambitious programme of reform and transformation. The introduction of Universal Credit and the Work Programme, alongside our plans to improve and personalise the services we offer, will provide both significant challenges and opportunities for Jobcentre Plus. We will become a smaller, leaner and more flexible organisation which delivers more of its services over the telephone and Internet.

As we deliver more, of our services over the Internet, and as unemployment falls, so we will free up capacity in our network. Face-to-face contact will reduce as more services can be accessed online and as we simplify the benefit system. Ultimately, these reforms are aimed at delivering a better service in a more efficient manner.

Our Jobcentres will remain central to our operation. The Government’s reforms will transform and strengthen the support for people to get back into work. Our prime concern is to ensure that we have a Jobcentre network that is appropriate to deliver the service our customers need, and of course cost effectiveness and...
productivity will be a factor. Each District has been asked to produce a service delivery plan, mapping how customers in that District will be served in each locality.

No decisions have yet been taken on any closures. Once we have developed our options we will consult with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders. We will in addition, undertake full Equality Impact Assessments and actively seek to mitigate, as far as is possible, any potentially adverse impacts. These assessments will be used in our decision making about the future.

Older Workers: Unemployment

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what steps his Department is taking to provide training for unemployed people over the age of 55 years. [65682]

Chris Grayling:Jobcentre Plus advisers offer all jobseekers of all ages a comprehensive menu of help including skills provision and job-search support. Advisers have the flexibility to judge which interventions will help jobseekers at the most appropriate point in their claim, tailoring this to individual need.

From the start of the academic year in August 2011, Jobcentre Plus will work closely with skills providers at a local level to ensure that the training offered meets the needs of both claimants and employers.

The Work programme provides support for those older workers who are at risk of long-term unemployment. Work programme providers are free to design support based on the needs of individuals and target the right support at the right time. Work programme providers will be paid for getting people into work and keeping them there, which means that there are strong incentives for delivery partners to provide skills training where that support would help a customer move into work and keep them in work.

Personal Income: Sunderland

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the likely effects of the incomes of people with children of each sex and relationship status in Sunderland of changes in the level of benefits in 2011-12. [65286]

Maria Miller: Estimates of the number and proportion of children living in poverty are published in the Households Below Average Income (HBAI) series. HBAI uses household (rather than family) income adjusted (or ‘equivalised’) for household size and composition, to provide a proxy for standard of living.

The sample size of this survey is not sufficient to provide estimates for small areas such as those requested. However, figures at a regional level, for Yorkshire and the Humber are available. Three survey years have been combined because single year estimates are not considered to be sufficiently reliable. Therefore information for part (i) is not available.

Statistics covering 2007-08 to 2009-10 are the most recent available.

The following table below shows (a) the proportion and number of children living in absolute poverty and (b) relative poverty Before Housing Costs (BHC) in the UK, for 2007-08 to 2009-10 in Yorkshire and the Humber.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Absolute Poverty (million)</th>
<th>Proportion (%)</th>
<th>Relative Poverty (BHC) (million)</th>
<th>Proportion (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08 to 2009-10</td>
<td>0.2</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.3</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. These statistics are based on Households Below Average Income (HBAI) data available at: http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?page=hbai_arc
2. These statistics are based on Households Below Average Income (HBAI) data sourced from the 2009-10 Family Resources Survey (FRS). This uses disposable household income, adjusted using modified OECD equivalisation factors for household size and composition, as an income measure as a proxy for standard of living.
3. Net disposable incomes have been used to answer the question. This includes earnings from employment and self-employment, state pension and other transfers, income from occupational and private pensions, investment income and other sources. Income tax, payments, national insurance contributions, council tax/domestic rates and some other payments are deducted from incomes.
4. Figures have been presented on a Before Housing Cost rather than an After Housing Cost basis. For Before Housing Costs, housing costs are not deducted from income, while for After Housing Costs they are.
5. All estimates are based on survey data and are therefore subject to a degree of uncertainty. Small differences should be treated with caution as these will be affected by sampling error and variability in non-response.
6. The reference period for HBAI figures is the financial year.
7. Numbers of children have been rounded to the nearest hundred thousand children.
8. Proportions of children in low-income households have been rounded to the nearest percentage point.
9. Each of the measures is defined as:
Absolute poverty: children living in households with equivalised incomes below 60% of 1998-99 median household income held constant in real terms.
Relative poverty: children living in households with equivalised incomes below 60% of contemporary median household income.

Social Security Benefits

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will estimate the average take-home income including in-work benefits of households from 2013.

[63826]
Chris Grayling: DWP estimates suggest that for households that are in work the median take-home income, including in work benefits, could be approximately £520 a week in 2013-14 (in 2013-14 prices). £520 is an estimate and the exact amount will depend on actual benefit rates in 2013-14.

The costing model used to make this estimate is DWP’s Policy Simulation Model (PSM), which is a static microsimulation model based on data from the 2008-09 Family Resources Survey, uprated to the relevant year’s prices, benefit rates and earnings levels. The model is also adjusted for expected changes in the size and composition of the population.

Social Security Benefits: Payments

Dr Whiteford: To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions what the cost to the public purse was at current prices of the ICL Pathway contract to build a benefits care payment system. [65624]

Chris Grayling: The Benefit Payment Card Project was cancelled by the previous Government in 1999. Up to the date of cancellation the then benefits agency’s expenditure on the project totalled approximately £127 million.

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 winter fuel payments in (a) 2009-10 and (b) 2010-11. [65622]

Steve Webb: The information for 2009-10 is available in the document ‘Winter Fuel Payment (Number of Households) 2009-2010 by Parliamentary Constituency’. This is available in the Commons Library and on the internet at: http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/index.php?paqe=wfp

Information for 2010-11 is not currently available.

ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

Common Agricultural Policy

Oliver Heald: To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for Wycombe, of 28 June 2011, Official Report, column 636W, on the common agricultural policy, what plans she has to ensure that the condition of chalk streams is taking into account in responding to climate change challenges as part of her Department’s negotiations on future common agricultural policy expenditure. [64718]

Mr Paice: The Government are already working to make the existing Environmental Stewardship provisions within Axis 2 of the Rural Development Programme for England more effective through the ongoing ‘Making Environmental Stewardship More Effective’ project.

Negotiations on CAP reform will start later this year. Future CAP expenditure should tackle the key objectives of encouraging a competitive, sustainable EU agriculture sector able to respond to climate change challenges, reducing reliance on subsidies and focusing resources on the provision of environmental public goods.

Chalk streams are valued for their unique biological and environmental characters, and many are already designated as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or have other protections.

Improving or preserving the condition of chalk streams is already taken into account in national policy through the establishment of river basin management plans which are required under the water framework directive. This allows regional panels, which include local stakeholders, to work together to design suitable management plans for water bodies in their area.

Recommendation 4 of the Government’s response to the Lawton review ‘Making Space for Nature’, published in June, outlines measures to protect and improve the water environment:


Under the water framework directive the UK is required to aim to achieve good chemical and ecological status in all inland and coastal waters by 2015.

CABINET OFFICE

Behavioural Insights Team

Luciana Berger: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office by what means the success of the Behavioural Insight Team’s initiatives will be measured; and how frequently reviews of its performance will take place. [65380]

Mr Maude: The Behavioural Insights Team’s quarterly Steering Board reviews progress on a regular basis. In July 2012, the two year anniversary of the team, the Steering Board will consider the team’s progress in the round. Success metrics depend on the policy initiative in question, but will include costs to benefits analysis.

Luciana Berger: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proportion of the Behavioural Insight Team’s budget will be spent on marketing. [65381]

Mr Maude: No proportion of the Behavioural Insights Team budget will be spent on marketing.

Luciana Berger: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many press officers are assigned to the Behavioural Insight Team. [65382]

Mr Maude: The team employs no press officers.

Luciana Berger: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how much his Department has spent on travel expenses for the Behavioural Insight Team since September 2010. [65383]

Mr Maude: Travel expenses for the team, including travel for unpaid academic advisers, amounted to £8,198.37.
Carbon Emissions

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office whether he has any plans to generate low-carbon energy from the Downing Street Estate.

Mr Maude: There are no plans to generate low-carbon energy from the Downing Street estate.

The primary heat source for the estate is the Whitehall District Heating System, which runs from combined heat and power generation equipment. There are no plans to replace this.

Charitable Donations

Luciana Berger: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress the Behavioural Insight Team has made in developing a charitable project to improve donations.

Mr Maude: The recently published Giving White Paper

www.cabinet-office.gov.uk/resource-library/giving-white-paper

sets out what the Cabinet Office, with support from the Behavioural Insights Team, is doing to encourage charitable giving.

Deaths: Drugs

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many people died of a drug overdose in (a) York, (b) North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust area and (c) England in each year since 1997.

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated July 2011:

As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your recent question asking how many people died of a drug overdose in (a) York, (b) North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust area and (c) England in each year since 1997. (65841)

The following tables provide the number of deaths where the underlying cause was (i) drug poisoning (Table 1) and (ii) drug poisoning and any drug controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 was mentioned on the death certificate (Table 2), for (a) York unitary authority, (b) North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust and (c) England in each year from 1997 to 2009 (the latest year available).

Table 1. Number of deaths from drug poisoning, York unitary authority, North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust, and England, 1997 to 20091, 2, 3, 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>York unitary authority</th>
<th>North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust</th>
<th>England</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2,644</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2,811</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>2,932</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>2,758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>2,884</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>2,624</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) for the years 1997 to 2000 and Tenth Revision (ICD 10) for the years 2001 to 2009. The ICD-9 and ICD-10 codes for drug poisoning are shown in Box 1.

2 Based on boundaries as of 2011.

3 Figures exclude deaths of non-residents.

4 Figures are for deaths registered in each calendar year.

Table 2. Number of deaths from drug misuse, York unitary authority, North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust, and England, 1997 to 20091, 2, 3, 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>York unitary authority</th>
<th>North Yorkshire and York Primary Care Trust</th>
<th>England</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1,233</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>1,389</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>1,538</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>1,510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1,697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>1,505</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1,312</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>1,417</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1,506</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>1,456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>1,590</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>1,800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1,731</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Cause of death was defined using the International Classification of Diseases, Ninth Revision (ICD-9) for the years 1997 to 2000 and Tenth Revision (ICD 10) for the years 2001 to 2009. The ICD-9 and ICD-10 codes for drug poisoning are shown in Box 1. Figures for drug misuse include all drug poisoning deaths where a drug controlled under the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 was mentioned on the death certificate.

2 Based on boundaries as of 2011.

3 Figures exclude deaths of non-residents.

4 Figures are for deaths registered in each calendar year.

Box 1. ICD-9 and ICD-10 codes for deaths related to drug poisoning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ICD-9</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>F11-F16, F18-F19</td>
<td>Mental and behavioural disorders due to drug use (excluding alcohol and tobacco)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X40-X44</td>
<td>Accidental poisoning by drugs, medicaments and biological substances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>X60-X64</td>
<td>Intentional self-poisoning by drugs, medicaments and biological substances</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Box 1: ICD-9 and ICD-10 codes for deaths related to drug poisoning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ICD-10</th>
<th>ICD-9</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>X85</td>
<td>E962.0</td>
<td>Assault by drugs, medicaments and biological substances</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Y10-Y14</td>
<td>E980.0-E980.5</td>
<td>Poisoning by drugs, medicaments and biological substances, undetermined intent</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Departmental Regulation

Mr Umunna: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many regulations his Department has introduced (a) in the six months prior to 1 September 2010 and (b) in the six months after 1 September 2010 which it has determined do not impose costs on businesses.

Mr Maude: (a) Two regulations determined as not imposing costs on businesses were introduced by the Cabinet Office in the six months prior to 1 September 2010.

(b) No regulations determined as not imposing costs on businesses were introduced by the Cabinet Office in the six months after 1 September 2010.

Mr Umunna: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many regulations that impose costs on businesses his Department has (a) introduced and (b) removed in the six months prior to 1 September 2010; and what the net effect on the costs on businesses of such introductions and removals was; and what regulations have been excluded from the one-in one-out system because they address (i) emergencies and (ii) systemic financial risks since 1 September 2010.

Mr Maude: No regulations that impose costs on businesses have been introduced or revoked by the Cabinet Office since 1 September 2010.

No regulations have been excluded from the one-in one-out system because they addressed (i) emergencies and (ii) systemic financial risks since 1 September 2010.

Mr Umunna: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many regulations that impose costs on businesses his Department has (a) introduced and (b) removed in the six months prior to or the six months after 1 September 2010.

Mr Maude: No regulations that impose a cost on businesses were introduced by the Cabinet Office in the six months prior to or the six months after 1 September 2010.

Food: Hygiene

Luciana Berger: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress the Behavioural Insight Team has made in relation to food hygiene.


a joint BIS/Behavioural Insights Team publication, sets out how the team has been progressing work on food hygiene. This work is ongoing.

New Businesses: Wales

Simon Hart: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many new business starts there have been in (a) Carmarthenshire and (b) Pembrokeshire since May 2010.

Mr Hurd: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the UK Statistics Authority. I have asked the authority to reply.

Letter from Stephen Penneck, dated July 2011:
As Director General for the Office for National Statistics, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking how many new business starts there have been in (a) Carmarthenshire and (b) Pembrokeshire since May 2010.

Annual statistics on the number of enterprise births are available from the ONS release on Business Demography at www.statistics.gov.uk

However, the information requested is not available as the latest estimates for business births relate to 2009.

Organs: Donors

Luciana Berger: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress the Behavioural Insight Team has made in relation to levels of organ donation.

Mr Maude: The Behavioural Insights Team has been working with the Department of Health to trial a new ‘prompted choice’ for organ donation. The changes to the DVLA website will go live in the near future.

Public Consultation

Luciana Berger: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what proportion of the Behavioural Insight Team’s budget is allocated to public consultations.

Mr Maude: No proportion of the Behavioural Insights Team’s budget is allocated to public consultations.

Public Sector: Procurement

John McDonnell: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office if he will take steps to ensure that all contracts put out to tender by Government departments include a social value element.

Mr Maude: The role of the public procurer is to secure value for money in buying the goods and services that Government needs. Where they represent value for money, social issues can be taken into account in a way that is consistent with procurement law.

Smoking

Luciana Berger: To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office what progress the Behavioural Insight Team has made in relation to reductions in levels of smoking.
Mr Maude: The Behavioural Insights Team and the Department of Health are working in partnership with Boots and a leading UK academic in the field of smoking cessation to trial ways to encourage more smokers to successfully quit smoking. Results are expected in 2012.

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Clubs: Public Finance

Charlie Elphicke: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on what date the decision was taken by his Department to authorise public expenditure on an away day at the Brickhouse burlesque club; how much was spent on the away day and on which contractors and firms; what form the teambuilding event took; and what steps have been taken to reduce expenditure on away days. [59209]

Robert Neill: This away day event was authorised by the Department in February 2010, before the coalition Government took office. The booking was made under the last Administration, while the cost of the event was debited via the Government Procurement Card in May 2010.

Poisson Rouge, an events management company, were contracted to provide the venue and the event. The total cost of the event was £4,719.21 which comprised £3,417.71 of payments made to Poisson Rouge and £1,301.50 to the venue, the Brickhouse.

The event involved hire of a room during the day at the venue, for a review of work in internal audit. While I am informed the Brickhouse often features such figures as ‘burlesque chanteuse Lady Beau Peep’ and ‘showgirl sensation Amber Topaz’, the event in this instance did not involve civil servants watching, or indeed, performing cabaret or other eclectic entertainment.

No alcohol was consumed at the event. The purpose of the staff event was to review work carried out for 2009-10, identify areas for improvement, agree changes for the forthcoming year to improve service delivery and build the team. However, the final part of the day did involve a team building event involving drumming, organised by Poisson Rouge.

http://www.poissonrouge.co.uk/events-organisers/services/team-building/rhythm.asp

The policy on such events has changed significantly following the arrival of the new Administration in May 2010. Team review events now take place at no or very limited costs, for example through using rooms in the Department building.

I am aware that Poisson Rouge has been used in the past by a number of public sector clients. Embracing transparency and reducing away day spending is a prime example of how both Whitehall and the town hall can make sensible savings to cut costs, protect frontline services and pay off the deficit inherited from the last administration.

Robert Neill [holding answer 10 June 2011]: In first instance, I refer the hon. Member to the National Audit Office report of 1 July 2011, HC 1272, on “The Failure of the FiReControl project”.

It states:

“The FiReControl project was flawed from the outset because it did not have the support of those essential to its success—local Fire and Rescue Services. The Department rushed the start of the project, failing to follow proper procedures. Ineffective checks and balances during initiation and early stages meant the Department committed itself to the project on the basis of broad-brush and inaccurate estimates of costs and benefits and an unrealistic delivery timetable, and agreed an inadequate contract with its IT supplier. The Department under-appreciated the project’s complexity, and then mismanaged the IT contractor’s performance and delivery. The Department failed to provide the necessary leadership to make the project successful, over-relying on poorly managed consultants and failing to sort out early problems with delivery by the contractor. The Department took a firmer grip of the project from 2009 and terminated the contract in December 2010 to avoid even more money being wasted. The Department is now trying to minimise the future cost of the project by subsidising Fire and Rescue Services to use the Regional Control Centres” (National Audit Office press release, 1 July 2011).

The total running costs incurred at each control centre building (up to and including April 2011) and the monthly running costs over the last three years are shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control centre building</th>
<th>Estimated monthly running cost (inc. rent)1 2011-12</th>
<th>Estimated monthly running cost (inc. rent)2 2010-11</th>
<th>Estimated monthly running cost (inc. rent)3 2009-10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>London</td>
<td>£2,011,773</td>
<td>£261,152</td>
<td>£268,320</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South East</td>
<td>£5,268,002</td>
<td>£164,200</td>
<td>£171,434</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West</td>
<td>£5,970,324</td>
<td>£145,784</td>
<td>£156,267</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East of England</td>
<td>£4,307,538</td>
<td>£155,833</td>
<td>£168,338</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Midlands</td>
<td>£6,266,748</td>
<td>£144,534</td>
<td>£155,835</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The National Audit Office report states on the empty buildings:

“The Department’s failure to manage the project as a whole has resulted in the creation of empty regional control centres. The nine regional control centres were purpose-built to house the new computerised equipment and were designed specifically for that purpose. The Department’s decision to prioritise the procurement of the centres over the IT system at an early stage meant that the first centres were completed in June 2007, just three months after the IT contract had been awarded” (Full Report, p.8).

A total of £68.6 million has been spent on consultancy services for the FiReControl project to date. There are currently no costs associated with consultancy work on the control centre buildings. Monthly cost comparisons between 2009-10 and 2010-11 are shown in the following table; the project closed in December 2010.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Control centre building</th>
<th>Cost incurred in total</th>
<th>Estimated monthly running cost (inc. rent)£ 2011-12</th>
<th>Estimated monthly running cost (inc. rent)£ 2010-11</th>
<th>Estimated monthly running cost (inc. rent)£ 2009-10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>West Midlands</td>
<td>5,460,625</td>
<td>158,574</td>
<td>169,243</td>
<td>165,493</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yorkshire and Humberside</td>
<td>4,175,2-54</td>
<td>145,725</td>
<td>153,965</td>
<td>144,638</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East</td>
<td>5,894,453</td>
<td>142,647</td>
<td>150,434</td>
<td>146,684</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West</td>
<td>4,534,320</td>
<td>141,241</td>
<td>155,620</td>
<td>150,953</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 All costs exclude VAT.

The coalition Government took decisive action and closed down the last Government’s costly and flawed project when it became clear that it could not be delivered to an acceptable timeframe. Our aim is to achieve the best possible value for money for the taxpayer from these expensive legacy buildings that we have been handed on by the previous administration.

We have already reached agreement with the London Fire and Emergency Planning Authority to take over the control centre in Merton. Our preference is for Fire and Rescue Services to use the centres as they are highly resilient and built for this purpose. Where we cannot reach agreement for Fire and Rescue Services to move in, we will actively seek suitable tenants for them.

Fire Services: Finance

Chi Onwurah: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for what reasons his Department has changed the funding formula for fire brigades.

[65849]

Robert Neill: Two changes were made to the fire funding formula which are reflected in the current Local Government Finance Settlement. The first was to update the expenditure data and the second was to adopt a new fire risk index with a positive weight for population density. Both updates were made to reflect more up to date data. We took into account all of the views received on the options for change set out in the summer 2010 consultation paper, which concluded two years of work reviewing the existing formula with representatives from fire authorities.

Housing: Fire Extinguishers

Simon Kirby: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what his policy is on the fitting of sprinkler systems to all new build domestic accommodation.

[65688]

Andrew Stunell: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave my hon. Friend the Member for Filton and Bradley Stoke (Jack Lopresti) on 28 March 2011, Official Report, column 6W.

Northwest Regional Development Agency: Lancashire

Graham Jones: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what sites in (a) Hyndburn and (b) Lancashire are owned by the (i) North West Regional Development Agency and (ii) Homes and Communities Agency.

[65569]

Andrew Stunell: The Regional Development Agency assets are a matter for the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, my right hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable).

A detailed list of the assets owned by Homes and Communities Agency, broken down by local authority area, are listed on the agency website at:

http://www.homesandcommunities.co.uk/land-and-property-assets

These assets are a mix in terms of scale and type of land with many being part of ongoing negotiation or at a stage of contractual commitment for development, but are still in the agency’s ownership. Others are small non-developable parcels such as grass verges.

Rents

Ms Buck: To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will publish the modelling on the effects on the Department for Work and Pensions, including the potential effects on housing benefit expenditure, of his policy on affordable rents.

[64637]
**Travellers: Planning Permission**

**Hazel Blears:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what arrangements he has put in place in respect of the retrospective grant of planning permission to Travellers. [64859]

**Robert Neill:** The provisions on retrospective planning applications in the Localism Bill will apply to all developers. Clause 108 provides for local planning authorities to decline to determine retrospective planning applications where an enforcement notice has been served. This means that a developer may attempt to obtain planning permission for an unauthorised development by either a retrospective planning application or an enforcement appeal, but not both. This will allow for the correction of innocent mistakes, such as a householder not realising planning permission was required, whilst clamping down on the intentional abuse of retrospective planning permission.

**Grant Shapps:** The Department for Communities and Local Government published a full impact assessment for Affordable Rent in June 2011. This includes indicative estimates of the potential effects on housing benefit expenditure:

http://www.communities.gov.uk/publications/housing/rentimpactassessment

**Waste Disposal**

**Bridget Phillipson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government which local authorities collect resident and business waste (a) weekly and (b) bi-weekly. [62371]

**Robert Neill:** We believe the public have a reasonable expectation that their household waste collections should be weekly, particularly for smelly waste. That is why we have already ditched the last Government’s policy of imposing fortnightly collections and we are now going to work with local councils to increase the frequency and quality of rubbish collections. We want to make it easier to recycle, and to tackle measures which encouraged councils to cut the scope of collections.

My Department does not hold centrally the frequency data requested, however, the Government will be working with the Waste and Resources Action Programme to monitor levels of service, and my Department is examining how we can increase transparency to local residents on the frequency and cost efficiency of waste collections, with a view to using best practice to help increase frequency and quality of service.

**DEFENCE**

**Assassination: Armed Conflict**

**Caroline Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the Government’s policy is on the targeted killing of individuals (a) in armed conflict situations and (b) outside armed conflict situations; and if he will make a statement. [64472]

**Dr Fox:** Any use of force whether in an armed conflict or otherwise will need to be consistent with applicable legal obligations, whether under a UN Security Council Resolution or some other legal mandate. In an armed conflict situation we would comply with the Laws of Armed Conflict. Any use of force outside of an armed conflict should be consistent with that legal mandate and also with English criminal law, for instance, in cases such as self defence, defence of others or prevention of crime.

**Defence: Space Technology**

**Michael Fallon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps he is taking to improve the UK’s military space capability. [65975]

**Peter Luff:** As part of the strategic defence and security review, the Government expressed its intent to develop a national space security policy which will coherently address all aspects of the UK’s dependence on space. The Ministry of Defence is currently closely involved in this policy development work, which will set the context for what improvements, if any, may be necessary to meet the UK’s future military space capability requirements.

**Departmental Regulation**

**Mr Umunna:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many regulations his Department has introduced (a) in the six months prior to 1 September 2010 and
Emergencies and (ii) systemic financial risks since 1 September 2010, have been introduced or removed by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) since 1 September 2010. No regulations were excluded from the one-in, one-out system by the MOD because they address emergencies and systemic financial risks since 1 September 2010. The one-in, one-out regulatory management system, although announced in September, did not come into force until January 2011.

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many regulations that impose costs on businesses his Department has (a) introduced and (b) removed since 1 September 2010; what the net effect on the costs on businesses of such introductions and removals was; and what regulations have been excluded from the one-in one-out system because they address (i) emergencies and (ii) systemic financial risks since 1 September 2010.

Peter Luff: All of the regulations introduced by the Ministry of Defence in the six months prior to 1 September 2010 and in the six months after 1 September 2010 are determined not to impose costs on businesses. Defence Ministers signed seven statutory instruments in the first period, and five statutory instruments in the second period. The Government’s policy is to consider alternatives to regulation. A list of regulatory measures introduced in the first half of 2011 can be found in the Statement of New Regulation in the Library of the House.

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many regulations that impose costs on businesses his Department has (a) introduced and (b) removed in the six months prior to 1 September 2010; what the net effect on the costs on businesses of such introductions and removals was; and what regulations have been excluded from the one-in one-out system because they address (i) emergencies and (ii) systemic financial risks since 1 September 2010.

Peter Luff: No regulations that impose costs on businesses have been introduced or removed by the Ministry of Defence (MOD) since 1 September 2010. No regulations were excluded from the one-in, one-out system by the MOD because they address emergencies and systemic financial risks since 1 September 2010. The one-in, one-out regulatory management system, although announced in September, did not come into force until January 2011.

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many regulations that impose costs on businesses his Department has (a) introduced and (b) removed in the six months prior to 1 September 2010; and what the net effect on the costs on businesses of such introductions and removals was.

Peter Luff: No regulations that impose costs on businesses have been introduced or removed by the Ministry of Defence in the six months prior to 1 September 2010.

Departmental Responsibilities

Chris Ruane: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence on how many occasions a request for a meeting by an hon. Member of each political party has been refused by (a) a Minister in his Department directly and (b) his Department on behalf of a Minister since May 2010.

Dr Fox: Defence Ministers are committed to an open and regular dialogue with their parliamentary counterparts, however the information requested is not held.

HMS Ark Royal

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence if he will review the decision to sell HMS Ark Royal.

Peter Luff: I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave on 30 March 2011, Official Report, column 389W, to the right hon. Member for Holborn and St Pancras (Frank Dobson).

HMS Endurance

Angus Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (a) for how long HMS Endurance was leased, (b) how much that lease cost and (c) at what cost it was purchased.

Peter Luff: The records of these arrangements are stored in archive and need to be retrieved in order to provide a full answer to the hon. Member. I will write to the hon. Member in due course.

Substantive answer from Peter Luff to Angus Robertson:

In my answer of 15 June 2011 to your Parliamentary Question (Official Report, column 830W), I undertook to write to you and provide details of the lease and purchase of HMS Endurance.

In October 1991, the Department leased the Polar Circle, which was subsequently renamed HMS Endurance, for a period of seven months for £3.1 million. The ship was then purchased for £25 million in early 1992.

I am placing a copy of this letter in the Library of the House.

Libya: Armed Conflict

Dan Jarvis: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what assets that have been used in the Libyan campaign are due for decommisioning under the strategic defence and security review; what elements of that capacity will be replaced; and in what time frame.

Dr Fox (holding answer 11 July 2011): Following the strategic defence and security review, a number of assets have been, or are planned to be withdrawn, that have been used in Libya, these are as follows:

- the withdrawal from service of the Type 22 Frigate HMS Cumberland in April this year, without replacement;
- the withdrawal from service of the three variants of the TriStar transport/tanker aircraft as we transition to the more capable A330 (Voyager) over the next few years;
- the withdrawal from the role of the VC-10 transport/tanker aircraft to air-to-air refuelling only, with the target of withdrawing it by 2013 as Voyager enters service;
- the withdrawal from service of the C-130J Hercules tactical transport aircraft by 2022, as we transition to the larger and more capable A400M aircraft;
- the withdrawal from service of the Sentinel aircraft, once these are no longer required to support operations in Afghanistan, and of the Sea King Mk 7 helicopter from 2016. We have a number of manned and remotely piloted aircraft either in-service or forthcoming that will mitigate the loss of these aircraft.

We will continue to have the capability required to continue to support UK activity in Libya pursuant with UN Security Council Resolution 1973.

Martin Horwood: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons forces involved in Operation (a) Ellamy and (b) Unified Protector are not eligible for operational pay.

Mr Robathan: I refer the hon. Member to the Statement made earlier today by the Secretary of State for Defence, my right hon. Friend the Member for North Somerset (Dr Fox).
Military Aircraft

Mr Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many flying hours are provided for in the Sentinel R1 Aircraft basic contract.

Peter Luff: The Sentinel contractor logistic support contract provides for 3,200 flying hours per year.

Mr Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what plans his Department has made for the replacement of the capability currently provided by Sentinel R1 aircraft after 2015.

Peter Luff: The strategic defence and security review announced the decision to delete the Sentinel capability in 2015. The Ministry of Defence is developing plans to address the capability gap and expect to reach conclusions in the autumn. The plans are likely to involve the use of Watchkeeper, an unmanned air vehicle, and future systems such as the Crowsnest programme from 2016, and through the development of Scavenger, an unmanned air system.

Military Decorations

Bob Russell: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) if he will recommend an extension to the qualification criteria for receipt of the Diamond Jubilee Medal to allow those who have served for a minimum of five years in the armed forces at any point during the reign of Queen Elizabeth II to apply; and (2) if he will recommend an extension to the qualification criteria for receipt of the Diamond Jubilee Medal to those currently serving in the armed forces who have been deployed to Afghanistan at any point since February 2007 without having served for a minimum of five years.

Mr Robathan: We welcome the announcement by the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, my right hon. Friend the Member for South West Surrey (Mr Hunt), on 28 June 2011 that members of the armed forces (regular and reserves) who have completed five full calendar years of service, and are serving on 6 February 2012, will be presented with a medal to mark Her Majesty’s diamond jubilee.

The Ministry of Defence will issue detailed qualifying criteria applying to personnel later this summer, and the points raised by these questions will be taken into consideration during this work.

Military Police

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the (a) duties and (b) priorities of service police in the (i) Army, (ii) RAF and (iii) Royal Navy are; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Robathan: Each Service police force is headed by a Provost Marshal and directed by their respective services. Each force provides different capabilities and is therefore organised differently.

Royal Military Police (RMP)

The duties and priorities of the RMP are twofold; to police the Army and, to provide support to the Army. The first covers the provision of policing and investigative services in a contemporary operating environment at home and while deployed, in order to support the service justice system. The second covers the use of police and investigative skills to support military operations, and includes close protection for designated individuals.

Royal Air Force (RAF) Police

The RAF Police duties and priorities are to provide police, counter-intelligence and protective security support to enable RAF commanders to deliver effective military capability. Their roles include the policing of RAF stations at home and overseas, provision of higher level investigative support, and advising on security and risk management issues. They also provide tactical policing support to military operations including close protection and counter intelligence work.

Royal Navy Police (RNP)

The RNP support operational effectiveness and the delivery of military capability by the prevention, investigation and detection of crime and disciplinary offences across the naval service.

The overriding priority for RNP is to support the Royal Navy on deployed operations and enhance the policing capability to deal with counter-piracy and narcotic operations. Within the UK base port areas, RNP policing priorities are to reduce crime that impacts on military capability and respond to the needs of military communities including concerns over crime and anti-social behaviour.

Military Police: Expenditure

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the costs of administration of the service police, including the Service Police Crime Bureau, were in the latest period for which figures are available.

Mr Robathan: It is important to note that administrative costs are recorded differently across the Service police.

The administration costs of the Service police for financial year 2010-11 were as follows:

Royal Military Police—£1,907,954

This figure includes the administration cost of the Service Police Crime Bureau which is met by Provost Marshal (Army) and was £183,831 over the period. The figure does not include the costs of Royal Military Police or civilian personnel involved in administrative duties who are allocated to other military units.

Royal Air Force Police—£4,632,000

The RAF police figure covers all administration costs and includes civilian personnel costs at £2 million.

Royal Navy Police—£246,744
Nuclear Disarmament

Paul Flynn: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what matters were agreed at the meeting of the permanent members of the UN Security Council on nuclear disarmament held in Paris between 29 June and 1 July 2011; and if he will place in the Library copies of papers circulated by attending parties.

Mr Lidington: I have been asked to reply.

The P5 Conference in Paris was a significant demonstration by the five nuclear weapon states of their determination to make progress against their commitments agreed in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) Review Conference Action Plan in May 2010; a public statement announcing the outcomes of the Conference was issued immediately afterwards and is available on the FCO website:


In order to facilitate frank discussions on sensitive issues, participants had agreed in advance that the detail of the discussions and papers circulated at the meeting would remain confidential. The meeting successfully contributed to building mutual trust between the P5; reaching agreement on further work on new confidence-building disarmament initiatives, including the establishment of a working group to enhance understanding of P5 nuclear terminology, and a confidential UK-hosted expert-level meeting later this year to share lessons from work that the UK has led on verification of nuclear warhead dismantlement.

Records of Detention

Mr Tyrie: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence with reference to the oral statement of 26 February 2009, Official Report, columns 3294-97W, on records of detention (review conclusions) and the answer of 6 July 2011; and if he will place in the Library copies of papers circulated by attending parties.

Mr Lidington: I have been asked to reply.

The UK Government was one of those parties that attended the P5 Conference in Paris in May 2010. In that context, the UK Government was unwilling to take part in any discussions to reach agreement on the establishment of a working group to enhance understanding of P5 nuclear terminology, or in the establishment of a confidential UK-hosted expert-level meeting. So we did not co-operate with the French in these respects. The reason for this transfer was that the UK did not have its own detention facility close to where the two individuals were captured. The individuals were then held in US detention at Balad and consequently transferred to a US detention facility in Afghanistan by August 2004.

UK forces did not undertake an assessment of whether or not the individuals were prisoners of war because they were immediately transferred to US forces for detention. As part of the review of the case completed by officials between late 2008 and early 2009, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) considered the status of the detainees and determined that, as there was no information to suggest that they were members of the armed forces of Iraq, they would not have been prisoners of war. They may have been protected persons under the Geneva conventions, subject to certain criteria being satisfied. If they were protected persons, compliance with the Geneva conventions in respect of detainees held by US forces was primarily a matter for the US.

The MOD is co-operating fully with Sir Peter Gibson’s Detainee inquiry, the purpose of which was described by the Prime Minister, in July 2010 as to “examine whether, and if so to what extent, the UK Government and its intelligence agencies were involved in improper treatment of detainees held by other countries in counter-terrorism operations overseas, or were aware of the improper treatment of detainees in operations in which the UK was involved.”

We understand that the Detainee inquiry will consider this case as part of their work.

Service Police: Travel

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the cost to the public purse was of travel for official purposes of civilian staff of the Service police, across the Army, RAF and Navy between May 2010 and 2011.

Mr Robathan: The travel and subsistence costs incurred by civilian staff supporting the Service police was as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service Police: Travel</th>
<th>£</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Royal Navy police</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Air Force police</td>
<td>1,901.74</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is not possible to provide a figure for the civilian staff supporting the Royal Military Police (RMP) since any travel costs are met by the relevant unit where the RMP are located, therefore this information is not held centrally and could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

EDUCATION

Children in Care: GCSE

Mr Timpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of (a) looked after children and (b) other children gained five GCSEs or equivalents at grades A* to C in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2010; and how many of those included GCSEs or equivalents in English and mathematics.

[64319]
Tim Loughton: Information on the percentage of looked after children who achieve five GCSEs, as well as those who achieve five GCSEs including English and mathematics, is available in table 3.1 of the Department's Statistical First Release, Outcomes for Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England, as at 31 March 2010. This shows the percentage of children looked after continuously for 12 months at 31 March who achieved five or more GCSEs (including equivalents) for all years since 2006. Information on years prior to 2006 is not available from this data source. The publication can be found at:


Information taken from table 3.1 is shown in table 1; this follows the current practice of comparing the GCSE performance of children looked after continuously for 12 months with that of all children. Information on the GCSE performance of children who are not looked after can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Table 1: Key Stage 4 performance of children who have been looked after continuously for at least 12 months at 31 March compared to Key Stage 4 performance of all children, years: 2006-10—coverage: England

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number eligible to sit GCSEs</th>
<th>Entered for at least 1 GCSE or equivalent</th>
<th>Entered for at least 5 GCSEs or equivalent</th>
<th>5+ GCSEs at grades A*-G</th>
<th>5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C</th>
<th>5+ GCSEs at grades A*-C including English and mathematics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>4,900</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>49.0</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>40.7</td>
<td>11.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>4,900</td>
<td>61.8</td>
<td>48.5</td>
<td>61.3</td>
<td>40.8</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>53.0</td>
<td>66.3</td>
<td>46.1</td>
<td>16.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>5,000</td>
<td>68.5</td>
<td>56.0</td>
<td>68.7</td>
<td>49.7</td>
<td>21.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>5,100</td>
<td>77.6</td>
<td>58.9</td>
<td>78.0</td>
<td>50.6</td>
<td>25.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All children

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number in Year 11</th>
<th>Number who sat at least 1 GCSE or GNVQ</th>
<th>Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>3,900</td>
<td>2,100</td>
<td>53.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>4,200</td>
<td>2,200</td>
<td>54.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Number who obtained at least:

1 GCSE at grade A* to G or a GNVQ 1,900 2,100 40.2 49.6 94 95
5 GCSE's at grade A* to G 1,400 1,400 35.5 33.1 89 90

Note:
Figures have been rounded to the nearest 100.
Source: CLA-NPD matched data

Information on the GCSE attainment of children looked after continuously for 12 months in 1997 is not available. The earliest data available is for 2000 and relates to all children looked after continuously at 30 September each year. This data includes GNVQs but does not include any other GCSE equivalent qualifications. As this data has been derived from a different data source and includes a different cohort of children, the percentages given in table 2 are not directly comparable with those shown in table 1. Information on the percentage of children looked after continuously for 12 months at 30 September who achieved five or more A* to C grade GCSEs including English and mathematics or the percentage of these children entered for GCSEs is not available. The available information is shown in table 2.
Children in Care: Reading

Mr Timpson: To ask the Secretary of State for Education what proportion of (a) looked after children and (b) other children achieved the expected standard in reading and writing at key stage 1 in (i) 1997 and (ii) 2010.

Tim Loughton: Information on the percentage of looked after children who achieve the expected standard in reading and writing in key stage 1 tests is available in table 1.1 of the Department’s Statistical First Release, Outcomes for Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England, as at 31 March 2010. This shows the percentage of children looked after continuously for 12 months at 31 March who achieved at least level 2 in reading and writing key stage 1 tests for all years since 2006. Information on years prior to 2006 is not available from this data source. The publication can be found at: http://www.education.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/SFR/s000978/index.shtml

Information taken from table 1.1 is shown in table 1; this follows the current practice of comparing the academic achievement of children looked after continuously for 12 months with that of all children. Information on the key stage 1 performance of children who are not looked after can be provided only at disproportionate cost.

### Table 1: Eligibility and performance of children who have been looked after continuously for at least 12 months at key stage 1, includes comparisons with all children. Years: 2006-10. Coverage: England

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number eligible to sit key stage 1 tasks and tests</th>
<th>Percentage who achieved at least level 2 in the following:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>1700</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>1500</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>1400</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Children looked after

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number eligible to sit key stage 1 tasks and tests</th>
<th>Percentage who achieved at least level 2 in the following:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reading</td>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>559,800</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>545,300</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>535,800</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>531,900</td>
<td>84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>551,400</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### All children

Information on the key stage 1 attainment of children looked after continuously for 12 months for years prior to 2006 relates to children looked after continuously at 30 September each year. Please note that because these data have been derived from a different data source and include a different cohort of children, the percentages given in table 2 are not directly comparable with those shown in table 1 above. The earliest year for which this information is available is 2000; this is shown in table 2.

### Table 2: Eligibility and performance of looked-after children in key stage 1 tasks and tests, compared with all children, school years ending 30 September 2000 and 2001. England

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number eligible to sit key stage 2 tasks and tests</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>2,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>2,100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Departmental Freedom of Information

**Chris Ruane:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what many requests under the provisions of the Freedom of Information Act 2000 his Department received from (a) hon. Members from each political party and (b) members of the public in each year since the Act’s entry into force. [63583]

**Tim Loughton:** The Department does not collect statistics about the background of individual requesters. This is because the Freedom of Information Act is applicant and motive blind and therefore it is not necessary to record or determine whether a requestor is a Member of Parliament or member of the public.

The Ministry of Justice publishes quarterly and annual statistics on the volume, timeliness and outcome of information requests received by over 40 central Government bodies.

### Human Trafficking

**Fiona Mactaggart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what responsibility he has for contributing to Government action against human trafficking; and what recent action he has taken in this regard. [65361]

**Tim Loughton:** The Department is working closely with the Home Office, other Government Departments and stakeholders on the development of a new human trafficking strategy. I am reviewing guidance which was issued by the previous Government on safeguarding children from trafficking, and am considering improved measures to protect trafficked children going missing from care. We have also provided a grant of £521,360 for 2011-12, and a further grant of £876,360 for 2012-13 conditional on meeting targets, for a Barnardo’s project aimed at providing specialist support to sexually exploited or trafficked children. Additionally I sit on the Minister of State for Immigration’s inter-departmental ministerial group on human trafficking.

### ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

#### Climate Change: Satellite Communications

**Adam Afriyie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what assessment his Department has made of the contribution of Earth observation satellite technology in monitoring (a) climate change and (b) the impacts of climate change. [65812]

**Gregory Barker:** The Department of Energy and Climate Change (DECC) welcomes the assessment and recommendations provided by the 2010 update of the “Implementation Plan for the Global Observing System for Climate in Support of the UNFCCC” on climate observations, including those obtained by satellite technology, prepared by the Global Climate Observing System (GCOS) secretariat. A UK response to the 2010 Update is currently in preparation.

DECC also welcomes the 2011 update of the satellite supplement to the GCOS implementation plan that is currently under way. The Department is well aware of the importance of Earth observation satellite technology in monitoring (a) climate change and (b) the impacts of climate change, and works closely with the UK Space Agency on such matters.

#### Energy: Seas and Oceans

**Jim Shannon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what his policy is on licensing sea kite energy technology. [65163]

**Gregory Barker:** The Government are committed to supporting the development of the marine energy industry in the UK. The “sea kite” technology being developed in the UK has already received £350,000 support from the Carbon Trust to develop and deploy its first prototype at sea. If sea kite technologies can be successfully developed they could allow the utilisation of lower velocity tidal energy resource which cannot be used by more conventional designs.

#### Environment Protection

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change whether he has made an estimate of the average rate of return on investment for a company investing in low-carbon technologies. [65443]

### Table 2: Eligibility and performance of looked-after children in key stage tasks and tests, compared with all children, school years ending 30 September 2000 and 2001. England

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Looked after children</th>
<th>All children/</th>
<th>Ratio QP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>970</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>2000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>2001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 Source: DfES bulletin ‘National curriculum assessments of 7, 11 and 14 year olds in England—2001’.
2 The proportion of looked after children attaining the target levels or better in each of the tested subjects in the National Curriculum Assessments tests, expressed as a ratio of the proportion of all children at that stage attaining the target level or better in the local education authority.
3 Target level for age group.
4 The ‘all children’ key stage 1 reading task figure is derived by DfES from an average of children attaining level 2 or above in the reading task and pupils attaining level 3 or above in the reading comprehension test, therefore cannot be directly compared with the reading task or reading comprehension test figures for looked after children. There was also a reading comprehension task in 2000. Figures shown for 2000 are for reading task only.

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**Table 1:**

### Number and percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Looked after children</th>
<th>All children/</th>
<th>Ratio QP</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Number</td>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>Number</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>970</td>
<td>47.6</td>
<td>2000</td>
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<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>950</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>2001</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

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**Table 2:** Eligibility and performance of looked-after children in key stage tasks and tests, compared with all children, school years ending 30 September 2000 and 2001. England

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 2</th>
<th>Looked after children</th>
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<td>950</td>
<td>45.1</td>
<td>2001</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Gregory Barker: A company’s rate of return is often confidential and will depend on the nature and stage of investment and type of technology being invested in.

An assessment of the impact on the cost of capital for low carbon technologies was undertaken as part of the Government’s commitment to transform the UK’s electricity system. This information is set out in the impact assessment published alongside the Electricity Market Reform White Paper.

The current bands set for the current Renewables Obligation were developed using assumed hurdle rates, (i.e. minimum rate of return required to invest) developed in 2007.

More recent assessments of hurdle rates have been undertaken as part of a report produced by Arup in June 2011.

Information regarding DECC’s assumptions around the required rates of return under the Feed In Tariffs scheme for different classes of investor is available in ‘Design of Feed in Tariffs for sub-5MW electricity in Great Britain—Quantitative Analysis for DECC’, and for the Renewable Heat Incentive in the impact assessment published in March 2011.

1 Ernst and Young (2007), Impact of banding the Renewables Obligation: Costs of Electricity Production.

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills on steps to encourage research and development in low-carbon technologies by universities.

Gregory Barker: DECC ministers regularly hold meetings with their counterparts in BIS to discuss a range of issues. The primary channel for BIS and DECC Ministers to engage on low-carbon research and development is through the Low Carbon Innovation Group. The group is co-chaired by the Minister for Universities and Science, my right hon. Friend the Member for Havant (Mr Willetts), and myself, and includes representation from Research Councils UK.

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what recent discussions he has had with (a) the Trades Union Congress and (b) industry groups on research and development for low-carbon technologies.

Gregory Barker: DECC publishes all meetings the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, my right hon. Friend the Member for Eastleigh (Chris Huhne) has had with industry groups and organisations on its internet on a quarterly basis.

DECC is also a member of Energy Research Partnership. The high level forum brings together key funders of low carbon innovation in Government, industry and academia, plus other interested parties, to work together towards shared goals.

Housing: York

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much funding was allocated to the City of York council for capital investment in housing stock through the Decent Homes programme in (a) 2009-10 and (b) 2010-11.

Andrew Stunell: I have been asked to reply.

Government investment in council owned housing stock was primarily provided through the housing revenue account subsidy system in the form of local authorities supported capital expenditure, arms length management organisations supported borrowing allocations and major repairs allowance. In 2009-10 the City of York was allocated £1 million in local authorities supported capital expenditure and £5.13 million in major repairs allowance. In 2010-11 the city was allocated £5.34 million in major repairs allowance.

Renewable Energy

Chris Evans: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change what the incentives are which the Government makes available to energy companies to encourage the use of renewable energy.

Gregory Barker: The current financial mechanisms to incentivise renewable electricity are the renewables obligation (RO) and the feed-in tariff (FIT) scheme.

Since its introduction in 2002, the RO has succeeded in more than tripling the level of large-scale renewable electricity in the UK from 1.8% in 2002 to 7% in 2010. It currently supports around 6.3GW of accredited capacity and is worth around £1.4 billion to the renewable electricity industry.

The FITs scheme was launched in April 2010 to incentivise the deployment of small scale low carbon electricity generation. To date, over 44,800 FITs installations have been registered.

The Renewable Heat Incentive (RHI) is due to go ahead this year to support renewable heat.

1 On a renewables obligation basis.
Source: Energy Trends, June 2011

Warm Front Scheme: York

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how much his Department spent on the Warm Front Scheme in York in (a) 2009-10 and (b) 2010-11.

Gregory Barker: The following table shows the total Warm Front spend in York in 2009-10 and 2010-11.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Spend (£)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>674,588.82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010-11</td>
<td>396,275.90</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 The figures are for the local authority of York due to the constituency changing between 2009 and 2011.
Balkans: War Crimes

Mr Douglas Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the prosecution of persons alleged to have committed war crimes in the Balkans; and if he will make a statement. [64924]

Mr Hague: The UK is among the strongest supporters of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (ICTY). The tribunal’s work to effectively prosecute war criminals is critical for regional reconciliation.

Most notably, we welcome, very strongly, the recent arrest and transfer to The Hague of Ratko Mladic and we support the ICTY in its effective handling of that case.

This is important for International Justice, and for the families of the victims of those terrible crimes. It is vital now, that the Serbian authorities continue to cooperate fully with the ICTY. Both in supporting the handling of existing trials—such as the notable cases of Vojislav Seselj and Radovan Karadzic. But also in continuing the search for the last ICTY remaining fugitive—Goran Hadzic.

Equally, we note the successful prosecution of Croatian General Ante Gotovina sentenced on 15 April to 24 years for war crimes. We hope that this judgement, like all ICTY judgments, will be respected, while bearing in mind the possibility of an appeal.

BBC World Service: Finance

John McDonnell: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether his Department has allocated ring-fenced funding to the BBC World Service Hindi shortwave service. [63054]

Mr Lidington: I refer my hon. Friend to the written ministerial statement made by the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my right hon. Friend the Member for Richmond (Yorks) (Mr Hague), on 22 June 2011, Official Report, columns 14-16WS. In that statement, the Foreign Secretary welcomed the BBC’s agreement that the World Service would be able to reinvest the reduction in their planned contribution to the BBC pension deficit to mitigate the impact on services of their budget reduction. One area they have identified as a priority for such funding is the continuation of the Hindi shortwave service. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office has not allocated any additional funding to the Hindi shortwave service.

Belarus: Politics and Government

Mr Douglas Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what assessment he has made of reports of the actions of the government of Belarus in relation to online dissent in that country. [64925]

Mr Hague: I am appalled at the increasingly repressive approach being taken by the authorities in Belarus. Opposition and independent media websites have been subjected to increasing numbers of cyber attacks, in particular before and after the so-called “silent” protests which have taken place throughout Belarus in recent weeks. I and the Minister for Europe, my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington), have made clear repeatedly to Belarus that basic human rights and freedom of expression must be respected.

Brahmaputra River: Hydroelectric Power

Barry Gardiner: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received of the effects of hydroelectric and diversionary projects on the Brahmaputra River on downstream countries. [64329]

Mr Jeremy Browne: We are aware of recent media reporting regarding hydroelectric and diversionary projects on the Brahmaputra river. However we have not received any specific reports of the effects of such projects. We understand that since 2002 India and China have signed a number of MOUs for the provision of hydrological information on the Brahmaputra river, and that the two sides have set up a joint expert level mechanism to discuss co-operation. We continue to monitor water disputes in the region, recognising that these are a potential source of tension.

British Nationals Abroad: Homicide

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what training is offered to officials in his Department to deal with the families of UK victims of murder and manslaughter abroad. [64232]

Mr Jeremy Browne: All consular staff in London and abroad undergo pass/fail training before taking up their duties. Much of this is delivered by professional external trainers and includes specific modules on death in violent and suspicious circumstances and bereavement. Staff refresh their skills through attending consular workshops held regularly at posts around the world.

Foreign Relations

Mr Douglas Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether any meetings are scheduled between members of the Government acting in a private capacity and foreign heads of state and government. [64835]

Mr Hague: No.

GCHQ: Location

Mr Weir: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what the (a) original estimate and (b) final cost was in real terms of the 1997 relocation of GCHQ in Cheltenham. [65836]

Mr Hague: The cost of the Government Communications Headquarters’ (GCHQ) whole new accommodation programme was approximately £1.2 billion. This included the building cost, maintenance and running of the building and the provision of services over 30 years. This was in line with initial estimates.

There was a further £308 million to meet the costs of the technical transition.
Human Rights: Internet

Mr Douglas Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will place in the Library a copy of each representation he has received from human rights organisations on the issue of internet access in other countries since May 2010. [63611]

Mr Hague: This Government are committed to supporting freedom of expression on the internet and will continue to encourage states that restrict access to online media to uphold their international human rights commitments.

We do not keep a central record of all representations received, including those on the issue of internet access in other countries. However, a sub-group of my Advisory Group on Human Rights has been set up under the chairmanship of the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Taunton Deane (Mr Browne), specifically to advise the Foreign and Commonwealth Office on freedom of expression on the internet. This group will hold its first meeting on 20 July, and will include representatives from relevant human rights organisations.

Human Trafficking

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what responsibility he has for contributing to Government action against human trafficking; and what recent action he has taken in this regard. [65771]

Mr Jeremy Browne: The Government made tackling human trafficking a priority in the coalition programme for government. The Home Department leads this work and will shortly be publishing the Government’s strategy on human trafficking. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office strongly welcomes its publication and has been involved in its development. We work, often with colleagues from other Departments, with governments and others in source and transit countries to identify and prevent human trafficking, to protect its victims and to prosecute its perpetrators. We are proud that our work to date has received praise from the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre, and will continue to work with the Home Office and others to combat human trafficking.

Libya: Armed Conflict

Mr Douglas Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent assessment he has made of the (a) number and (b) seniority of defectors from the Gaddafi government in Libya since the beginning of Operation Ellamy. [64914]

Mr Hague: The number of Libyans who have deserted or defected from Gaddafi’s regime is steadily increasing. It is hard to give a definitive number, but recent departures include five generals and two colonels, reported along with soldiers of other ranks; the Libyan ambassadors in Rome and Berlin; and 17 members of the Libyan football team.

Since the beginning of Operation Ellamy, the Foreign Minister, Musa Kusa, the Labour Minister Ali Al-Amin Mansur and the head of the National Oil Corporation, Shukri Ghanem, are the most senior members of the regime to have left Gaddafi. These departures are a measure of the growing pressure on those close to Gaddafi—both from sustained military action to prevent the regime attacking its own people, and from UN and EU sanctions.

Libya: Arms Trade

Stephen Gilbert: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on the supplying of weapons to rebel fighters in Libya by the French Government; and if he will make a statement. [65805]

Alistair Burt [holding answer 12 July 2011]: We are aware of reports that the French Government decided to supply some weapons along with other essential supplies to the Libyan Opposition in the Jebel Nafusa resisting attacks by the Gaddafi regime. We agree the United Nations resolutions allow in certain limited circumstances weapons to be provided. The UK has focused on supplying other forms of equipment.

Libya: British Nationals Abroad

Mr Douglas Alexander: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on allegations that UK-manufactured radar components for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether (a) consideration was given to and (b) a costing sought for (i) chartering a reserve aircraft and (ii) ensuring that contracts had a redundancy capacity in case of mechanical fault when chartering evacuation flights from Libya. [64922]

Mr Hague: Throughout the Libya evacuation, our top priority was the safe and quick evacuation of British nationals and other eligible persons. The UK instigated the military multinational evacuation cell, based in Malta, to co-ordinate rescue efforts throughout the crisis. Whenever we sought a charter flight to support the evacuation, our brokers would return a number of options from different air operating companies. We made a selection on the basis of seat capacity, location of aircraft and price. Once our selected charter was confirmed, the broker informed the unsuccessful bidders. Because of the way the charter market works, it is not possible to hold other flights on reserve without paying significant costs. Following the FCO Review of Consular Evacuation Procedures, which I lodged in the Library on 4 July, we are examining the most cost-effective way of securing redundancy capacity, if we need it in the future.

Palestinians: Arms Trade

Stephen Gilbert: To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what reports he has received on allegations that UK-manufactured radar systems were found by Israeli defence forces in the cargo of the ship Victoria. [65765]

Mr Lidington [holding answer 12 July 2011]: I have received reports that UK-produced radar components were found on the ship Victoria. This is very concerning. The UK operates an extremely rigorous export licensing system which includes consideration of end users and end use. Following an investigation of the reports with
the manufacturer in this case we are working to ensure that new measures are implemented to prevent similar allegations in future.

**Palestinians: International Assistance**

**Anas Sarwar:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what representations he has made to the Greek Government on the Gaza Aid flotilla.  
[65430]

**Mr Lidington:** Officials from our embassy in Athens have discussed the matter of the Gaza flotilla with the Greek authorities and have relayed to them the United Kingdom’s position on this. Our travel advice for Israel and the Occupied Palestinian Territories gives clear guidance against any attempt to enter Gaza by sea. We continue to advise against participating in flotillas or overland convoys to Gaza because of the risks involved.

**Palestinians: Politics and Government**

**Mr Douglas Alexander:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what discussions he has had with his EU counterparts on UN consideration of Palestinian statehood.  
[60073]

**Mr Hague:** The unprecedented changes of the Arab Spring make progress on the peace process more urgent than ever. President Obama has called for the parties to return to the table for negotiations based on 1967 borders with agreed swaps and security arrangements that protect Israel and respect Palestinian sovereignty. The UK backs this call.

We urge all parties to seize this moment of opportunity and return as soon as possible to direct negotiations and we have regular meetings with our EU counterparts. As I told all sides during my visit to the region on 27 June to 1 July, we do not know if there will be a resolution in September, or what it will look like—so we have not made any decisions. Instead we urge both sides to look towards the things that are necessary to get a negotiated settlement and to return to talks as soon as possible.

**Sikhs: Clothing**

**Emma Reynolds:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent representations he has received on steps to ensure appropriate respect for the wearing of the Sikh turban.  
[64701]

**Andrew Stunell:** I have been asked to reply.

I refer the hon. Member to the answer given by the Minister for Europe, my right hon. Friend the Member for Aylesbury (Mr Lidington), on 11 July 2011, *Official Report*, column 125-26W.

My Department leads on engagement with faith communities and has been facilitating discussions between the Department for Transport and a range of bodies representing British Sikhs, in relation to the approach on this issue adopted at British airports.

**Syria**

**Mr Douglas Alexander:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether (a) he and (b) Ministers in his departments met the hon. Member for Braintree (Mr Newmark), to discuss his meeting with President Assad of Syria in June 2011 to discuss the meeting.  
[64837]

**Mr Hague:** I have not met the Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty’s Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Braintree (Mr Newmark), to discuss his visit to Syria. However, the Under-Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, my hon. Friend the Member for North East Bedfordshire (Alistair Burt), spoke briefly to the hon. Member for Braintree both before and after the visit and they have also spoken in the margins of a meeting in the House. No other Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) Minister has met the hon. Member for Braintree, although following his return from Syria he has met FCO officials.

**Syria: Oil**

**Nicholas Soames:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will initiate discussions with the governments of (a) Germany, (b) Italy, (c) France and (d) the Netherlands to urge them to cease importing oil from Syria.  
[65575]

**Alistair Burt [holding answer 12 July 2011]:** The UK has been at the forefront of the international effort to introduce targeted sanctions against Syria on those responsible for and associated with violent repression in Syria.

We will, with our EU and international partners, continue to keep up the pressure on those responsible for the violence and repression.

We are in constant discussion with our EU partners about ways to increase this pressure.

**HOME DEPARTMENT**

**Alcoholic Drinks: Misuse**

**Jim Shannon:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether she has discussed with her counterparts in (a) Norway and (b) Sweden measures to reduce the level of alcohol consumption by the public.  
[65144]

**Anne Milton:** I have been asked to reply.

I met my counterpart from Norway, Anne-Grete Strom-Erichsen, at an informal European Union Council of Health Ministers from 4 to 5 April 2011. At her request, we discussed the possible renewal of the derogation for Norway from the EU Audiovisual media services Directive, which has permitted Norway to continue to ban advertising of alcohol.

Departmental officials have taken part in discussions on reducing alcohol misuse and harm within the EU Commission’s Committee on National Policy and Action in World Health Organization European Region discussions.

I meet many Health Ministers at EU Health Council informally and discuss a number of issues.
Association of Chief Police Officers: Finance

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent discussions she has had with the Association of Chief Police Officers on its budget for 2011-12. [63257]

Mrs May [holding answer 4 July 2011]: I hold regular discussions with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) about a range of policing issues, the role of ACPO and its budget.

Biometrics: Olympic Games 2012

Mike Crockart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) what plans her Department has to collect biometric data on (a) members of the public, (b) athletes and (c) officials for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games; [65291]
(2) for how long biometric data on (a) members of the public, (b) athletes and (c) officials for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games will be held; [65294]
(3) what steps will be taken to destroy biometric data collected for the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. [65295]

Damian Green: The UK Border Agency (UKBA) collects fingerprints and facial images from visa nationals as part of the business as usual process when they apply for a visa.

UKBA will continue to collect fingerprints and facial images from visa nationals during the London 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games. This process will apply to members of the public who are visa nationals and wish to visit the UK to attend the games.

Olympic and Paralympic Games family members such as athletes, coaches and officials will be required to obtain accreditation for the Olympic or Paralympic Games before participating in the games, and will undergo a series of biographical security checks undertaken by the Home Office prior to being granted accreditation and receiving an Olympic or Paralympic identity and accreditation card.

As a result of commitments given in the host city contract for the games, certain visa national families will be able to use the Olympic and Paralympic identity and accreditation card in lieu of a visa when it is presented with a valid national passport or other acceptable travel document during games time. Consequently, they will not need to apply for a visa to enter the UK and provide their fingerprints and facial image prior to travelling to the UK.

UKBA will therefore collect the fingerprints and facial images at the UK border from visa national families to maintain a proportionate level of its usual security checks on this group of people during the games. The agency will only collect the fingerprints and facial image of visa national families that it identifies as not already possessing.

We are currently taking secondary legislation through Parliament to provide UKBA with the power to collect the fingerprints and facial images of the visa national games family members who are able to use their accreditation card in lieu of visa.

UKBA is also seeking to collect visa national games family members fingerprints and facial images before they travel to UK to take part in the games to reduce the amount of biometrics it needs to collect at the UK border during games time. A special visit visa, for which fingerprints and facial images have to be provided, is currently available to likely games family members, and we are also seeking to collect visa national games family members fingerprints and facial images on a voluntary basis overseas prior to games time.

The fingerprints and facial images collected from visa national games family members will be stored for 10 years then destroyed. If prior to the lapse of 10 years the person becomes a British citizen their fingerprints and facial image will be destroyed. This retention period mirrors UKBA’s business as usual biometrics retention policy.

Crime Prevention: Young People

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how much funding her Department plans to allocate to the Positive Futures programme in (a) 2012-13, (b) 2013-14 and (c) 2014-15. [64256]

Mrs May [holding answer 7 July 2011]: The Home Office has announced its intention to provide £5 million in 2012-13 to fund the frontline delivery of Positive Futures. No decisions have been made about levels of funding beyond that.

Crime: Business

Michael Fallon: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what steps her Department is taking to reduce crimes against businesses. [64414]

James Brokenshire [holding answer 7 July 2011]: The Home Office takes all crimes against businesses seriously and works with a range of organisations and partnerships to tackle business crime.

The Home Office also works closely with the Association of Chief Police Officers (ACPO) Acquisitive Crime Programme Board and its sub groups to deliver across a range of crime types that affect businesses, in particular Cash and Valuables in Transit Robbery, Commercial Robbery and Metal Theft.

The Home Office co-chairs the National Retail Crime Steering Group, the national partnership to tackle crimes against retailers.

The Steering Group is delivering a work plan focused on crime priorities affecting retailers. This includes strengthening local partnerships between retailers and law enforcement agencies; taking steps to develop safe working and trading environments; supporting designing out crime techniques; and working with the criminal justice system to ensure that effective sanctions and deterrents to retail crime are available.

Deportation: Offenders

Priti Patel: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many foreign nationals who have (a) served time in UK prisons and (b) been removed from the UK after serving time in UK prisons were (i) refused and (ii) granted entry into the UK in each of the last five years. [63855]
Damian Green: This answer could be provided only at disproportionate cost.

Entry Clearances: Russia

Mr MacShane: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether she plans to prohibit the issue of visas to Russian officials alleged to be responsible for the (a) arrest, (b) torture and (c) death of Sergei Magnitsky.

Damian Green: As the Prime Minister has made clear, the Government remains very concerned by the circumstances surrounding Mr Magnitsky’s death. It is important that the Russian authorities carry out a thorough and transparent investigation, given the serious allegations that have been raised. The Government welcomed the recent publication of the conclusions of the report by the Presidential Council for Human Rights, and hopes that the official investigation into this case announced by President Medvedev in November 2009 will soon be completed.

The Secretary of State for the Home Department, my right hon. Friend the Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May), does have the power to exclude foreign nationals whose presence in the UK she judges would not be conducive to the public good. Furthermore, all foreign nationals seeking entry to the UK must satisfy either an entry clearance officer overseas or an immigration officer at the port of arrival that they fully meet the requirements of the Immigration Rules.

However, the duty of confidentiality means that the Government are unable to discuss the details of individual immigration cases.

Human Trafficking

Emma Reynolds: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what recent assessment she has made of the principal countries of origin of victims of human trafficking into the UK.

Damian Green: The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) collects Information on a victim’s nationality rather than their country of origin. An analysis of the NRM data from 1 April 2009 to 31 March 2011 shows that the following are the top seven nationalities for referrals, reasonable grounds and conclusive grounds decisions:

|----------------|-------------|------------|---------------|-------------|---------|-----------|------|

Conclusive grounds

1. Romanian
2. Nigerian
3. Czech
4. UK
5. Slovak
6. Chinese
7. Vietnamese

Human Trafficking: Children

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many children have been referred to the National Referral Mechanism as trafficked in the last 12 months; how many of those children have (a) seen (i) a qualified social worker and (ii) an advocate and (b) a nominated independent reviewing officer; and how many of them have lost contact with authorities before their case can be determined.

Damian Green: Between 1 July 2010 and 30 June 2011 a total of 217 children believed to be trafficked were referred to the National Referral Mechanism (NRM).

Of the 217 referrals of children to the NRM, seven absconded/went missing before a Conclusive Grounds Decision was made.

Information requested on the numbers of children who have seen a qualified social worker, an advocate and an independent reviewing officer is not centrally collected. However, all children who become looked after must be allocated a social worker and an independent reviewing officer. They should also have access to an advocate.

Identity Cards: Costs

Dr Whiteford: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what costs to the public purse, in real terms, under the previous Administration, had been incurred in respect of the planned identity card scheme.

Damian Green: Between 2003 and March 2006, the Home Office spent a total of £41 million developing the policy, legislation and business case for ID cards. Responsibility for the National Identity Service (NIS) was transferred to the Identity and Passport Service (IPS) on its establishment in April 2006 and IPS spent a total of £251 million on set-up costs between April 2006 and March 2010.

Around £8 million was spent on delivering ID cards from their launch in October 2009 until the decommissioning of the NIS.

Immigration: Housing

Mr Blunkett: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department what discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on the effect on social housing of any change to the habitual residence list.

Andrew Stunell: I have been asked to reply.
The habitual residence test requires a person to demonstrate links with the United Kingdom and a sufficient degree of social and economic integration to justify eligibility for social housing. There are no plans to change the habitual residence test.

Knives: Crime

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 5 July 2011, Official Report, column 1134W, on knives: crime, which voluntary and community organisations received funding from her Department in 2010-11 for the purposes of preventing young people’s involvement in knife and gun crime.

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when her Department was notified that Sheikh Raed Salah was excluded from the UK;

Mrs May [holding answer 11 July 2011]: In 2010-11 the Home Office made funding available to 143 voluntary and community organisations working to prevent young people’s involvement in knife and gun crime through the Community Fund. A list of the successful applicants to the fund can be found on the Home Office website.

Police Custody

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department when her Department was notified of the High Court ruling related to Greater Manchester Police vs Salford Magistrates Court.

Mrs May [holding answer 11 July 2011]: The Home Office was first notified of the oral ruling in this case on 25 May 2011. We received a written copy of the High Court ruling related to Greater Manchester Police on 17 June 2011.

Raed Salah

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether Sheikh Raed Salah was granted an entry clearance visa in June 2011;

(2) on what date the decision was taken to exclude Sheikh Raed Salah;

(3) on what date Sheikh Raed Salah was informed that he had been excluded from the UK; and what form that notification took;

(4) whether she was informed by the UK Border Agency that Sheikh Raed Salah had not been excluded successfully.

Jeremy Corbyn: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) (a) on what date and (b) at what time she signed the order banning Sheikh Raed Salah from the UK;

(2) what representations she received on the activities of Sheikh Raed Salah before she made the order banning him from entering the UK; and from whom each such representation was received.

Mrs May [holding answer 4 July 2011]: The Government do not routinely comment on individual exclusion cases but in this instance I have considered it important to do so, and he had already put the details of his case into the public domain.

Raed Salah was excluded from the UK on 23 June as a result of numerous statements he had made, details of which were obtained from a variety of sources. As an Israeli national Mr Salah does not require a visa and he managed to enter the UK. He was on the Home Office watch list and should have been refused entry as a result of my exclusion decision. Her Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary has investigated how this happened.

Mr Salah has been detained and the UK Border Agency is making arrangements to remove him.

Police Custody

Yvette Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) on what date and at what time the UK Border Agency informed her Department that Sheikh Raed Salah had most recently entered the UK;

(2) on what date the UK Border Agency was informed that Sheikh Raed Salah was excluded from the UK;

(3) on what date Sheikh Raed Salah most recently entered the UK;

(4) in what country Sheikh Raed Salah was present on the date he was informed that he was excluded from the UK;

(5) on what date she was made aware that Sheikh Raed Salah was visiting the UK.

Mrs May [holding answer 5 July 2011]: The Government do not routinely comment on individual exclusion cases but in this instance I have considered it important to do so, and he had already put the details of his case into the public domain.

Raed Salah was excluded from the UK on 23 June as a result of numerous statements he had made, details of which were obtained from a variety of sources. As an Israeli national Mr Salah does not require a visa and he managed to enter the UK. He was on the Home Office watch list and should have been refused entry as a result of my exclusion decision. Her Majesty’s Inspector of Constabulary has investigated how this happened.

Mr Salah has been detained and the UK Border Agency is making arrangements to remove him.

Theft: Bicycles

Simon Hughes: To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department whether her Department is taking steps to improve the provision of security equipment for bicycles.

James Brokenshire: Police forces locally are responsible for dealing with the problem of bicycle theft. They can offer effective crime prevention advice to the public on measures to secure their belongings. Bicycle owners have an important part to play in ensuring that their bicycles are locked and secure at all times when not in their possession.

The Home Office Design and Technology Alliance worked with partners to sponsor a design challenge to encourage solutions to bike theft. The Home Office’s new Forum for Innovation in Crime Prevention will continue to focus on new challenges and solutions to crime.
INDEPENDENT PARLIAMENTARY STANDARDS AUTHORITY COMMITTEE

Members: Complaints

Bob Russell: To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, what the policy of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority is on naming a complainant against a hon. Member in the published determination of the complaint. [61805]

Mr Charles Walker: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Compliance Officer for IPSA, who is statutorily independent of IPSA's executive branch. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Luke March, Compliance Officer, dated July 2011:

As the Compliance Officer for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking what the policy of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority is on naming a complainant against an hon. Member in the published determination of the complaint.

There is no legal obligation on the Compliance Officer to publish the names of complainants.

Bob Russell: To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, whether the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority Compliance Officer is independent of the Authority's executive branch; for what reason the Compliance Officer conveyed to the Chairman of the Authority information relating to the number of notices of preliminary investigation which he had issued; and with how many other persons the Compliance Officer has communicated information relating to his office. [61806]

Mr Charles Walker: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Compliance Officer for IPSA, who is statutorily independent of IPSA's executive branch. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Luke March, Compliance Officer, dated July 2011:

As the Compliance Officer for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking what reason the Compliance Officer conveyed to the Chairman of the Authority information relating to the number of notices of preliminary investigation which he had issued; and with how many other persons the Compliance Officer has communicated information relating to his office.

The Compliance Officer reports directly to the Chairman of IPSA's Board. In accordance with the Guidance to the Compliance Officer determined by IPSA under section 9A of the Parliamentary Standards Act 2009 "the Compliance Officer shall notify the MP and IPSA that a Preliminary Investigation is to be undertaken to ascertain if there is a reason for the Compliance Officer to believe that the MP may have been paid a certain amount under the Scheme that should not have been allowed".

The number of investigations has also been given to the National Audit Office.

Bob Russell: To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority what the average cost to the public purse has been of investigating each complaint made to the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority to date. [61807]

Mr Charles Walker: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Compliance Officer for IPSA, who is statutorily independent of IPSA's executive branch. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Luke March, Compliance Officer, dated July 2011:

As the Compliance Officer for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking what the average cost to the public purse has been of investigating each complaint made to the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority to date.

As the recently appointed Compliance Officer, I am as yet unable to identify the precise cost of each investigation. I am, however, acutely mindful of the proportionality of our investigations, whilst recognising that I am required to act in accordance with statute.

Bob Russell: To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority what target the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has set for (a) the issue of a notice of preliminary investigation by its Compliance Officer following (i) a public complaint and (ii) work carried out in his office, (b) concluding the investigation; and (c) conveying the result of the investigation to (A) the hon. or right hon. Member concerned and (B) the person who made the complaint.

Mr Charles Walker: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Compliance Officer for IPSA, who is statutorily independent of IPSA's executive branch. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Luke March, Compliance Officer, dated July 2011:

As the Compliance Officer for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking what target the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has set for (a) the issue of a notice of preliminary investigation by its Compliance Officer following (i) a public complaint and (ii) work carried out in his office, (b) concluding the investigation; and (c) conveying the result of the investigation to (A) the hon. or right hon. Member concerned and (B) the person who made the complaint.

As the independent Compliance Officer for IPSA, I am responsible for setting my own targets

(a) (i) Each complaint is assessed on a case by case basis.
   (ii) A range of targets exist for different activities carried out by my office.

(b) The target for completing an investigation is 120 days (sixty days for the preliminary investigation and sixty days for the substantive investigation).

(c) No target has been set for conveying the result of an investigation to (A) the honourable or right honourable Member concerned or (B) the person who made the complaint. However, I would endeavour to relay the result to all parties as quickly as possible.

Bob Russell: To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Speaker's Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority pursuant to the answer of 14 June 2011, Official Report, column 587W, on Members: complaints, on what dates the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority Compliance Office issued each of the notices of preliminary investigation arising from the work carried out by its office. [61811]
Mr Charles Walker: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Compliance Officer for IPSA, who is statutorily independent of IPSA’s executive branch. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Luke March, Compliance Officer, dated July 2011:

As the Compliance Officer for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking on what dates the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority Compliance Office issued each of the notices of preliminary investigations arising from the work carried out by its office.

The first notices of preliminary investigation were issued on 13 April 2011.

Bob Russell: To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Speaker’s Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority on what dates the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority Compliance Officer (a) commenced and (b) concluded his investigations in respect of notices served following the complaints received on (i) 2 December 2010, (ii) 20 December 2010, (iii) 21 December 2010, (iv) 16 January 2011 and (v) 9 February 2011.

Mr Charles Walker: IPSA, who is statutorily independent of IPSA’s executive branch. I have asked him to reply.

Letter from Luke March, Compliance Officer, dated July 2011:

As the Compliance Officer for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking on what dates the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority Compliance Officer (a) commenced and (b) concluded investigations in respect of notices served following the complaints received on (i) 2 December 2010, (ii) 20 December 2010, (iii) 21 December 2010, (iv) 16 January 2011 and (v) 9 February 2011.

For investigations commenced on 13 April 2011, all cases remain open with the exception of the complaint of 21 December 2010, where the preliminary investigation has concluded.

Schemes

Adam Afriyie: To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Speaker’s Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, what definition of public confidence the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority uses in assessing the effectiveness of its schemes.

Mr Charles Walker: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. I have asked IPSA to reply.

Letter from Andrew McDonald, dated June 2011:

As Chief Executive of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking what definition of public confidence the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority uses in assessing the effectiveness of its schemes.

There is no established standard definition of public confidence in political science. IPSA has therefore taken the approach to interpret it as meaning in respect of our schemes, confidence amongst the population at large, as perceived subjectively by each individual, that IPSA by means of a) clear, published rules on MPs’ expenses, b) IPSA’s rigorous governance and processes and c) transparency around IPSA’s work and MPs’ expense claims, is dispersing public funds efficiently and effectively to support MPs in carrying out their parliamentary functions.

Work Experience

Bridget Phillipson: To ask the hon. Member for Broxbourne, representing the Speaker’s Committee for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, how many interns the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has on (a) casual and (b) fixed-term contracts.

Mr Charles Walker: The information requested falls within the responsibility of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. I have asked IPSA to reply.

Letter from Andrew McDonald, dated June 2011:

As Chief Executive of the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority, I have been asked to reply to your Parliamentary Question asking how many interns the independent Parliamentary Standards Authority has on (a) casual and (b) fixed-term contracts. IPSA does not employ any interns, either on a casual or on a fixed-term basis.

TREASURY

Departmental Carbon Emissions

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what proportion of funds generated from the Crown Estate was spent on the development and installation of low-carbon technologies in the last year for which figures are available.

Justine Greening: During 2010-11 the Crown Estate’s capital expenditure on the facilitation and implementation of low carbon technologies was nearly £20 million.

Departmental Conditions of Employment

Dr Murrison: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what uses his Department has made of the annual survey of hours and earnings data produced by the Office of National Statistics in the last three years.

Justine Greening: Officials across the Treasury make occasional use of the annual survey of hours and earnings data to inform policy development. As there is no single user of this data at the Treasury, to answer this question in full would entail disproportionate costs.

Loans: Republic of Ireland

Jim Shannon: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent estimate he has made of the sum to be contributed by the UK to financial stabilisation of the Republic of Ireland; and what assessment he has made of the effect on the economy of Northern Ireland of such contributions.

Mr Hoban: The international financial assistance package for Ireland agreed in December 2010 included: a €22.5 billion loan from the IMF, of which €7.2 billion has been disbursed; a €22.5 billion loan from the EFSM, of which €11.4 billion has been disbursed; a €17.5 billion loan from the EFSF, of which €3.6 billion has been disbursed; and, €5 billion of bilateral loans from the UK, Sweden and Denmark.
The UK’s exposure breaks down as follows:

A bilateral loan of £3.227 billion is available to Ireland. The loan cannot be drawn until after the approval of the third quarterly review of Ireland’s Memorandum of Understanding with the International Monetary Fund and the European Commission. The review is expected to take place in August.

The European Financial Stabilisation Mechanism (EFSM) is financed by the European Commission raising funds on capital markets, guaranteed by the EU Budget. There is no direct impact on the EU Budget from any such borrowing by the Commission. Only in the event that a beneficiary member state defaults on loan repayments would the EU Budget be adversely affected. In those circumstances, member states would be liable for a share based on their contribution to the EU Budget at that time. Contributions to the EU Budget vary over time, mainly driven by the member states’ share in the EU’s Gross National Income. For this reason, it is not possible to state exactly the UK liability. As an illustrative example, based on contributions to the 2010 EU Budget, the UK’s share would be approximately 14%.

It is not possible to provide an estimate of the UK’s contribution to specific IMF programmes. The UK contributes funds to the IMF as a whole rather than to any country-specific IMF programme. Our ultimate exposure to any IMF lending programme would be in line with our quota shareholding, i.e. around 4.5%.

It is in our national interest that the Irish economy is successful and its banking system is stable. Ireland accounts for 6% of Britain’s total exports—we export more to Ireland than to Brazil, Russia, India and China put together. By offering Ireland a bilateral loan, Britain is recognising the important economic relationship between Britain and Ireland, including between Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Public Sector: Pay

Mr Frank Field: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will place in the Library copies of his communications to local authorities on the increase in the pay of public sector workers whose income does not exceed £21,000. [65356]

Danny Alexander [holding answer 11 July 2011]: Local Government pay is a matter for free collective bargaining between local authority employers and unions, primarily through the National Joint Council.

The Chancellor has had no communication with local authorities regarding the increase in pay of public sector workers whose income does not exceed £21,000.

VAT: Tax Rates and Bands

Steve Rotheram: To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what recent assessment he has made of the effects on the (a) tourism, (b) heritage and (c) sporting industries of the increase in the rate of value added tax. [65715]

Mr Gauke: No specific assessment has been made of the economic impact of the VAT rate increase on these sectors.

WALES

Energy

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what discussions she has had with (a) the First Minister of Wales and (b) Ministers at the Department of Energy and Climate Change on devolving decision-making on consents for energy projects with a generating capacity up to 100 megawatts; and if she will publish the minutes of any such meetings; [65461]
(2) what her policy is on the devolution of decision-making on consents for electricity projects with a generating capacity up to 100 megawatts; and if she will make a statement. [65464]

Mr David Jones: The Secretary of State for Wales, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan) and I have had a number of informal discussions with Ministers at the Department of Energy and Climate Change and the First Minister on a range of issues relating to energy policy including consents for energy projects. As these were informal discussions no minutes were taken.

The Government shares the view of the previous administration that the system of consents for electricity projects with a generating capacity in excess of 50 megawatts should be one that minimises delay and commands investor confidence. This is most effectively achieved by a common consents regime for major infrastructure in England and Wales.

Ministerial Meetings

Bill Esterson: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) what (a) meetings and (b) other engagements (i) Ministers and (ii) special advisers in her Department had which were attended by Mr Andrew Coulson (A) between 12 May 2010 and 21 January 2011 and (B) since 21 January 2011; [65996]
(2) what (a) meetings and (b) other engagements (i) Ministers and (ii) special advisers in her Department have attended since her appointment which were also attended by (A) representatives, (B) journalists and (C) other employees of (1) News International and its subsidiary organisations including newspapers, (2) News Corporation and its subsidiary organisations and (3) BSkyB. [66009]

Mr David Jones: As has been the practice of previous Administrations information relating to internal meetings, discussions and advice is not normally discussed.

I refer the hon. Member to the Prime Minister’s statement to the House of earlier today.

Renewable Energy

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales what discussions she has had on the development of marine and tidal energy generation in Wales. [65462]

Mr David Jones: The Secretary of State for Wales, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan), and I have discussed the development of marine and tidal generation in Wales with the Minister of State for Energy, the First Minister for Wales and a variety of interested parties.
We believe that Wales has a vital role to play in generating marine and tidal energy, as the Government’s approval of the 1.2 MW ‘Deltastream’ test device situated off the coast of Pembrokeshire demonstrates.

Huw Irranca-Davies: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales whether she has discussed with Ministers in the Department of Energy and Climate Change the development of low-carbon energy technologies in Wales; and if she will publish the minutes of any such meetings.

Mr David Jones: The Secretary of State for Wales, my right hon. Friend the Member for Chesham and Amersham (Mrs Gillan), and I have had a number of informal discussions with Ministers from the Department of Energy and Climate Change on energy policy, and in particular the development of low-carbon technologies in Wales. As these were informal discussions no minutes were taken.

Welfare State: Reform

Owen Smith: To ask the Secretary of State for Wales (1) if she will discuss with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions the effect of planned welfare reforms on recipients of incapacity benefit in Wales; and (2) what recent discussions she has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the effect on people in Wales of the Government’s proposed welfare reforms.

BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

Bankruptcy

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many (a) businesses and (b) individuals filed for bankruptcy in (i) York, (ii) Yorkshire and the Humber and (iii) England in each year since 1997.

Mr Davey: The Insolvency Service does not compile figures for bankruptcy petitions; statistics for orders made at this level of geography are available from 2000; the latest available figures currently are those for 2009. The additional breakdown into those bankruptcies as a result of trading debts (business bankruptcies) and those among other individuals (consumers) is only readily available from 2007. The available statistics are shown in the following table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Traders (Unitary Authority)</th>
<th>Consumers</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Traders (Yorkshire and the Humber GOR)</th>
<th>Consumers</th>
<th>Total</th>
<th>Traders (England)</th>
<th>Consumers</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2,163</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>17,537</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2,573</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>19,965</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2,603</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>20,891</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2,882</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>24,838</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>3,431</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>32,223</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2005</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>134</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>4,270</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>43,093</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2006</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>214</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>5,812</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>57,564</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2007</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>167</td>
<td>185</td>
<td>661</td>
<td>5,294</td>
<td>5,955</td>
<td>6,433</td>
<td>52,802</td>
<td>59,235</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>198</td>
<td>697</td>
<td>5,963</td>
<td>6,660</td>
<td>7,425</td>
<td>54,570</td>
<td>61,995</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>208</td>
<td>236</td>
<td>855</td>
<td>6,374</td>
<td>7,229</td>
<td>8,902</td>
<td>59,587</td>
<td>68,489</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

n/a = Not available.

1 Where bankrupt has provided a valid postcode (from 87.6% in 2000 rising to 97.1% in 2009).

Business: Loans

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many businesses in York received Government guarantees on bank loans under the Enterprise Finance Guarantee (a) between May 2009 and May 2010 and (b) between May 2010 and May 2011; and what the total monetary value of the loans guaranteed was in each case.

Mr Prisk: In the period May 2009 to May 2010, there were 16 Enterprise Finance Guarantee (EFG) loans to businesses in York with a drawn down loan value of £0.94 million. Between May 2010 and April 2011, there were 13 EFG loans to businesses in York with a drawn down value of £1.58 million. A full breakdown by each period follows:

16 EFG loans between May 2009 and April 2010

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Period</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 2009 - May 2010</td>
<td>£96,663.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2010 - April 2011</td>
<td>£24,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2011 - April 2011</td>
<td>£7,000.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2011 - May 2012</td>
<td>£83,230.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2012 - April 2013</td>
<td>£81,200.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2013 - April 2014</td>
<td>£25,250.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2014 - April 2015</td>
<td>£24,673.80</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2015 - April 2016</td>
<td>£20,300.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>May 2016 - April 2017</td>
<td>£36,440.08</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Business: Regulation

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many regulations that impose costs on businesses his Department has introduced since 1 September 2010; what the net effect on the costs on businesses of such introductions and removals was; and what regulations have been excluded from the one-in one-out system because they address (i) emergencies and (ii) systemic financial risks since 1 September 2010. [65405]

Mr Prisk: The one-in one-out regulatory management system, although announced in September, did not come into force until January 2011.

A list of regulatory measures introduced or removed in the first half of 2011 can be found in the Statement of New Regulation in the Libraries of the House.

The following regulations have been excluded from the one-in one-out system because they address emergencies. These have zero net effect to business and the economy;

The Export Control (Amendment) Order 2011 (SI 2011/1304)

Provides for enforcement of certain provisions of EU sanctions against Syria—came into force 25 May 2011.

The Export Control (Amendment) Order 2011 (SI 2011/543)

Provides for enforcement of certain provisions of EU sanctions against Libya—came into force 18 March 2011.

The Export Control (Syria and Miscellaneous Amendments) Order 2011 (SI 2011/1304)

Provides for enforcement of certain provisions of EU sanctions against Syria—came into force 25 May 2011.

Business: Surveys

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills when his Department next plans to undertake a small business survey; and what schedule he has put in place for small business surveys to 2015. [65909]

Mr Davey: The most recent BIS Small Business Survey was published in May 2011 and current practice is to undertake this large scale survey every two years.

In addition BIS undertakes a range of regular surveys and other research relating to small businesses, details of which can be found at:

http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/enterprise-and-business-support/analytical-unit/research-and-evaluation

Business: York

Hugh Bayley: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills if he will estimate the number of companies in Yorkshire and the Humber that exported goods or services to (a) other EU countries and (b) non-EU countries (i) between May 2009 and May 2010 and (ii) between May 2010 and 2011. [65678]
Mr Gauke: I have been asked to reply. The information requested is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Total Exporter Count</th>
<th>Exporting to EU</th>
<th>Exporting to non-EU</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2009</td>
<td>5,280</td>
<td>1,597</td>
<td>3,693</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2010</td>
<td>5,690</td>
<td>1,374</td>
<td>4,316</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2011</td>
<td>5,736</td>
<td>1,410</td>
<td>4,326</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
1. Only those companies trading above the Intrastat threshold are included under ‘Exporting to EU’. Companies below this threshold do not have to make Intrastat trade declarations to HMRC.
2. All counts are based on the Regional Trade Statistics (RTS) methodology.
3. The RTS is published quarterly, Q1 is January-March; Q2 is April-June; Q3 is July-September; and Q4 is October-December.
4. The latest RTS publication is first quarter (Q1) 2011.
5. Where quarterly company counts are indicated, the figures reflect the number of companies active in that quarter. The annual total company counts do not correspond to the sum of the quarterly company counts, but to the count of unique companies active at any time during the year.

Source:
HM Revenue and Customs, Regional Trade Statistics (RTS)

The data supplied only relates to companies that have traded in goods.

Departmental Allowances

Mr Watson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what expenses were claimed by (a) paid and (b) unpaid special advisers working in his Department in the last 12 months.

Mr Davey: Expense claims by special advisers during the period 13 May 2010 to 31 March 2011 amount to £681.28.

The Department has no unpaid special advisers.

Departmental Offices

Mr Marsden: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the capacity of his Department’s new local offices to cover more than one administrative region in England.

Mr Prisk [holding answer 12 July 2011]: The BIS Local teams’ geographic coverage is based on Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) geography. In areas which span more than one previous administrative region, the teams have dual locations in order to provide the most effective coverage within the resources allocated.

Electronic Equipment: Waste Disposal

Mr Laurence Robertson: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills whether electrical showers are categorised as fixed installations under the EU Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive 2002/96/EC amended by 2003/108/EC as transposed into UK regulations; and if he will make a statement.

Mr Prisk: The scope of the EC Waste Electrical and Electronic Equipment Directive has been problematic since its adoption at the end of 2002. There is no direct reference to an exemption for ‘fixed installations’ in the directive, but the European Commission’s guidance does allow for one in its interpretation of Article 2.1.

The Department’s understanding is that a simple electric shower fitted into a bathroom as a discrete or stand-alone unit would not be regarded as a fixed installation and would, therefore, be caught within the scope of the Directive and UK Regulations. A power shower that has controls in the bathroom but a remote pump and/or water heater fitted elsewhere in the building would be regarded as part of a fixed installation and, therefore, outside scope.

European negotiations on a recast of the original directive are underway and we are hoping for greater clarity on this and other scope issues once a new directive is agreed.

Enterprise Promotion

Mr Umunna: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what steps he is taking to encourage enterprise promotion activities in disadvantaged areas.

Mr Prisk: The Government are leading a series of measures which will promote enterprise and which will be of particular help to disadvantaged areas.

In October 2010 the Government announced that the first Local Enterprise Partnerships were ready to move forward and establish their local enterprise partnership boards. The Partnerships will play a central role in determining local economic priorities and undertaking activities to drive economic growth and the creation of local jobs:

http://www.communities.gov.uk/localgovernment/local/localenterprisepartnerships/

In October 2010 the Government also launched the New Enterprise Allowance to support unemployed people to start their own business.

The allowance is available to Jobseekers Allowance customers who have been claiming for 26-weeks or more. Participants have access to a volunteer business mentor to provide guidance and support as they develop their business plan and through the early months of
trading. Once a customer can demonstrate they have a viable business proposition with the potential for growth in the future, they can access financial support.

This will consist of:

- a weekly allowance worth £1,274 over 26 weeks, paid at £65 a week for the first 13 weeks and £33 a week for a further 13 weeks, and
- if they need start-up capital, they may also be able to access a loan up to £1,000 to help with their start-up costs.

Details can be found at:
http://www.dwp.gov.uk/adviser/updates/new-enterprise-allowance/

In November 2010 the Government announced that we will remove barriers preventing social tenants from applying to start up a business based in their home and will work with social landlords to encourage their tenants to develop entrepreneurial skills.

In July 2011 the Government announced the launch of a new mentoring scheme, developed in partnership with the private sector, to improve access to, and stimulate the demand for, mentoring. Developing and established businesses will now have access to more knowledge and support through a brand new web portal:
www.mentorsme.co.uk

Environment Protection

Zac Goldsmith: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent progress his Department has made on the green economy roadmap.

Mr Prisk: The Green Economy Roadmap will now be published at the end of July. This Department has worked with the other lead Departments—Department of Energy and Climate Change and Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs—to finalise the content and ensure it reflects the latest developments on major initiatives such as the Green Investment Bank and the energy market reforms package. The draft Roadmap document has been discussed with a number of stakeholders, including business, and the Green Economy Council, to ensure we have a clear vision and coherent framework.

Local Enterprise Partnerships: Public Appointments

Mr Nicholas Brown: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what the name is of each local enterprise partnership in respect of which approval of the board membership has been given; what the name is of each member of each such partnership representing (a) local authorities, (b) businesses and (c) higher education; what the name is of each partnership for which approval of board membership is pending; and what the name is of each partnership which is not in a position for board membership to be approved.

Mr Prisk: The information is as follows:

Local enterprise partnership boards formally recognised by Government

Information regarding board membership can be found on each partnership’s website as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Local enterprise partnership</th>
<th>Website</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cheshire and Warrington</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cwea.org.uk/lep">http://www.cwea.org.uk/lep</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coast to Capital</td>
<td><a href="http://www.coast2capital.org.uk/articles/the-board.html">http://www.coast2capital.org.uk/articles/the-board.html</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cornwall and Isles of Scilly</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=24697">http://www.cornwall.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=24697</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cumbria</td>
<td><a href="http://www.cumbrialep.co.uk/boardprofiles.php">http://www.cumbrialep.co.uk/boardprofiles.php</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greater Cambridge and Greater Peterborough</td>
<td><a href="http://www.yourlocalenterprisepartnership.co.uk/board">http://www.yourlocalenterprisepartnership.co.uk/board</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leeds City Region</td>
<td><a href="http://www.leedscityregion.gov.uk/lepboard.htm">http://www.leedscityregion.gov.uk/lepboard.htm</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxfordshire City Region</td>
<td><a href="http://www.oxfordshirelep.org.uk/wps/wcm/connect/micro/LEP/About/People/">http://www.oxfordshirelep.org.uk/wps/wcm/connect/micro/LEP/About/People/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sheffield City Region</td>
<td><a href="http://www.sheffieldcityregion.org.uk/lepboard">http://www.sheffieldcityregion.org.uk/lepboard</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stoke-on-Trent and Staffordhire</td>
<td><a href="http://www.stokestaffslep.org.uk/a/">http://www.stokestaffslep.org.uk/a/</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West of England</td>
<td><a href="http://www.westofenglandlep.co.uk/?p=33">http://www.westofenglandlep.co.uk/?p=33</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worcestershire</td>
<td><a href="http://www.worcestershirelep.org/board.aspx">http://www.worcestershirelep.org/board.aspx</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>York and North Yorkshire</td>
<td><a href="http://www.ynylep.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&amp;amp;view=article&amp;amp;id=48&amp;amp;Itemid=2">http://www.ynylep.co.uk/index.php?option=com_content&amp;amp;view=article&amp;amp;id=48&amp;amp;Itemid=2</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 In addition to those listed on this page Paul Richards and Simon Morris share a seat and represent higher education.
2 Peter Pawsey, the LEP chair, is also part of the board but not listed on this page.

For the following two partnerships the board information is not available online:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Greater Lincolnshire</th>
<th>Local authority representatives</th>
<th>Business representatives</th>
<th>Higher education representatives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Eddy Poll</td>
<td>Ursula Lidbetter (Chair)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Doreen Stephenson</td>
<td>David Dexter</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[65825]

[65220]
Local authority representatives | Business representatives | Higher education representatives
--- | --- | ---
Richard Wills | Chris Baron | Edward Acton
New Anglia  
Mark Bee  
David Ellesmere  
Derrick Murphy  
Alan Waters | Andy Wood (Chair)  
Erika Clegg  
David Gledhill  
Mark Goodall  
Mark Jeffries  
David Marsh

Local enterprise partnerships with board approvals pending with the Government:
- Greater Birmingham and Solihull
- The Solent

Local enterprise partnerships still developing their permanent boards:
- Derby Derbyshire Nottingham and Nottinghamshire
- Dorset
- Gloucestershire
- Heart of the South West
- Hertfordshire
- Hull and the Humber
- Kent, Greater Essex and East Sussex
- Lancashire
- Leicester and Leicestershire
- Liverpool City Region
- London
- The Marches
- North Eastern
- South East Midlands
- Tees Valley
- Thames Valley Berkshire

Military Aircraft: Exports

Mr Ainsworth: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what recent discussions with other governments (a) he and (b) other Ministers in his Department have had on the export of (i) Hawk Mk. 128 and (ii) Eurofighter Typhoon Aircraft. [64892]

Mr Prisk [holding answer 11 July 2011]: During a visit to Japan in June the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills, my right hon. Friend the Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable), discussed Typhoon with the Japanese Government. I was present with the Prime Minister on 28 July 2010 at the signing of the agreement to supply 57 Hawk trainer aircraft to India. Ministers from the Department of Business Innovation and Skills, and from a range of other Departments, regularly discuss Typhoon and Hawk exports, as well as other defence and security export prospects with their counterparts overseas, and will continue to do so in line with this Government’s commitment to promote responsible defence exports.

Pay

Dr Murrison: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what uses his Department has made of the annual survey of hours and earnings data produced by the Office for National Statistics in the last three years. [65289]

Mr Davey: The Department for Business, Innovation and Skills has used ASHE for analysis of the low paid and National Minimum Wage Policy. ASHE has also been used for briefing Ministers on levels of earnings, hours worked and gender pay differences.

THQ Digital Studios

Mr Ivan Lewis: To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills pursuant to the answer of 27 June 2011 to the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport, Official Report, columns 480-1W, on THQ, what discussions UK Trade and Investment officials have had with representatives of the video games industry on the closure of THQ’s Warrington studios. [64170]

Mr Prisk [holding answer 6 July 2011]: No officials from UK Trade and Investment have had any discussions with representatives of the video games industry specifically regarding the closure of THQ’s Warrington studios.

UKTI and Department for Culture Media and Sport officials have regular discussions regarding the state of the UK games industry with TIGA, the trade association representing the UK’s games industry and the Association for UK Interactive Entertainment (UKIE), the UK’s leading videogames trade body.

Health

Abortion: Counselling

Dr Huppert: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) by what means he proposes to effect changes to the regulation of the provision of counselling for women seeking abortions; [65272]

(2) what assessment he has made of the likely impact of preventing organisations which provide abortion services from providing pregnancy counselling services. [65273]
Cancer

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent steps he is taking to reduce the incidence of cancer. [65150]

Paul Burstow: To reduce the incidence of cancer we will need to continue to tackle the risk factors. Many of these risk factors are rooted in lifestyle behaviours such as smoking, the harmful use of alcohol, drug misuse, poor diet and nutrition, being overweight and physically inactive.

Last year, the Government published “Healthy Lives, Healthy People”, which set out our strategy for improving public health. This includes the establishment of a new, dedicated, professional public health service—Public Health England—which will be set up to take action to promote public health and to encourage behaviour change to help people live healthier lives.

Following on from the public health White Paper, the Government published its Tobacco Control Plan, “Healthy Lives, Healthy People: A Tobacco Control Plan for England” in March, which sets out how tobacco control will be delivered over the next five years. New United Kingdom-wide physical activity guidelines were launched on 11 July as part of a UK Chief Medical Officers’ report which details the latest evidence on the physical activity required to achieve general health benefits and prevent diseases, including some cancers. We will be publishing a document on obesity shortly after the summer. It will set out how obesity will be tackled in the new public health and national health service systems and the role of key partners. An alcohol strategy will follow later this year.

The NHS cervical screening programme continues to play an important role in reducing the incidence of cervical cancer in women. The programme prevents cervical cancers by detecting and treating abnormalities which, if left undetected and untreated, may develop into cancer. Experts estimate it saves up to 4,500 lives per year. As set out in “Improving Outcomes: A Strategy for Cancer” (January 2011) we have committed to invest £60 million between 2011 and 2014 to incorporate flexible sigmoidoscopy (FS) into the NHS bowel screening programme. New evidence has shown that a one-off FS screening test for bowel cancer at age 55 can reduce the incidence of bowel cancer in people attending screening by 33%. Experts estimate FS will save around 3,000 lives every year.

Cancer: Drugs

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what measures are in place for patients to continue to access medicines through the Cancer Drugs Fund once the present fund is exhausted. [65231]

Paul Burstow: We have committed £600 million to the Cancer Drugs Fund over the next three years which will help thousands more cancer patients access the drugs their clinicians believe will help them. This is a significant injection of funding for additional cancer drugs. Strategic health authorities and their clinical panels are responsible for ensuring that this additional funding is employed to best effect, and should take account of the likely costs of future treatment in their planning.

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what his policy is on the transfer of funding supplied through the Cancer Drugs Fund between regions. [65233]

Paul Burstow: We expect regional strategic health authority (SHA) clinical panels to plan according to their allocated shares of the available funding. The Department will monitor SHA spend from the Cancer Drugs Fund and transfers between SHA’s can be considered if a good reason arises.

Cerebral Palsy: Medical Treatments

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) how many people have been treated by the NHS for cerebral palsy selective dorsal rhizotomy in the last three years; (2) how many people have been diagnosed with cerebral palsy selective dorsal rhizotomy in the last three years; (3) if he will make available on the NHS in England a treatment for cerebral palsy selective dorsal rhizotomy similar to that available in the US. [65145] [65146] [65147]

Paul Burstow: Information on the number of people diagnosed, and treated, for cerebral palsy selective dorsal rhizotomy is not collected centrally.

In December 2010, the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence revised their existing guidance on selective dorsal rhizotomy because they now had a
greater evidence base regarding its safety and efficacy. They recommend that the operation can improve the comfort and mobility of some people who have cerebral palsy. However, the operation still carries some serious risks and is not a cure for spasticity. Funding for this procedure is a matter for local health bodies.

**Dementia**

**Jim Shannon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many diagnoses of dementia there were in each of the last three years.

**Paul Burstow:** Data on new diagnoses of dementia are not collected. However, the Quality and Outcomes Framework (QOF) collects each year the number of patients on the dementia register in general practices. The figures for the latest three years are shown in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of dementia register</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2007-08</td>
<td>220,246</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2008-09</td>
<td>232,430</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2009-10</td>
<td>249,463</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note:* Coverage of QOF—Patients will only contribute to the figures in QOF if they are registered with a general practice participating in QOF.

We believe however that these figures underestimate the actual number of people in England who have dementia and it is estimated that approximately 650,000 people in England have the condition. Because of this level of under-diagnosis, one of the Government’s priority objectives in implementing the National Dementia Strategy is increasing the early diagnosis of dementia.

**Departmental Carbon Emissions**

**Huw Irranca-Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) whether he has issued any guidance on the generation of low-carbon energy on estates owned by (a) his Department and (b) the NHS.

(2) if he will explore the feasibility of low-carbon energy generation on his estate.

**Mr Simon Burns:** The Department has not issued any specific guidance on the generation of low carbon energy on estates owned by the Department, although guidance is received from the Carbon Trust through the Carbon Management Programme.

The Department has issued “Health Technical Memorandum 07-02 Encode, making energy work in healthcare” and “HTM 07-07 Sustainable Health and Social Care Buildings”, which have been placed in the Library. Both documents encourage the national health service to consider a wide range of low carbon energy opportunities. The NHS also takes guidance from the Carbon Trust through the Carbon Management Programme and is further informed through the NHS Sustainable Development Unit, which is supported by the Department.

The Department will look to explore the feasibility of low-carbon energy generation on its estate in this financial year.

**Departmental Regulation**

**Mr Umunna:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many regulations his Department has introduced (a) in the six months prior to 1 September 2010 and (b) in the six months after 1 September 2010 which it has determined do not impose costs on businesses.

**Mr Simon Burns:** In the six months prior to 1 September 2010, no regulations were introduced by the Department which impact on businesses.

In the six months after 1 September 2010, two regulations Care Quality Commission registration and Health service Branded Medicines have been introduced which do not impose a cost on businesses.

The Government’s policy is to consider alternatives to regulation. A list of regulatory measures introduced in the first half of 2011 that impact business can be found in the Statement of New Regulation, which has already been placed in the Library.

**Mr Umunna:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many regulations that impose costs on businesses his Department has (a) introduced and (b) removed since 1 September 2010; what the net effect on the costs on businesses of such introductions and removals was; and what regulations have been excluded from the one-in one-out system because they address (i) emergencies and (ii) systemic financial risks since 1 September 2010.

**Mr Simon Burns:** In the period from September 2010 to December 2010 no regulations were introduced or removed by the Department that impact on business. A list of regulatory measures that impact on business that were introduced or removed in the first half of 2011 can be found in the Statement of New Regulation, which has already been placed in the Library.

The one-in one-out regulatory management system, although announced in September, did not come into force until January 2011.

No regulations have been excluded from the one-in one-out system because they address emergencies and systemic financial risks.

**Mr Umunna:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many regulations that impose costs on businesses his Department (a) introduced and (b) removed in the six months prior to 1 September 2010; and what the net effect on the costs on businesses of such introductions and removals was.

**Mr Simon Burns:** In the six months prior to 1 September 2010, no regulations were introduced or removed that impose costs on businesses.

**General Practitioners: Devon**

**Anne Marie Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many GPs there are per head of population in (a) Devon and (b) Newton Abbot constituency.
Mr Simon Burns: Information about the number of general practitioners (GPs) at a constituency level is not held by the Department. The Department holds information about GP numbers at primary care trust (PCT) and care trust level. The data for the three such trusts in Devon are in the following table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of GPs in Devon</th>
<th>All GPs (excluding retainers and registrars) headcount per 100,000 population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Devon²</td>
<td>917                                                                      80.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Of which:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Devon PCT²</td>
<td>621                                                                      83.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plymouth</td>
<td>196                                                                      76.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaching PCT</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Torbay Care Trust</td>
<td>100                                                                      74.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1 The new headcount methodology for 2010 data are not fully comparable with previous years data due to improvements that make it a more stringent count of absolute staff numbers. Further information on the headcount methodology is available in the Census publication. Headcount totals are unlikely to equal the sum of components.

2 The area of Devon is served by Devon PCT, Plymouth PCT and Torbay PCT. A sub-total of the three PCTs has been provided. GP workforce data are not available at constituency level. In England, only local PCTs and Strategic Health Authorities. Newton Abbot is contained within and serviced by Devon PCT.

Notes:
1. Data as at 30 September 2010.
2. GP per head of population figures have been calculated using Office for National Statistic resident population estimates.

Data Quality:
The NHS Information Centre for health and social care seeks to minimise inaccuracies and the effect of missing and invalid data but responsibility for data accuracy lies with the organisations providing the data. Methods are continually being updated to improve data quality where changes impact on figures already published. This is assessed but unless it is significant at national level figures are not changed. Impact at detailed or local level is footnoted in relevant analyses.

Sources:
The NHS Information Centre for health and social care General and Personal Medical Services Statistics

Health Services

Stuart Andrew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he plans to mandate a timetable for the formation of clinical senates and specialist commissioning networks.

Mr Simon Burns: The Government’s response to the NHS Future Forum report set out a revised timetable for changes in the national health service, recognising the need for flexibility in transitioning to the new system.

The NHS Commissioning Board will be established formally by October 2012 with a limited set of functions, in order to start considering applications for authorisation from clinical commissioning groups. By April 2013, the NHS Commissioning Board will have taken on its full responsibilities, and general practitioner practices will be members of either an authorised clinical commissioning group, or a ‘shadow’ commissioning group (one that is legally established but operating only in shadow form, with the NHS Commissioning Board commissioning on its behalf).

Clinical commissioning groups will receive expert support and advice from clinical networks and senates on the design and delivery of services, in order to provide the best care and outcomes for patients. The NHS Commissioning Board will work with stakeholders and the NHS Future Forum on the detailed design of clinical senates and networks, and we will publish further details in due course.

Health Services: Greater London

John Pugh: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what the (a) debt and (b) revenue budget balance has been of each NHS hospital trust in greater London in each of the last four years.

Mr Simon Burns: The information requested is not available in the format requested.

The following tables show:

(a) the total amount owed by national health service trusts in London in respect of bank overdrafts, current and long term loans, obligations under finance leases and private finance initiative arrangements for each financial year 2007-10; and

(b) the revenue budget balance (surplus/operating deficit) of each NHS hospital trust in London for each financial year 2007-11.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NHS hospital trust debt as at 31 March 2007-10</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barnet, Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barts and The London NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camden and Islington Mental Health Social Care NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central and North West London MH NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chelsea and Westminster Hospital NHS Foundation Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ealing Hospital NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East London and the City MH NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Ormond Street Hospital NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hammersmith Hospitals NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>King’s College Hospital NHS Foundation Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kingston Hospital NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>London Ambulance Service NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayday Healthcare NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organisation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Newham University Hospital NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North East London Mental Health NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Middlesex University Hospital NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North West London Hospitals NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxleas NHS Foundation Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen Elizabeth Hospital NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Queen Mary’s Sidecup NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Brompton and Harefield NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South London Healthcare NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South London and Maudsley NHS Foundation Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South West London and St George’s Mental Health NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St George’s Healthcare NHS Trust</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: ‘Debt’ can be interpreted in a number of ways in relation to the finances of NHS trusts. We have interpreted ‘debt’ to mean the total amount reported by each NHS trust in their balance sheet in respect of bank overdrafts, loans, finance leases and Private finance initiative arrangements. These are the items most readily identified with the term ‘debt’ in accounting terminology.

Source: Department of Health audited summarisation schedules, 2006-07 to 2009-10

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>2007-08 annual accounts surplus/(deficit)</th>
<th>2008-09 annual accounts surplus/(operating deficit)</th>
<th>2009-10 annual accounts surplus/(operating deficit)</th>
<th>2010-11 annual accounts surplus/(operating deficit)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RF4 Barking, Havering and Redbridge Hospitals NHS Trust</td>
<td>(35,621)</td>
<td>(26,214)</td>
<td>(22,309)</td>
<td>(32,986)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RVL Barnet and Chase Farm Hospitals NHS Trust</td>
<td>2,611</td>
<td>155</td>
<td>5,069</td>
<td>3,154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRP Barnet. Enfield and Haringey Mental Health NHS Trust</td>
<td>2,014</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>239</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RNJ Barts and The London NHS Trust</td>
<td>16,416</td>
<td>10,502</td>
<td>11,423</td>
<td>6,012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RG3 Bromley Hospitals NHS Trust</td>
<td>(17,920)</td>
<td>(4,434)</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TAF Camden and Islington Mental Health Social Care NHS Trust</td>
<td>2,595</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RV3 Central and North West London Mental Health NHS Trust⁴</td>
<td>850</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RYX Central London Community Healthcare NHS Trust⁴</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>2,198</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RC3 Ealing Hospital NHS Trust</td>
<td>1,135</td>
<td>2,125</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RWK East London and the City Mental Health NHS Trust⁵</td>
<td>10,428</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RVR Epsom and St Helier University Hospitals NHS Trust</td>
<td>827</td>
<td>4,902</td>
<td>2,877</td>
<td>3,332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RP4 Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children NHS Trust</td>
<td>6,956</td>
<td>5,889</td>
<td>7,368</td>
<td>8,617</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust⁵</td>
<td>12,750</td>
<td>12,025</td>
<td>9,102</td>
<td>5,146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RAX Kingston Hospital NHS Trust</td>
<td>2,713</td>
<td>807</td>
<td>2,412</td>
<td>2,724</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RRU London Ambulance Service NHS Trust</td>
<td>398</td>
<td>725</td>
<td>1,425</td>
<td>1,002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RJ6 Croydon Health Services NHS Trust⁶</td>
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<td>2,149</td>
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<td>RNH Newham University Hospital NHS Trust</td>
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Health Services: Special Educational Needs

Rosie Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for Health by what means NHS commissioners will obtain expert advice and support from speech and language therapists to improve integration between provision of health services and education services for those with special educational needs. [63857]

Mr Simon Burns: The Government want the full range of health and care professionals to be involved in the new commissioning arrangements, supporting the NHS Commissioning Board and clinical commissioning groups to design pathways of care and shape services. The Government’s response to the NHS Future Forum report makes clear that they will strengthen existing duties on clinical commissioning groups to secure professional advice and ensure this advice is from a full range of health professionals where relevant. Clinical commissioning groups will also receive expert support and advice from clinical networks and senates on the design and delivery of services. Clinical networks and senates will have a wide range of multi-disciplinary input, including from allied health professionals, to support the better integration of services.

Clinical commissioning groups will be supported and held to account by a national NHS Commissioning Board. Subject to the passage of the Health and Social Care Bill, the NHS Commissioning Board will be responsible for issuing guidance to commissioning groups on their duty to obtain appropriate professional advice, for example in relation to working with clinical networks and senates.

Anne Marie Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how many patients were admitted to (a) Newton Abbot Hospital, (b) Dawlish hospital and (c) Teignmouth hospital in the latest year for which figures are available. [63363]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department is not able to provide data at hospital site level. The following table provides figures for activity provided by Devon Primary Care Trust (PCT) within which Newton Abbot hospital, Dawlish hospital and Teignmouth hospital, and other hospitals are located. The England figure is provided for comparison.

The revenue budget balance (surplus/operating deficit) of each NHS hospital trust in London for each financial year 2007-11

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation code</th>
<th>Trust name</th>
<th>2007-08 annual accounts surplus/ (deficit)</th>
<th>2008-09 annual accounts surplus/ (deficit)</th>
<th>2009-10 annual accounts surplus/ (deficit)</th>
<th>2010-11 annual accounts surplus/ (operating deficit)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Rney</td>
<td>South West London and St George’s Mental Health NHS Trust</td>
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<td>The Hillingdon Hospital NHS Trust</td>
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<td>The Royal National Orthopaedic Hospital NHS Trust</td>
<td>1,109</td>
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<td>1,026</td>
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<td>Whittington Hospital NHS Trust</td>
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<td>2,045</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>508</td>
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</tbody>
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Notes:

1. Admissions do not represent the number of in-patients, as a person may have more than one admission within the year.
2. It should be noted that activity provided by Devon PCT is not the same as activity commissioned by this PCT. Activity provided by the PCT only covers in-patient activity in hospital beds owned by the PCT.
3. The latest published annual Hospital Episode Statistics (HES) data are for 2009-10. It should be noted that the number of finished admission episodes does not relate to people as an individual may have had more than one admission to hospital in a year.

Source: HES, The NHS Information Centre for health and social care
Hospitals: Infectious Diseases

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what recent research his Department has undertaken on the spread of MRSA and C. difficile in hospitals; and what the findings of this research are. [65158]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department funds, through the National Institute for Health Research (NIHR) and the Policy Research Programme (PRP), a range of research relevant to antibiotic resistant micro-organisms in healthcare settings, including Methicillin-resistant Staphylococcus aureus (MRSA) and Clostridium difficile (C. difficile).

For example, through the UK Clinical Research Collaboration Translational Infection Research Initiative, a group of researchers based at Oxford university have been working on establishing how revolutionary new technologies can be optimally integrated into microbiology research and service.

Researchers have identified whole genome sequencing as an appropriate initial typing strategy for four pathogens, including MRSA and C. difficile. Translating this whole genome sequencing data to the investigation of pathogen infections has started to give rise to improved understanding of patterns of spread, mechanisms of resistance, evolution and basic biology.

Human Trafficking

Fiona Mactaggart: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what responsibility he has for contributing to Government action against human trafficking; and what recent action he has taken in this regard. [65302]

Anne Milton: There is a vital role for health services to play in identifying and responding to the needs of human trafficking victims. The Department of Health is therefore working with the United Kingdom Human Trafficking Centre and others, to improve the response from health services to victims of trafficking.

The Department has allocated £80,000 to work with the Women’s Health and Equality Consortium on a project to agree specific actions to promote greater awareness of human trafficking and provide health professionals with guidance on how to respond to victims appropriately. The project is due to commence in summer 2011. As part of this work, the Department is seeking to provide more health services/professionals with the training and skills to refer potential victims directly into the National Referral Mechanism. The Department has also recognised the need for better understanding of the issues around health and trafficking and has therefore invited bids for research in this area, due to commence in 2011. The Royal College of General Practitioners has also been commissioned to develop an e-learning course on violence against women and children which will include trafficking.

Medical Equipment

Charlotte Leslie: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what arrangements are in place in the NHS to ascertain the professional skills and standards of surgical instrument contractors. [65247]

Mr Simon Burns: No separate assessment is made of the professional skills of individuals employed by surgical instrument suppliers to the national health service.

Manufacturers of surgical equipment must ensure that their devices meet the relevant safety, quality and performance requirements laid down in the European Union (EU) medical devices directive prior to placement on the United Kingdom market. The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) has a role in the surveillance and enforcement of the regulation of devices placed in the UK and will assess all allegations of non-compliance brought to its attention.

A system is in place for the user reporting and assessment of incidents of device failures. In the event of evidence emerging that devices placed on the market are not compliant with the requirements of the directive, the MHRA has a range of powers and sanctions available under the Consumer Protection Act to deal with the problem.

The NHS Supply Chain has set in place framework agreements for the supply of surgical instruments for use by the NHS. As part of these assessments, quality and price are taken into account and manufacturers will comply with legislation and regulatory requirements.

Mental Health

Rosie Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps he plans to take to ensure that Public Health England takes account of the findings of his Department’s mental health strategy with respect to linkages between mental health, wellbeing and employment. [65859]

Paul Burstow: Subject to the Health and Social Care Bill receiving Royal Assent, Public Health England will be an integrated public health delivery body that will support the delivery of public health services by providing information and scientific advice to local authorities and the national health service. It will be established on 1 April 2013. We will ensure that Public Health England will support the mental health strategy objectives by including improving mental health and well being within its overarching functions.

Mental Health Advisory Group

Rosie Cooper: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether (a) speech and language therapists and (b) allied health professionals are to be represented on the Ministerial Advisory Group for his Department’s mental health strategy. [65858]

Paul Burstow: Allied health professions have representation on the Ministerial Advisory Group for the mental health strategy through the Allied Health Professions Federation (AHPF). The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists is a member of the AHPF.

NHS Commissioning Board

Stuart Andrew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether there will be a person appointed to the NHS Commissioning Board who has a primary duty to promote integration across health and social care. [65807]
Mr Simon Burns: The Health and Social Care Bill published on 19 January 2011 sets out details about the membership of the NHS Commissioning Board. Sir David Nicholson published a document on 8 July 2011 entitled Developing the NHS Commissioning Board setting out further details about the design and operating model of the NHS Commissioning Board. A copy of the document has already been placed in the Library.

The Board itself will determine its own appointments but will include people with a range of skills and experience covering both health and social care.

Stuart Andrew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health how he plans to promote the integration of health and social care budgets. [65808]

Paul Burstow: Flexibilities in the National Health Service 2006 Act already support opportunities for integrated working by facilitating lead commissioning, integrated provision and pooled budgets.

The Government have identified greater integration between health and social care as a key priority and has demonstrated its importance by the development of new and integrated health, social care and public health outcomes frameworks.

Furthermore, in line with the recommendations of the NHS Future Forum, our proposed amendments to the Health and Social Care bill will ensure, subject to parliamentary approval, that there will be a stronger duty on the NHS Commissioning Board, clinical commissioning groups, the Health and Wellbeing boards and monitor to encourage integrated working at all levels.

Improving integration between health and social care will also be one of themes of the engagement exercise following on from the Government’s response to the report of the Commission on the funding of care and support.

NHS: Charities

Stuart Andrew: To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether the provisions of the Health and Social Care Bill will provide greater opportunities for charitable providers to take on NHS services. [65809]

Mr Simon Burns: The Government are committed to giving patients greater choice of any qualified provider and creating a fair playing field, in which the best providers (from whichever sector) flourish. We will make sure that what matters is the quality of care provided, not who owns the organisation providing it. Charities, voluntary organisations and social enterprises will have the opportunity to offer services that, as well as achieving health and social care outcomes, can respond to clients’ individual needs and provide real social value.

Amendments to the Health and Social Care Bill will outlaw any policy to increase or decrease the market share of any particular sector of provider. As a result of the changes we have proposed, Monitor, the NHS Commissioning Board and the Secretary of State would not be able to exercise their functions for the purpose of increasing the market shares of any sector of provider.

NHS: Telephone Services

Anne Marie Morris: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the number of (a) GP surgeries, (b) hospitals and (c) dental practices in (i) England and (ii) Devon that operate 0844 or 0845 telephone numbers. [63378]

Mr Simon Burns: The Department has made no assessment of the number of general practitioner surgeries, hospitals, or dental practices in England that use 0844 or 0845 numbers for patients seeking appointments.

The Department issued guidance and directions to national health service bodies in December 2009 on the cost of telephone calls, which prohibit the use of telephone numbers, which charge the patient more than the equivalent cost of calling a geographical number to contact the NHS. It is currently the responsibility of primary care trusts to ensure that local practices are compliant with the directions and guidance.

Prostate Cancer

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what consideration he gave to including indicators for better one and five year survival rates for prostate cancer in the NHS Outcomes Framework. [65229]

Paul Burstow: The NHS Outcomes Framework indicators were selected on the basis of trying to achieve a balanced, high-level set of outcome goals that signal improving quality across the breadth of services that the national health service provides. This was conducted through a full public consultation with stakeholders, and suggestions received were considered as part of this process.

We considered indicators across a range of population groups and conditions, including cancer and its various types, and using a set of criteria assessed their suitability for inclusion in the framework. For this reason, it was not possible to include an indicator on survival from prostate cancer.

In addition, ‘Improving Outcomes: a Strategy for Cancer’ sets out the Government’s broader plans to improve outcomes for patients with all cancers, including those with prostate cancer.

Mr Liddell-Grainger: To ask the Secretary of State for Health when the NHS Quality Standard for prostate cancer will be developed; and what relationship the standard will have with the revised National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence clinical guidelines on prostate cancer. [65230]

Paul Burstow: The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence (NICE) has been commissioned to produce a Quality Standard for prostate cancer during the period 2011-12. NICE provides progress updates on its Quality Standard programme on its website: www.nice.org.uk/aboutnice/qualitystandards/qualitystandards.jsp

NICE is undertaking a review to decide whether the prostate cancer clinical guideline should be updated and will make appropriate links with the development of the Quality Standard should they decide to do so.
**Tuberculosis**

Jim Shannon: To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps is he taking to stop the spread of tuberculosis; and what assessment he has made of the contribution of border controls to reduce the spread of the disease.

Anne Milton: The Department and the National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence have published guidance to support the national health service in commissioning and providing effective services to prevent, diagnose and treat tuberculosis (TB).

In addition, the Department is funding TB Alert to raise awareness among groups at risk of TB and among primary care workers.

We expect NHS organisations and their partners to ensure early detection, treatment completion and co-ordinated action to prevent and control TB.

The UK Border Agency is currently reviewing the existing TB screening arrangements for migrants with support from the Department and the Health Protection Agency.
Ministerial Corrections

Wednesday 13 July 2011

COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Housing (Armed Forces Personnel)

The following are the answers given by the Minister for Housing and Local Government, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), to questions from the hon. Member for North Wiltshire (Mr Gray) during Communities and Local Government Question Time on 20 June 2011.

2. Mr James Gray (North Wiltshire) (Con): What plans he has to provide support through his Department’s housing policy to serving and former members of the armed forces.

The Minister for Housing and Local Government (Grant Shapps): I am absolutely determined to ensure that serving and former serving personnel from the armed forces are treated properly when it comes to housing on their return.

Mr Gray: Serving men and women form a disproportionately large part of those who are homeless or rough sleepers. I therefore very much welcome the Government’s notification that they are a priority group under the Firstbuy scheme. However, many of them cannot afford to buy a house at all. Will the Minister now consider whether he can bring pressure to bear on local authorities, so that serving men and women are also designated as a priority for local authority housing?

Grant Shapps: I do not just want to remove the housing disadvantage for those who have served in the military; I want to put them at a positive advantage. That is why we have announced today that they will receive that priority in the Firstbuy scheme. I can also tell my hon. Friend that they will be a priority in the social housing allocation list. Also, if I may correct one point, the new figures for rough sleepers out today from CHAIN—the Combined Homeless and Information Network—show that just 3% of UK people on the streets have served previously in the military.


Letter of correction from Mr Grant Shapps:

An error has been identified in an oral answer given on 20 June 2011. The correct answer to the follow-up question should have been:

Grant Shapps: I do not just want to remove the housing disadvantage for those who have served in the military; I want to put them at a positive advantage. That is why we have announced today that they will receive that priority in the Firstbuy scheme. I can also tell my hon. Friend that they will be a priority in the social housing allocation list. Also, if I may correct one point, the new figures for rough sleepers out today from CHAIN—the Combined Homeless and Information Network—show that just 3% of UK people on the streets have served previously in the military.

Social Housing (England)

The following is an extract from the response given by the Minister for Housing and Local Government, the right hon. Member for Welwyn Hatfield (Grant Shapps), to speeches from the hon. Member for Stafford (Jeremy Lefroy) and the hon. Member for Manchester, Withington (Mr Leech) during the Westminster Hall Debate on Social Housing (England) on 28 June 2011.

Grant Shapps: The issue of under-occupancy and empty homes was raised. I passionately believe in trying to solve the equation of 430,000 people under-occupying while nearly 250,000 are overcrowded. I have provided some money, time and resources in order for the Chartered Institute of Housing to assist with that issue.


Letter of correction from Grant Shapps:

An error has been identified in the oral answer given on 28 June 2011. The figures given on under-occupancy and overcrowding in the response were incorrect.

The correct response should have been:

Grant Shapps: The issue of under-occupancy and empty homes was raised. I passionately believe in trying to solve the equation of just over 420,000 households under-occupying while over 270,000 are overcrowded. I have provided some money, time and resources in order for the Chartered Institute of Housing to assist with that issue.
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