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**HOUSE OF COMMONS  
OFFICIAL REPORT**

**PARLIAMENTARY  
DEBATES**

**(HANSARD)**

**Wednesday 30 June 2010**

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# House of Commons

*Wednesday 30 June 2010*

*The House met at half-past Eleven o'clock*

## PRAYERS

[MR SPEAKER *in the Chair*]

## Oral Answers to Questions

### NORTHERN IRELAND

*The Secretary of State was asked—*

#### Presbyterian Mutual Society

1. **Dr William McCrea** (South Antrim) (DUP): What progress has been made in providing assistance to savers affected by the current situation of the Presbyterian Mutual Society. [4204]

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Owen Paterson):** Both the Prime Minister and I have publicly stated our firm commitment to working with the Northern Ireland Executive to ensure a just and fair resolution to the PMS situation, and all options are being considered. The reconvened ministerial working group will meet soon to review progress, and I will be its chairman.

**Dr McCrea:** Is the right hon. Gentleman aware that many of those with savings of less than £20,000 in the PMS are in the older age bracket? As a result, they have been denied access to their savings for more than 20 months and have faced hardship and great distress? Does he appreciate that the urgent resolution of this situation is necessary? What timetable is he working on to resolve it?

**Mr Paterson:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his question. I totally appreciate the severity of the pressures, particularly on older people, who are having trouble paying nursing home fees and so on. I would love to set a timetable, but I cannot do so. All I can say is that this Government take this issue seriously, we will get a grip on it, we have reconvened the working group and I will chair it. I very much hope that we will arrive at a solution.

**Ms Margaret Ritchie** (South Down) (SDLP): I thank the Secretary of State for his answer. Given the extent of central Government support for failed financial institutions and the severe budgetary pressures faced by the Northern Ireland Executive, does he accept that it is imperative that the Treasury endeavours to alleviate the financial burdens faced by savers in the PMS? Will he take those views on board when he begins to chair this group shortly? If the Northern Ireland Executive find resources for this organisation, will the Treasury match those several-fold?

**Mr Paterson:** I am most grateful to the hon. Lady for her question. I would not want to prejudge the result of our deliberations, so I merely say that my hon. Friend the Financial Secretary to the Treasury will be on the working group, and its other four members are all part of the Executive and will put the point of view of the Executive clearly in our deliberations.

#### Dissident Paramilitary Activity

2. **Mr Iain Wright** (Hartlepool) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of the extent of activities of dissident republicans in Northern Ireland. [4205]

3. **David Simpson** (Upper Bann) (DUP): What his most recent assessment is of the level of security threat from dissident republican organisations in Northern Ireland. [4206]

7. **Mr David Hanson** (Delyn) (Lab): What recent assessment he has made of levels of dissident paramilitary activity in Northern Ireland. [4210]

**The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr Hugo Swire):** The threat level in Northern Ireland remains at severe, but the security forces continue to bear down on this small number of criminals. So far this year there have been 121 arrests and 30 charges brought, which compares with 106 arrests and 17 charges brought in the whole of 2009.

**Mr Wright:** I thank the Minister for his response. In the light of the Independent Monitoring Commission's report, the increase in the activity of a small band of dissident republicans and, in particular, the worrying use of car bombs, will he consider continuing the previous Government's practice of providing additional funds from the reserves to tackle terrorism?

**Mr Swire:** We did, of course, endorse that approach and, as my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State said, we wrote the most open-dated cheque in supporting the previous Government's moves in that direction before the general election. In my opening remarks, I referred to the level of activity among those who reject the peace process and who have, in effect, turned their backs on it. I do not wish to distinguish them by calling them "dissident republicans" because I believe that that gives them a status that they do not deserve. I believe that the security services, particularly the Police Service of Northern Ireland, the Department of Justice in Belfast, which is headed by David Ford, and crucially, the Garda in the Republic of Ireland, are working extremely carefully and closely together to try to prevent these atrocities from happening on a more regular basis.

**David Simpson:** The Minister will be aware that in recent days a 300 lb bomb and a 160 lb bomb have been planted in Northern Ireland by these so-called "dissidents". Further to the previous question, may I ask whether he will give assurances to this House today and to the people who live in the area where these bombs were put that we will get whatever resources are needed, be they financial or manpower?

**Mr Swire:** The hon. Gentleman's constituency had the pipe bomb in the grounds of the Brownlow PSNI station on 18 June and the tragic and unacceptable murder of Constable Stephen Carroll by the Continuity

IRA. The answer to the hon. Gentleman's question is that we support any bid by the PSNI for additional resources, and we will make representations to the Treasury as and when necessary, because the security of innocent individuals in Northern Ireland should be paramount in everything we seek to do.

**Mr Hanson:** Does the Minister agree that this is not just about the threat of bombs and dissident activity but about the fact that many dissidents in Northern Ireland—as I know from my experience as a Minister there for some time—are involved in criminal activity? Even today, we have seen reports of criminal gangs and prostitution run by dissident paramilitaries. Will he ensure that resources are available not only to tackle the emergency situation but to deal with the long-term security and crime issues that impact on the community across the Province?

**Mr Swire:** Indeed. Things have changed since the right hon. Gentleman was in Northern Ireland and, of course, crime issues that are without any kind of terrorist connotation are a matter for the Department of Justice, David Ford and the PSNI. Of course, we will provide all the resources that are needed. I cannot stress enough the close co-operation we have with the Garda on cross-border issues. I am delighted to make an announcement today on one of the things for which we have been lobbied by the PSNI—an automatic number plate reading device that will cost £12.9 million. The Secretary of State has been lobbying the Treasury since he took office and I am delighted to be able to announce to the House this morning that we have that funding for the PSNI. That will be a useful device in its continuing battle against those who would commit crime.

**Mr Nigel Dodds (Belfast North) (DUP):** May I congratulate the hon. Gentleman and the Secretary of State on their appointments and wish them well in Northern Ireland? Further to previous questions, may I ask what discussions have taken place between the Government, the Chief Constable and the Justice Minister in Northern Ireland on access to the security fund?

**Mr Swire:** I congratulate the right hon. Gentleman on his elevation to the Privy Council. We have regular meetings, both on a statutory basis and on an informal basis, with David Ford, the Chief Constable and others in Northern Ireland. We listen to the requests that they make for access to the funds, as the right hon. Gentleman suggests, but I think that they will be heartened by the news that when they asked us for something during the first few weeks of our being in power, we delivered.

**Mr Dodds:** I am grateful to the Minister for his response and congratulate him on his announcement today. Given that he is now off to a good start, I hope that he can continue with that. On the wider issue of resources, will he give us an assurance? Given the amount of powers that are devolved to Northern Ireland, one of his main tasks will be, along with his colleague the Secretary of State, to fight the Treasury for funds for Northern Ireland. He will be judged on that, so will he give a commitment that he is fighting on that front, too?

**Mr Swire:** The right hon. Gentleman will know that we do not have to fight with the Treasury, because in the Treasury are our dear and trusted colleagues. Whenever we have asked them for anything, they have delivered—

although I would concede that that has happened only once to date. Without being particularly partisan against Labour Members, I refer the right hon. Gentleman back to the outgoing Chief Secretary's remark that "There is no money." This is a very tight fiscal round and I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that the Secretary of State and I will make representations to the Treasury when asked to do so on behalf of the devolved Administration in Northern Ireland.

**Mr Laurence Robertson (Tewkesbury) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend and the Secretary of State on their appointments. Does the Minister agree that one way in which paramilitary activity can start to be countered is if there is co-operation between people in all sections of the communities in each of these areas? Is the Minister satisfied that sufficient progress is being made in that respect?

**Mr Swire:** I congratulate my hon. Friend on being appointed Chair of the Select Committee. I hope that that is one issue that the newly formed Select Committee will consider. Of course, he is right, particularly in the light of the Saville report on Bloody Sunday when, for many people, we finally got the truth of what happened on that dreadful day. It is incumbent on everyone in Northern Ireland to come forward and tell the truth. It is only through the truth being told that we can get reconciliation and allow Northern Ireland to move on in the way that everybody in this House would wish it to.

**Mr Speaker:** We need to make somewhat faster progress.

**Paul Goggins (Wythenshawe and Sale East) (Lab):** I welcome the Minister to his post and wish him genuinely warm good wishes in his responsibilities. I also welcome the very good news that he and the Secretary of State have secured this additional £12 million from the reserve. That is vital funding and I congratulate them on obtaining it. I am sure that he will agree that the Independent Monitoring Commission has played a vital role in the political process and in the peace process in Northern Ireland. Now that devolution is complete, what role does he envisage for the IMC in the future?

**Mr Swire:** I pay tribute to the right hon. Gentleman and I have heard nothing but good about his time in Northern Ireland as a Minister. He is a hard act to follow. To keep my answer short, in line with what you have just suggested, Mr Speaker, the IMC has, as the right hon. Gentleman knows, performed a sterling service. We and the Irish Government keep the continuing need for it under review.

### Public Inquiries

4. **Paul Farrelly (Newcastle-under-Lyme) (Lab):** What his policy is on holding further public inquiries into events involving deaths which took place during the troubles in Northern Ireland. [4207]

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Owen Paterson):** I reaffirm the statement made to this House by my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister on 15 June, where he reassured the House that there would be "no more open-ended and costly inquiries into the past."—[*Official Report*, 15 June 2010; Vol. 511, c. 741.]

**Paul Farrelly:** May I, too, congratulate my next-door neighbour from just over the border in Shropshire on his appointment as the Secretary of State? Does he agree that the Saville inquiry, no matter how long it took, marked a watershed in the troubled history of Northern Ireland? While respecting the families' legitimate rights still to grieve, it is important to look to the future. All the Governments of the past 30 years should be congratulated on their efforts toward reconciliation in Northern Ireland, but will he outline what specific initiatives the new Government will take to secure peace in Northern Ireland?

**Mr Paterson:** I am most grateful for my neighbour's kind comments. He is absolutely right that Northern Ireland needs to look ahead, but the people of Northern Ireland need to work together, and solutions for dealing with the past and looking ahead must be agreed among those who lead the country at local level. We cannot have solutions being imposed from above.

**Mr Shaun Woodward** (St Helens South and Whiston) (Lab): I, too, congratulate the Secretary of State and the Minister of State on assuming their posts. In the Prime Minister's statement on Saville, he said that he wanted to

"reassure the House that there will be no more open-ended and costly inquiries into the past."—[*Official Report*, 15 June 2010; Vol. 511, c. 741.]

We know that that was also the Secretary of State's position in opposition, so we were a little intrigued to hear from the Prime Minister in the same statement that we

"should look at each case on its merits." —[*Official Report*, 15 June 2010; Vol. 511, c. 744]

So—a straight answer here will do—does the right hon. Gentleman accept that he may have been a little rash, in opposition, definitively to rule out future inquiries, whatever the case? A yes or no will do.

**Mr Paterson:** I am most grateful to the shadow Secretary of State for his comments. I do not want to turn this into a love-in, but I compliment him on delivering the final stage of devolution. That was his great achievement as the Secretary of State. It is important, in considering that past, that we do not shut out any possible solutions. The Prime Minister said last week in his statement that the Historical Enquiries Team is doing good work, has support across the community and achieves very high satisfaction levels: 86% of those who have had HET reports were satisfied with its performance. For the time being, that is the route ahead, but we cannot impose a solution from above.

**Mr Woodward:** I am glad that the right hon. Gentleman mentions the HET, which he will know was established as part of a process and is not, of course, the process. It is looking at 3,268 unsolved killings, but after five years it is still working on the 1970s. It is not an inquiry, it is not an inquest and it is not a police investigation. We know that all families want the truth, so will he be straight with those families, including the family of the hon. Member for South Antrim (Dr McCrea), and admit that now Saville has been published, there is a responsibility on the Government to come forward with a fully funded, comprehensive process to establish and discover the truth and bring reconciliation for all families?

**Mr Paterson:** We have a process through the HET that is achieving very high levels of satisfaction—of the families who have had a report, 95% credited it for professionalism and 86% for performance. That is working. Before we go further, we need to work with local politicians. As I keep repeating, there is no role for us, as the national Government, to impose. I draw the right hon. Gentleman's attention to the comments of David Ford, this week. He said:

"We cannot have a Saville-type inquiry for all the tragedies of the past, but the fundamental matter of dealing with the past is something which has to be dealt with collectively by the Executive."

### Consultative Group on the Past

5. **Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): What plans he has to take into account the recommendations of the report of the Consultative Group on the Past in formulating policy on reconciliation measures in Northern Ireland. [4208]

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Owen Paterson):** In determining what role I can play, I will of course consider the recommendations made by the Consultative Group on the Past. I will shortly publish a summary of responses to the previous Government's consultation on the group's proposals.

**Mark Durkan:** I congratulate the Secretary of State on his appointment and I take this opportunity to thank him and his predecessor for the quality of contact and consideration that they extended to the families regarding the publication of the Saville report. On the wider issues of the past, there are thousands of victims, all of whom have different needs in terms of truth, recognition and remembrance. Does the Secretary of State agree that the community also has a collective responsibility to discharge its regard for the past so that future generations will know that it was a dirty war and that we will never settle for a dirty peace?

**Mr Paterson:** I am grateful for that question and pay tribute to the hon. Gentleman, who has taken me to his constituency. I met the families in the Bogside two or three years ago, and on that trip I also met Dr Hazlett Lynch a few hours later. That drummed into me the fact that there is no consensus on the past. We have to work at local level, and I appeal to the hon. Gentleman to work with his colleagues in the Executive, in collaboration with us, to find a way forward. However, there is no black-and-white solution that will work if we impose it from above.

**Naomi Long** (Belfast East) (Alliance): May I add my congratulations to the Secretary of State on his appointment? Is he aware of the report produced this morning by the Commission for Victims and Survivors giving the Government advice on dealing with the past? How will he take forward the report's recommendations so that we have a more comprehensive process for dealing with all aspects of the past and the needs of victims?

**Mr Paterson:** I am grateful to the hon. Lady for that question. The document will form part of our listening exercise. We will publish the summary of the conclusions of those who responded to the previous Government

on the Eames-Bradley report. As I have said, we will be going round talking and listening to various groups, but I repeat—for the nth time in this question session—that we cannot impose. It is up to people in Northern Ireland to work together to decide a strategy going forward.

#### Pat Finucane

6. **Meg Hillier** (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op): When he plans to establish a public inquiry into the death of Pat Finucane. [4209]

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Owen Paterson):** I am aware of the previous Government's commitments and that there has been a long-running exchange between the previous Government and the Finucane family on the question of an inquiry.

Before I explain how I propose to approach this question, I want to hear the views of the Finucane family for myself. I have written to the family to invite them to meet me.

**Meg Hillier:** I welcome the Secretary of State to his position and thank him for that answer. Earlier, he indicated once again that there would be no more open-ended inquiries but, when the Prime Minister responded to the Saville report, he said both that and “but of course we should look at each case on its merits.”—[*Official Report*, 15 June 2010; Vol. 511, c. 744.]

Although I thank the Secretary of State for his answer, I am not sure—and I wonder whether the family of Pat Finucane are sure—which of those positions holds true for that case.

**Mr Paterson:** As the hon. Lady knows, the issue was the subject of considerable discussion between the Finucane family and the previous Secretary of State. I think that today it is appropriate for me to talk to the family first rather than to give a black-and-white answer on how we are going to take this forward.

**Mr Jeffrey M. Donaldson** (Lagan Valley) (DUP): As the Secretary of State will know, there is no bar to an inquiry going forward on this issue, except for the fact that the family are looking for some kind of special provision. If the right hon. Gentleman grants that, the danger is that he will create a hierarchy of victims, and that thousands of people who have not had justice will look on and wonder why they are not getting the same justice.

**Mr Paterson:** I am grateful for that, and the right hon. Gentleman makes a valid point. I repeat my earlier reply—that, at this stage, the first thing that I should do is to go and talk to the family—but I also repeat that it is our policy not to have any more costly and open-ended inquiries.

#### Dual Mandates

8. **Robert Halfon** (Harlow) (Con): What discussions he has had with Ministerial colleagues on the system of dual mandates in the House of Commons and the Northern Ireland Assembly. [4211]

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Owen Paterson):** I should be demanding time and a half.

I have had several discussions with ministerial colleagues on the system of dual mandates. I believe that dual mandates should be brought to an end but that the best way to do so is by consensus among the Northern Ireland parties.

**Robert Halfon:** Does my right hon. Friend agree that so-called “double jobbing” has scarred Northern Irish politics for far too long? If local parties will not agree to end that voluntarily, will he consider introducing legislation to restrict the practice and ensure that double-jobbers take only one salary?

**Mr Paterson:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that question, and he is quite right. The time to end double-jobbing is upon us: quite simply, a Member cannot sit in two legislatures at once. We know from local polls that double-jobbing is very unpopular—in one poll, 71% of respondents were against it. We would like to negotiate with local parties and, if absolutely necessary, we would legislate. However, I draw attention to the example set by my hon. Friend the Member for Vale of Glamorgan (Alun Cairns). On the day that he was elected to this House, he announced his intention to stand down from the Welsh Assembly, and he has forgone his salary for the rest of this year.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. There are far too many private conversations taking place in the Chamber. It is very unfair on the hon. Member asking the question, and indeed on the Minister answering. The House must come to order.

#### Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland

9. **Maria Eagle** (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): When the Government plan to publish their response to the consultation on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. [4212]

**The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr Hugo Swire):** I intend to publish a summary of responses to the consultation on a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland shortly.

**Maria Eagle:** I thank the Minister for that illuminating reply. Before the election, the Secretary of State expressed scepticism about legislating for a Northern Ireland Bill of Rights, but does the Minister accept, now that he is in office, that as there was a solemn commitment to doing so, and as that was part of the Belfast agreement, it would present difficulties in the peace process if he were to renege on that commitment now?

**Mr Swire:** I do not think that there is any question of reneging. The fact is that the world has moved on; we now have a coalition Government who are committed to looking into a UK-wide Bill of Rights. Of course we remain committed to fulfilling the commitments in the Good Friday agreement, and we are considering the best way of doing that within the architecture of a UK-wide commission. We genuinely believe that if we are to have a UK-wide Bill of Rights, the people of Northern Ireland are best represented within that, rather than by any stand-alone sideshow.

### Security Threat

10. **Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): What recent discussions he has had with the First Minister and Deputy First Minister on the level of security threat in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [4214]

**The Minister of State, Northern Ireland Office (Mr Hugo Swire)**: As I said in answer to previous questions, the threat level in Northern Ireland remains severe.

**Mr Campbell**: The Minister will be aware that in north-west Northern Ireland, more pipe bombs were exploded or defused in the first five months of this year than in the entire 12 months of 2009. On the Fountain estate in Londonderry, hundreds of attacks have taken place in the past year. What resources are being put into Northern Ireland to ensure that the police—and the Army, if called on—are there to respond to such a threat?

**Mr Swire**: The hon. Gentleman will be glad about our announcement this morning on automatic number plate recognition. That will be a useful tool for the Police Service of Northern Ireland. He mentioned pipe bombs; we condemn all those attacks. They are indiscriminate, and they target innocent people. It is worth remembering, when we talk about policing in Northern Ireland, that operational decisions are matters for the Chief Constable, in whom we have great faith and with whom we have regular meetings, and of course the Department of Justice and David Ford. It is perhaps worth remembering that in Northern Ireland, there is still an average of 4.36 police officers per 1,000 of the population. That compares with 2.87 per 1,000 of the population in England and Wales. I am not saying that that is necessarily enough—it can never be enough—but there are police and resources, and we respond to demands from the PSNI.

**Dr Alasdair McDonnell** (Belfast South) (SDLP): What is the Minister's assessment of the wider security threat in the context of Ulster Volunteer Force activity and the murder of Bobby Moffett?

**Mr Swire**: I join most people in this House, I suspect, in condemning the gunning down of Bobby Moffett in the cold light of day in a completely unacceptable way, and I pay tribute to all those people who live in that part of the city and who attended his funeral. The hon. Gentleman would not expect me to make any judgment on the case, as it is obviously the subject of ongoing investigation by the PSNI, but it is not impossible that there will need to be a hard line taken later, in the autumn, when the IMC next reports.

### Presbyterian Mutual Society

11. **Conor Burns** (Bournemouth West) (Con): What recent discussions he has had on his Department's policy in response to the collapse of the Presbyterian Mutual Society. [4215]

**The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland (Mr Owen Paterson)**: I have held a number of discussions with both Treasury Ministers and Ministers from the Northern

Ireland Executive in recent weeks as we seek to identify options to assist members of the Presbyterian Mutual Society. The reconvened PMS ministerial working group will meet soon to review progress.

**Conor Burns**: I welcome the Secretary of State's reply, which will give some reassurance to the thousands of people in Northern Ireland affected by the collapse. Does he recognise that there have been 18 months between the collapse of the society and the general election, and that this is another example of the Labour party leaving a mess for us to sort out?

**Mr Paterson**: My hon. Friend is absolutely right, because it was a boast of the previous Prime Minister that

“No UK depositor has lost money.”

That is why we have decided to grip the issue, and why I will chair the working group. I very much hope that we will come to a resolution soon.

**Ian Paisley** (North Antrim) (DUP): Rather than those on both sides of the House playing party politics with the needs of savers in Northern Ireland, can the Secretary of State tell the House when he will come to a conclusion, so that savers, especially pensioners who are hard pressed at this time, can access and use their money?

**Mr Paterson**: We have been in power only seven weeks. We have set up the working group. We will set about our work with determination, and I hope we will provide a solution soon.

**Bob Stewart** (Beckenham) (Con): Speaking as someone who was very kindly treated by the Garda when I made a map-reading error in hot pursuit, may I ask my right hon. Friend what the relationship currently is between the Garda and the Police Service of Northern Ireland?

**Mr Speaker**: I am extremely grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but unfortunately his question does not relate to the response to the collapse of the Presbyterian Mutual Society. I hope he will take that gentle admonition in the spirit in which it was intended.

### PRIME MINISTER

*The Prime Minister was asked—*

#### Engagements

Q1. [4720] **Kevin Brennan** (Cardiff West) (Lab): If he will list his official engagements for Wednesday 30 June.

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

**Kevin Brennan**: Is the reason that the Prime Minister wants to put fewer criminals in jail to do with cutting crime or cutting budgets?

**The Prime Minister**: What the Government want to do is clear up the complete mess of the criminal justice system left by the Labour party. Each prison place today costs £45,000, yet 40% of prisoners are back in

prison within a year, more than half of them are on drugs, and around 10% of them are foreign national prisoners, who should not be here in the first place.

**Nadine Dorries** (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): The American waste giant, Covanta, is proposing to build in my constituency an incinerator about the size of Wembley. Will the Prime Minister give an assurance that decisions about such matters will be made at a local level in future?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is right to raise this, and it is right that decisions should be made locally. We want to make sure that all the latest technology for alternatives to incineration is considered, so that we can make sure that we are using the best ways to achieve a green approach.

**Ms Harriet Harman** (Camberwell and Peckham) (Lab): We were very concerned this morning to read reports that as a result of the right hon. Gentleman's Budget, 1.3 million jobs will be lost. Can he confirm that this was an estimate produced by Treasury officials?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. and learned Lady should know—*[Interruption.]* I will give a surprisingly full answer if Opposition Members just sit patiently. This morning the Office for Budget Responsibility produced the full tables for the Budget for employment in the public and the private sector. That never happened under a Labour Government, right? As shown in the Budget, unemployment is forecast to fall every year under this Government, but the tables also show public sector employment. It is interesting that from the tables we can see the effect of Labour's policy before the Budget and the effect of our policy after the Budget. What the figures show is that under Labour's plans, next year there would be 70,000 fewer public sector jobs, and the year after that, there would be 150,000 fewer public sector jobs. We have had the courage to have a two-year pay freeze. I know we have all been watching the football, but that was a spectacular own goal.

**Ms Harman:** I know that the right hon. Gentleman has published some new figures today, but it is the figures that he has not published that I am asking about—the figures that show that 1.3 million jobs will be lost. Why will the Prime Minister not publish those Treasury documents? Why is he keeping them hidden?

**The Prime Minister:** The forecasts that are published now are independent from the Government. That is the whole point. *[Interruption.]* It is no good Opposition Members chuntering about that. They now support the Office for Budget Responsibility, completely independent of Government. The right hon. and learned Lady's approach is extraordinary. Before the election the shadow Chancellor, the then Chancellor, was asked on BBC radio on 23 April 2010, and the transcript says:

“Will you acknowledge that public sector jobs will be cut?”  
Darling: ‘It's inevitable.’”

**Ms Harman:** But even the OBR says that under the Prime Minister's Budget, unemployment will be higher than it would otherwise have been. It says that on today's figures and it said that on last week's figures.

Can the right hon. Gentleman confirm that the secret Treasury analysis shows that under his Budget, 500,000 jobs will be lost in the public sector, but even more will be lost in the private sector?

**The Prime Minister:** The figures published today show 2 million more private sector jobs. They show 1.4 million more people in work at the end of this Parliament. They show unemployment falling every year. It is not really any surprise that the former Labour Minister, Digby Jones, after the Budget said—*[Interruption.]* Why not listen?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I am sorry to interrupt the Prime Minister. I must ask hon. and right hon. Members to listen with some restraint. I want to hear the answers.

**The Prime Minister:** The Opposition gave him a peerage. They might as well listen to what he had to say. He said:

“I think that sign has gone up around the world saying Britain is serious about sorting out its economic mess”.

He is right. It is a pity he did not say it when he was in office.

**Ms Harman:** The right hon. Gentleman has not answered the question about the 1.3 million. He has not agreed to publish those documents. He should know what abject misery this unemployment will cause to individuals, to families and to communities. Can he tell us now how much extra it will cost in unemployment benefits?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. and learned Lady does not seem to understand. Unemployment will be falling during this Parliament. We have published the full figures, but it is not now us publishing the figures, it is the Office for Budget Responsibility. She must understand that this is something the Labour party now supports. Let me repeat: the figures show that unemployment in the public sector would be higher under Labour's plans next year and the year after. When she gets to her feet perhaps she will tell us whether she now supports the pay freeze to keep unemployment down?

**Ms Harman:** Mr. Speaker, you can always tell when the right hon. Gentleman does not want to answer a question, because he asks me a question. He should recognise that under the OBR figures published today, unemployment is higher than it would have been because of his Budget. The same is shown in the OBR report last week. He will not tell us how much more the Treasury will have to pay out in benefits to people without work as a result of his Budget. Will he tell us how much less will be coming in in taxes as a result of fewer people in work because of his Budget?

**The Prime Minister:** There will be more people in work. Like every Labour Government, the Opposition left us with unemployment rising and at the end of this Parliament unemployment will be falling. That is the difference. My advice would be to look at the figures before standing up and asking the question. If one looks at the figures one sees higher public sector unemployment next year and the year after under Labour. The right hon. and learned Lady has slotted the ball straight into the back of her own net.

**Ms Harman:** We will look at the figures if the right hon. Gentleman will publish them. We know that because this Budget hits jobs, the Treasury will have less money coming in and more money going out. Does not that make reducing the deficit even harder and more painful, with bigger tax rises or even deeper cuts in public services? Why are the Lib Dems just sitting there letting this happen? No one who voted Lib Dem voted for this.

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Lady talks about reducing the Budget deficit, but we have not heard one single proposal for cutting the deficit. We all know that the Opposition left us the biggest Budget deficit in the G20—the biggest Budget deficit in our history. We have been having a good trawl for the stupidest piece of spending that they undertook, and I think we have found it. It was in her own Department, which spent £2.4 million doing up the Department, including £72,000 each on two-storey meeting pods known as peace pods. This is what they were for—*[Interruption.]* It is true. I am reading from her own Department's staff magazine. Taxpayers have a right to hear where their money went. This is where it went. It was

“a 21st century...space of quality, air and light, where we can...relax and refuel in a natural ebb and flow.”

That is what has happened. They have gone from peaceniks to peace pods, and bankrupted the country in the process.

**Mr Steve Brine** (Winchester) (Con): The Prime Minister will be aware that Winchester hosted the largest homecoming parade of returning troops from Afghanistan to date last Wednesday afternoon, when 650 men and women from 11 Light Brigade marched through the city's streets in the presence of the Duchess of Cornwall. Will he join me in paying tribute to those 650 brave men and women, the 64 who did not make it home and, of course, the thousands of Winchester constituents of mine who showed their gratitude for a job well done?

**The Prime Minister:** I shall certainly join my hon. Friend in paying tribute to all those who served in Afghanistan. The homecoming parades that have been instituted are an absolutely excellent way of showing the whole country's support for our armed forces. He rightly talks about those who did not come home, and we should also think of those who have come home wounded and will need our support, backing and help in terms of health and mental health services, prosthetic limbs and other things of a really high quality for the rest of their lives. I am determined that we will honour that commitment.

**Q2.** [4721] **John Cryer** (Leyton and Wanstead) (Lab): The leaked Treasury papers are absolutely clear that unemployment will rocket by 1.3 million over the next five years. Does the Prime Minister not realise that millions of people watching this who face unemployment over the next few years will think that his comments are tinged with contempt in his refusal to answer perfectly straightforward questions from the Labour Front Bench?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Gentleman is wrong. We are publishing the figures, and they show exactly what will happen in terms of private sector employment and public sector employment. As the previous Government

accepted, there will be reductions in public sector employment, but, according to the Office for Budget Responsibility, which is independent of the Government, the growth in the private sector more than makes up for that. After he has left this room, he should maybe spend some time in a peace pod, wander to the Library and have a look at the figures, where he will see the Office for Budget Responsibility showing unemployment falling every year of this Parliament.

**Q3.** [4722] **Julian Sturdy** (York Outer) (Con): Following last week's much welcomed Budget announcement, does the Prime Minister agree that correcting our deeply unbalanced economy will require fresh investment and enterprise in many northern cities, such as my own of York, which for so long was neglected by the Labour Government? What assurances can he give to me and my constituents that the coalition will do all it can to encourage the economic growth—

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We are grateful to the hon. Gentleman. We need an answer.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is quite right to raise that point, because during the past decade the disparity between regions actually got worse. Regional policy has for the past decade been a complete failure, and that is why we are right to cut rates of corporation tax, to say to new businesses, “You can set up without having to pay national insurance on your first 10 employees,” to bias that policy in favour of parts of the country where the needs are greatest and to have a £1 billion regional growth fund that can help parts of the country such as the one that he represents.

**Mr George Howarth** (Knowsley) (Lab): Does the Prime Minister accept that one consequence of a prison sentence is that those serving them are unavailable to reoffend?

**The Prime Minister:** Yes, absolutely—I mean, that is absolutely right. That is why prison is there. I believe that prison can work; the fact is that it is just not working properly at the moment. When we have got those reoffending rates, the cost of each prison place and the appalling problem of drugs in prison, we have got to reform. If the Labour party wants to put itself on the side of the argument of simply defending the status quo, it is making a great mistake. If ever there were a part of our public services that needed radical reform to make sure that prison does work, then now, that is it.

**Q4.** [4723] **Stephen Lloyd** (Eastbourne) (LD): Given the Chancellor's recent comments stating that the UK is open for business, I should like to ask my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister why foreign students who come here to study at English language schools for a period greater than six months and contribute an estimated £600 million a year to that vital industry must now already be able to speak English before they can obtain a visa. Will the Prime Minister arrange for me and a delegation to meet the Immigration Minister to sort that out and show that our Government really are open for business?

**Mr Speaker:** There is a need to be a bit briefer.

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right: we want to make sure that this country is open for business, and we are taking steps to do that. The point about people coming here to learn English is that, if they come to learn English for less than six months, that is permitted, but clearly there are problems, as everybody knows: too many bogus colleges and too many people pretending to come and study, when really they are coming for work. I shall certainly organise a meeting between my hon. Friend and the Immigration Minister to discuss that, but it is right that we have to deal with the problem of bogus colleges, where there has been so much abuse in recent years.

**Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): The Prime Minister has said that he wants to see more companies owned by their workers—the so-called John Lewis model. Sheffield Forgemasters is one of those companies. Will the Prime Minister therefore now accept that he was wrong to criticise its shareholders for seeking a loan from the Government? They were not seeking to line their own pockets; they have not yet taken a penny in dividends. What they were seeking to do was ensure the future of that company and other jobs in the UK.

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady talks about the importance of firms being owned by their own employees; I am looking forward to her support and the support of every Labour Member when we make sure that the Post Office has that sort of ownership model and we get the investment going as well. [*Interruption.*] I will take that as a yes, then.

**Q5.** [4724] **Mr Gary Streeter** (South West Devon) (Con): About 5,000 young people a year leave local authority care, and without parental support many of them end up on the streets or in our prisons. Do the new Government have any plans to intervene more effectively in the lives of that very vulnerable group, to try to improve their life chances?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right to raise this. We really do need to do better as a country. The fact is that around 0.6% of children are in care, but 23% of adult prisoners in our prison system were in care. We have to do better. One of the problems is that, unlike other 18-year-olds, children leaving care aged 18 have nowhere to go and no one to help them. We have to do better. We are looking at this area and I recognise that dealing with the scandal of the poor outcomes for children in care is something, frankly, that everyone in this House ought to support.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): Homecoming parades for our very brave soldiers in Afghanistan are incredibly important, but so is an exit strategy from Afghanistan. Given the growing agreement that there is no military solution to the crisis there and that the head of the Army himself has said that we should start talking to the Taliban soon, would the Prime Minister not agree that we should start talking now, so that we can save more lives on all sides and bring our troops home?

**The Prime Minister:** May I first of all welcome the hon. Lady to the House? Winning her seat was an incredible achievement for her party, and I know that she will make a huge contribution during this Parliament.

We discussed Afghanistan at quite some length in the House yesterday. Of course there is no purely military solution; very few insurgencies are ended by purely military means. But I think it is important to continue with the strategy this year of the military surge, to put pressure on the Taliban—and, of course, there should be a political track. But as I said yesterday in the House, we have to recognise that there is a difference between the Taliban linked to al-Qaeda, who want to do so much harm not just in Afghanistan but across our continent as well, and those people who have been caught up in an insurgency for other reasons. Should there be reconciliation and reintegration? Yes, of course; there is, and we can go further. But I think that the things that the hon. Lady is talking about would not be advisable.

**Q6.** [4725] **Mark Lancaster** (Milton Keynes North) (Con): As we pay tribute to the members of our armed forces who have made the ultimate sacrifice in Afghanistan, it is worth remembering that for every life lost there, six more are changed for ever through the loss of one or more limbs. Sometimes there are things that money cannot buy, but I welcome the Prime Minister's announcement of an extra £67 million to try to help to counter improvised explosive devices. Will he explain to the House how that money will be spent?

**The Prime Minister:** I thank my hon. Friend for his question and pay tribute to him as a member of our Territorial Army reserve. He is himself a bomb disposal expert who has served in Afghanistan. What the bomb disposal and IED teams do is beyond brave. I saw for myself in Camp Bastion their training and instruction. They do a really extraordinary thing for our soldiers and our country. We announced an extra £67 million to give proper protection; £40 million of that is for more protected vehicles. We will also be doubling the number of teams. All the time, we have to keep up with the technology that our enemy is using.

My hon. Friend mentioned people coming home having lost one limb or two. These are young people, who do not just want to have a new limb and a quiet life—they want to run marathons and to climb Everest. They want to have fulfilled lives. We have to make sure that the support and the very best prosthetic limbs are there for them so that they can lead those lives.

**Q7.** [4726] **Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): In light of the earlier exchanges about employment and job losses, does not the Prime Minister think that the announcement this week of a further 4,000 full-time-equivalent staff being cut from Jobcentre Plus by next March amounts to a false economy?

**The Prime Minister:** First, I welcome the hon. Lady to the House. Not everyone will know that she was head of the Child Poverty Action Group, which has done incredible work in our country over many years. I pay tribute to her for that.

Let me just repeat: the forecasts show employment rising—that is the key—and employment is the best way of tackling poverty. Of course there are going to be public sector job losses, and of course there are going to be cuts in some programmes—that would have been true under a Labour Government, and it is true under

our Government. The key, though, is gripping this problem so that we start to get confidence and growth in our economy and so we start to get the recovery. I say to Labour Members that they have got to engage in this debate rather than play this pathetic game of pretending there would not have been cuts under Labour. There would have been—they announced them, they just never told anyone what they were.

**Charlie Elphicke** (Dover) (Con): The campaign of the right hon. Member for South Shields (David Miliband) is so confused these days that he is seeking support from Conservative MPs. He says that the Budget was avoidable. Can I ask the Prime Minister whether it was avoidable or—[*Interruption.*]

**Mr Speaker:** Order. It is a good idea to start with a question that directly relates to the policy of the Government, but unfortunately this one does not.

Q8. [4727] **Liz Kendall** (Leicester West) (Lab): The paediatric cardiac unit at Glenfield hospital in my constituency provides outstanding care, not only in terms of the quality of surgery but of the excellent nursing, aftercare, and facilities and support for parents. Will the Prime Minister confirm that all aspects of care will be considered as part of the Government's review of children's heart surgery; and will he agree to visit the Glenfield's unit before the review makes its recommendations to see for himself the excellent care it provides?

**The Prime Minister:** I quite understand why the hon. Lady raises this question. A national examination of children's cardiac services was started under the last Government, and it will continue under this Government, because we have got to make sure that standards are as high as they can be in this incredibly difficult and technical area. We all have our interests to defend—obviously, I have the John Radcliffe hospital, which does a great job as well, next to my constituency—so she is right to stand up for her constituents in that way. The examination needs to take place. However, one of the keys is going to be protecting, as we believe is necessary, spending in the NHS over this Parliament, with modest, real-terms increases each year. That is our policy; it is no longer the policy of the Labour party. So when difficult decisions have to be made, it would be worse if we were adopting the Labour policy of cutting the NHS.

Q9. [4728] **Mr Robin Walker** (Worcester) (Con): Will the Prime Minister join me in welcoming the fact that through protecting investments in health care, the coalition Government have been able to approve the £40 million hospices capital grant, £600,000 of which will go towards the expansion of St Richard's hospice in Worcester, which will benefit at least hundreds of patients a year, with community care, and hundreds of families and care workers across Worcestershire in the years to come?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is right to raise the hospice movement, which has been one of the great successes of the big society that we have in this country. I think we all cherish what the hospice movement does.

May I take this opportunity, on behalf of the whole House, to pay tribute to my hon. Friend's father, who served in Parliament for 49 years? He gave great service to this country, and he gave great service in Wales. He had many achievements in his long career. If politics is about public service in the national interest, and things that can change people's lives, his pioneering reform of selling council homes to their tenants is something that I think has greatly improved our country.

**Gordon Banks** (Ochil and South Perthshire) (Lab): I wonder whether the Prime Minister could tell us who he considers to be right on short prison sentences—the Secretary of State for Justice or the leader of his party in the Scottish Parliament.

**The Prime Minister:** The point here is straightforward. We all know we have to keep short sentences for some purposes; I have said that, and the Lord Chancellor has said that. Of course we need to have that in some circumstances, but do we benefit from lots and lots of very short sentences? I think it would be better if we could improve community sentences so that they were tough. One of the problems of the appalling inheritance that we have from the past 10 years is that no one has any faith in the community sentences that ought to be a good alternative to prison.

Q10. [4729] **Tony Baldry** (Banbury) (Con): May I urge my right hon. Friend to ignore Simon Heffer when, in *The Daily Telegraph* today, he advocates the complete abolition of the Department for International Development on the basis that charity begins at home? Will he take this opportunity to tell those sections of the Poujadiste press that keep on having a crack at the Government's commitment to international development that our national interest, security stability and sense of humanity very often begin overseas?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend is entirely right, and he has a record as a Minister for Africa and a Development Minister in a previous Government. The fact is that we have made a commitment, both nationally and internationally, to increase our aid spending, and I think Britain should be a country that sticks to its word. I have to say, even to those who take a more hard-headed approach to these things, that overseas aid is in our domestic interest. When we think of the problems that world poverty causes, we see that it is in our interest and that of our national security to deliver that aid. Above all, Britain sticking to its word, as I found at the G8 and G20, gives us the opportunity to have some moral authority and moral leadership on this vital issue.

**Mr Michael Meacher** (Oldham West and Royton) (Lab): How can the Prime Minister justify the fact that hundreds of thousands of public sector workers, the victims of the financial crash, will unquestionably lose their jobs because of the huge public service cuts to come, when the bankers and super-rich, the architects of the financial crash, whose wealth grew by £77 billion in this last year according to *The Sunday Times* rich list, stand to lose neither their jobs, their income nor their wealth? Is that what he means by everyone being in it together?

**The Prime Minister:** The right hon. Gentleman fought the last election on £50 billion of unspecified cuts. That is why the figures published today show that public sector job losses would be higher under Labour in the next two years. He can say all he likes about bankers; the fact is, his party would not introduce a bank levy until the rest of the world had decided to do it. We have done it in seven weeks.

Q11. [4730] **Annette Brooke** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): My constituent Milly, aged five, wrote to me recently asking why there are special days for mothers and fathers and not for children—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. The hon. Lady will be heard, and that is the end of it.

**Annette Brooke:** Will the Prime Minister commit to working with voluntary organisations to raise the profile of our children's day on 20 November, to celebrate the United Nations convention on the rights of the child and indeed to celebrate the achievements of all our children, whether they be rich or poor?

**The Prime Minister:** The hon. Lady has a long record of supporting children's day and the United Nations convention, which was signed in 1990. I think we should raise the profile of the day, and I know she will be pleased to note that the coalition is making good progress on that. Only this morning the Minister of State, Department for Education, my hon. Friend the Member for Brent Central (Sarah Teather), held a seminar about special needs children and how we must ensure that their needs are properly protected under this coalition Government.

Q12. [4731] **Michael Connarty** (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (Lab): The Prime Minister might have noticed that the people of Scotland did not choose his party, except in one seat out of 59, and they did not choose the Conservatives' poodles, the Liberal Democrats, either. Can he assure the House, as an absolute chill runs through Scotland at the 1.3 million hidden job losses that he did not publish, that any proposals for cuts in public services and expenditure in Scotland, and any Barnett formula cuts, will be brought before the Select Committee on Scottish Affairs—*[Interruption.]*

**Mr Speaker:** Order. We are grateful to the hon. Gentleman, but the question is too long.

**The Prime Minister:** I am well aware that the Conservative party did not sweep Scotland, and I thank the hon. Gentleman for reminding me of it.

What I said I would do if we formed a Government was to go straight to Scotland and Wales to meet the First Ministers and have—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman has asked a question; he might as well listen to the answer before he starts shouting at me. I said that I would have proper meetings and have a respect agenda in which we respected the devolved Assemblies. I have to say that under the last Government there was a whole year during the financial crisis when the Prime Minister of our country did not even meet the First Minister of Scotland. That will not happen under this Government—we believe in respect.

Q14. [4733] **Matthew Hancock** (West Suffolk) (Con): May I tell the Prime Minister how pleased my constituents were when he found £50 million to help further education colleges that were promised funding but left high and dry by the previous Administration? Will he ensure that the application for an FE college in Haverhill in my constituency is given the attention it deserves, so that Haverhill can get the FE college that it is promised?

**The Prime Minister:** My hon. Friend makes a very good public spending application, and I am sure that the Treasury will have been listening carefully. He also makes a very good point: even in a difficult Budget, when reductions had to be made, we have boosted spending on FE colleges and increased the number of apprenticeships, after the shambles left by the last lot.

Q13. [4732] **Graham Jones** (Hyndburn) (Lab): The *Local Government Chronicle* has listed my constituency as the one that has received the biggest cuts in Britain—nearly £3 million at district level. As the Prime Minister will be aware, it is an area of poor health, low incomes and some of the worst housing in Britain. In fact, at the weekend the Liberal Democrat leader of Burnley borough council, the neighbouring council, said:

“The cuts announced by the Government are hitting deprived areas like Burnley much harder than the more affluent areas.”

Does the Prime Minister agree with his colleague in the Liberal Democrats?

**The Prime Minister:** Of course there will be difficult decisions in the Budget and on public spending reductions. Everybody should know that and should be honest about it rather than pretending that they would not have happened if we had had a different Government. What we will do is help areas of need through the tax changes we are making and also through the regional development grant of £1 billion, for which areas such as Hyndburn are able to bid to ensure that they get an increased private sector, to try to get the motor of our economy going again. That is absolutely vital.

## Speaker's Statement

12.31 pm

**Mr Speaker:** On Monday the shadow Home Secretary, in exchanges across the Floor of the House, and the hon. Member for Rhondda (Chris Bryant), in a subsequent point of order, complained that details of a Home Office statement on non-EU migration had been passed to the media before the statement itself was delivered to the House. I undertook to look into the matter and to report back to the House. Having made inquiries, I am now able to update the House.

I have established that at a Home Office press briefing on Monday morning, copies of a statement were made available to journalists—*[Interruption.]* Order. The content of that statement was very similar to that delivered orally in the House by the Home Secretary on Monday afternoon. As Members know, I am concerned that Ministers should make key statements to the House before they are made elsewhere. In this case the opposite happened, and this was a discourtesy to the House. The Home Secretary is present, and will wish to take this opportunity to say something.

**The Secretary of State for the Home Department (Mrs Theresa May):** Thank you, Mr Speaker. I deeply regret the fact that on Monday, in my attempt to assist the House by changing from making a written ministerial statement to making an oral statement, the copy of the statement that would have been made in writing to the House was handed out to the press before I made my oral statement. I take full responsibility for that, and I have no hesitation in apologising to the House and in assuring the House that I will ensure that it will not happen again.

**Mr Speaker:** I am grateful to the Home Secretary for what she has said, and I will take—*[Interruption.]* Order. I will take no points of order on that matter.

**Meg Munn (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. On Tuesday 22 June the Deputy Prime Minister told the House that he was due to meet with the chief executive of Sheffield Forgemasters the following Friday. I understand that no such meeting took place. Can you inform me how the Deputy Prime Minister can set the record straight?

**Mr Speaker:** It is not a responsibility of the Chair—*[Interruption.]* Order. The House really must calm down; otherwise it gives a very bad impression to the public who take an interest in our proceedings. A commitment may or may not have been made. The matter is important and the hon. Lady has registered her concern forcefully on behalf of her constituents. The matter is on the record—and I suspect that she will pass copies of the record to those in her constituency interested in it—but it is not a matter for the Chair.

**Mr Geoffrey Robinson (Coventry North West) (Lab):** Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. You have recognised that it is an important issue. It is all the more important because the Deputy Prime Minister and many Ministers from his party in the coalition have been so disrespectful and have made suggestions about the personal motivation of the chief executive, whom he was due to meet, that have to be repudiated. I am grateful, therefore, that you took this matter seriously, sir.

**Mr Speaker:** I take all matters seriously, but I genuinely do not think that this is a point of order for the Chair. I have the very highest respect for the hon. Gentleman, who has long service in the House, but it is difficult for me to see how he can have a point of order further to a point of order that I have just ruled is not a point of order. However, he has raised his point, even if it is not a point of order, and he has registered his views firmly upon the record.

**Michael Connarty (Linlithgow and East Falkirk) (Lab):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You have often said that you are here to protect the House and to allow it to do its business in holding the Government to account. Will you take up with the Government the fact that although we have had a European summit and a number of European Council meetings, and although five stalwart Labour Members have already volunteered for the European Scrutiny Committee, we have no such Committee to scrutinise the Government's behaviour in Europe? This is the latest that that Committee has ever been set up.

**Mr Speaker:** I am afraid that that is not a task for the Chair—*[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman will not be too disappointed if he waits. He was looking uncertain, but I am trying to allay his uncertainty. He should be grateful to me.

**Michael Connarty:** I did not say anything.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. I do not want sedentary gestures from the hon. Gentleman. I am trying to help him. The matter is not one for the Chair. The information is now firmly in the public domain. Of course we are all in favour of the speedy composition of Committees with important scrutiny work to do, and the Committee to which he refers, which he has himself chaired with distinction, is an important case in point.

**Meg Hillier (Hackney South and Shoreditch) (Lab/Co-op):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. I know that you are very keen that Members of the House should always be factually accurate. On Tuesday 22 June, in answer to questions, the Deputy Prime Minister cited my constituency and said that it had an electorate of 52,000. In fact, on 6 May the electorate was 72,920. I would hope that you, Mr Speaker, would remind Government members of the importance of being factually accurate, when they have all the resources of Government to enable them to quote accurate figures, not figures plucked from the tops of their heads.

**Mr Speaker:** My response to the hon. Lady's point of order—I respect her for raising it—is that, as the Speaker, I am keen on accuracy, but it is not my responsibility, from the Chair, to enforce it. However, she has registered her views—which, I sense, was an important part of her purpose.

**Chris Bryant (Rhondda) (Lab):** On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Honestly, this is not about the previous matter, although it is slightly allied. I am glad that you are being short with Ministers these days—and there have been other instances, I am afraid, in which Ministers have continued to brief the papers very substantially. I think that we heard another example of it from the Prime Minister today. He referred to plans for Royal Mail that have not been explained to the House, but which have been substantially trailed around the newspapers. Will you investigate that issue as well?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman suggests that I have been short with Ministers. I am not sure about that, but I would say to him, and the House, that I have always been short—and I am entirely untroubled by the fact, which is probably just as well. On his point of order, I would say it was a good try, but he needs to explore the matter in other ways. Knowing his indefatigability, I feel sure that that is what he is about to do.

**Derek Twigg** (Halton) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. You related a specific instance concerning the Home Secretary, and we have now had two apologies from Ministers in the past 24 hours. Will you discuss with the Leader of the House how we can train and encourage Ministers to have due respect for the House and its Members?

**Mr Speaker:** I think that the hon. Gentleman is seeking to continue the debate. What I have said on this matter is very explicit. Today's exchanges speak for themselves, but again, as a committed constitutionalist, he has put his concerns on the record, as he was perfectly entitled to do.

**Alec Shelbrooke** (Elmet and Rothwell) (Con): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. Could you advise the House on how we can stop the danger of Prime Minister's Question Time slipping into Opposition statement time?

**Mr Speaker:** The hon. Gentleman will accept that that is a matter for the Chair, and I hope that he will be comfortable that I will discharge my obligations to the House appropriately.

**Barry Gardiner** (Brent North) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Speaker. At 11.24 this morning I went to the Vote Office to ask for a copy of the second report by the independent Committee on Climate Change, on energy. I thought that appropriate, as this afternoon's debate is about energy efficiency. Unfortunately, the Vote Office informed me that the report had not yet been made available to it, and that this followed a pattern from last year. Can we ensure that in future the reports from the independent Committee on Climate Change are made available to the Vote Office promptly?

**Mr Speaker:** It is important for the House and its opportunity to debate matters of public policy properly that relevant documents be made available in the Vote Office in time for debates. The hon. Gentleman has registered his point with his characteristic force. It is on the record, and those on the Treasury Bench—including appropriate Ministers—will have heard it.

**Joan Walley** (Stoke-on-Trent North) (Lab): Further to that point of order, Mr Speaker. I wonder whether you could perhaps encourage the promotion of the report of the Committee on Climate Change by Parliament—because it is a report to Parliament—rather than its being launched elsewhere.

**Mr Speaker:** I fear that that is somewhat outwith the scope of the Chair. I am grateful to the hon. Lady for her confidence in my capacities, and her desire to extend my agenda, but I am not sure that I can agree to her request on this occasion.

Members have been waiting patiently and we are grateful to them, but if there are no further points of order, we come now to the presentation of Bills.

## BILLS PRESENTED

### LAWFUL INDUSTRIAL ACTION (MINOR ERRORS) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

John McDonnell, supported by Kate Hoey, Tony Lloyd, Mr David Anderson, Michael Connarty, Austin Mitchell, Mr Frank Doran, Kelvin Hopkins, Jim Sheridan, Mr David Crausby, Ian Lavery and John Cryer, presented a Bill to amend section 232B of the Trade Union and Labour Relations (Consolidation) Act 1992 to extend the circumstances in which, by virtue of that section, industrial action is not to be treated as excluded from the protection of section 219 of that Act.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 October, and to be printed (Bill 4) with explanatory notes (Bill 4-EN).*

### SUSTAINABLE LIVESTOCK BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Robert Flello, supported by Andrew George, Mr Philip Hollobone, Caroline Lucas, Alun Michael, Zac Goldsmith, Martin Horwood, Hazel Blears, Henry Smith, Mr Michael Meacher and Peter Bottomley, presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to improve the sustainability of the production, processing, marketing, manufacturing, distribution and consumption of products derived to any substantial extent from livestock; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 12 November, and to be printed (Bill 5) with explanatory notes (Bill 5-EN).*

### PUBLIC SERVICES (SOCIAL ENTERPRISE AND SOCIAL VALUE) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Chris White presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State and local authorities to publish strategies in connection with promoting social enterprise; to enable communities to participate in the formulation and implementation of those strategies; to require that public sector contracts include provisions relating to social outcomes and social value; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 19 November, and to be printed (Bill 6).*

### DAYLIGHT SAVING BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Rebecca Harris, supported by Joan Walley, Mr Tim Yeo, Mr Frank Field, Mr Greg Knight, Caroline Lucas, Stephen Phillips, Mr Adam Holloway, Stephen Pound and Zac Goldsmith, presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State to conduct a cross-departmental analysis of the potential costs and benefits of advancing time by one hour for all, or part of, the year; to require the Secretary of State to take certain action in the light of that analysis; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 December, and to be printed (Bill 7).*

ESTATES OF DECEASED PERSONS (FORFEITURE RULE  
AND LAW OF SUCCESSION) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Mr Greg Knight, supported by Sir Alan Beith, Kevin Brennan, John Hemming, Mr William Cash, Mr Gary Streeter, Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger, Chris Bryant, Mr Christopher Chope, Mr Alan Meale, Richard Ottaway and Philip Davies, presented a Bill to amend the law relating to the distribution of the estates of deceased persons; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 21 January, and to be printed (Bill 8) with explanatory notes (Bill 8-EN).*

ANONYMITY (ARRESTED PERSONS) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Anna Soubry presented a Bill to prohibit the publication of certain information regarding persons who have been arrested until they have been charged with an offence; to set out the circumstances where such information can be published without committing an offence; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 February, and to be printed (Bill 9).*

LEGISLATION (TERRITORIAL EXTENT) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Harriett Baldwin, supported by Mr David Davis, Tracey Crouch, Bob Stewart, Andrea Leadsom, Esther McVey, Damian Hinds, David Tredinnick, Mr Peter Bone, Chris Heaton-Harris, Richard Graham and Mr Charles Walker, presented a Bill to require the Secretary of State, when preparing draft legislation for publication, to do so in such a way that the effect of that legislation on England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland is separately and clearly identified; to require the Secretary of State to issue a statement to the effect that in his or her view the provisions of the draft legislation are in accordance with certain principles relating to territorial extent; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 February, and to be printed (Bill 10).*

GANGMASTERS LICENSING (EXTENSION TO  
CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Mr David Hamilton, supported by Sandra Osborne, Mr Jim Hood, Mr David Anderson, Jim Sheridan, Alun Michael, John Robertson, Jim McGovern, Ian Lavery, Mr Stephen Hepburn and Jack Dromey, presented a Bill to apply the provisions of the Gangmasters (Licensing) Act 2004 to the construction industry; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 December, and to be printed (Bill 11).*

PUBLIC BODIES (SUSTAINABLE FOOD) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Joan Walley, supported by Mr Adrian Sanders, Alison McGovern, Martin Caton, Caroline Lucas, Mark Lazarowicz, Peter Bottomley, Mr Mike Hancock and Annette Brooke, presented a Bill to make provision for the creation of a Code regarding the procurement of

sustainable food by public bodies; for the review and development of the Code; for the regulatory enforcement of the Code by public bodies; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 12 November, and to be printed (Bill 12).*

SALE OF TICKETS (SPORTING AND CULTURAL EVENTS)  
BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Mrs Sharon Hodgson, supported by Mr Tom Watson, Chris Bryant, Paul Farrelly, Mr Russell Brown, David Wright, Mark Tami, Lyn Brown, Roberta Blackman-Woods, Mary Creagh, Rachel Reeves and Catherine McKinnell, presented a Bill to regulate the selling of tickets for certain sporting and cultural events; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 21 January, and to be printed (Bill 13) with explanatory notes (Bill 13-EN).*

FIRE SAFETY (PROTECTION OF TENANTS) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Mr Adrian Sanders, supported by Sir Menzies Campbell, Martin Caton, Annette Brooke, Peter Bottomley, Stephen Williams, Jonathan Edwards, Dr John Pugh, Mr Tom Watson, Mr John Leech, Paul Flynn and Lorely Burt, presented a Bill to require landlords to provide smoke alarms in rented accommodation; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 19 November, and to be printed (Bill 14).*

PLANNING (OPENCAST MINING SEPARATION ZONES)  
BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Andrew Bridgen, supported by Heather Wheeler, Nigel Mills, Paul Murphy, Nigel Adams and Mark Pritchard, presented a Bill to require planning authorities to impose a minimum distance between opencast mining developments and residential properties; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 11 February, and to be printed (Bill 15).*

COINAGE (MEASUREMENT) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Mark Lancaster, supported by Mr Adam Holloway, Mr Stewart Jackson, Mr Lee Scott, Mr Brian Binley, Mr Tobias Ellwood, Alec Shelbrooke, Julian Sturdy, Iain Stewart, Chris Heaton-Harris, Mr Ben Wallace and Mr Rob Wilson, presented a Bill to make provision about the arrangements for measuring the standard weight of coins.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 4 February, and to be printed (Bill 16) with explanatory notes (Bill 16-EN).*

SPORTS GROUNDS SAFETY AUTHORITY BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Jonathan Lord presented a Bill to confer further powers on the Football Licensing Authority and to amend its name; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 October, and to be printed (Bill 17) with explanatory notes (Bill 17-EN).*

## WRECK REMOVAL CONVENTION BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Dr Thérèse Coffey, supported by Mr Matthew Offord, presented a Bill to implement the Nairobi International Convention on the Removal of Wrecks 2007.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 19 November, and to be printed (Bill 18) with explanatory notes (Bill 18-EN).*

## FINANCIAL SERVICES (UNFAIR TERMS IN CONSUMER CONTRACTS) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Lorely Burt, supported by Simon Hughes, Mr Lee Scott, Richard Burden, Stephen Williams, Mr Ian Liddell-Grainger, Mr George Mudie, Mr Mike Hancock, Heather Wheeler, Meg Munn, Mr Andrew Love and Jack Dromey, presented a Bill to ensure that ancillary pricing terms in personal financial services contracts can be assessed for fairness; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 12 November, and to be printed (Bill 19).*

## FACE COVERINGS (REGULATION) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Mr Philip Hollobone presented a Bill to regulate the wearing of certain face coverings; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 3 December, and to be printed (Bill 20).*

## PROTECTION OF LOCAL SERVICES (PLANNING) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Nigel Adams, supported by Jonathan Reynolds, Greg Mulholland, Stuart Andrew, Gordon Henderson, Andrew Percy, Mike Weatherley, Andrew Stephenson, Stephen McPartland, Priti Patel, Philip Davies and Henry Smith, presented a Bill to enable local planning authorities to require planning permission prior to the demolition or change of use of premises or land used or formerly used to provide a local service; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 21 January, and to be printed (Bill 21).*

## DOMESTIC VIOLENCE, CRIME AND VICTIMS (AMENDMENT) BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

Sir Paul Beresford presented a Bill to amend section 5 of the Domestic Violence, Crime and Victims Act 2004 to include serious harm to a child or vulnerable adult; to make consequential amendments to the Act; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 21 January, and to be printed (Bill 22) with explanatory notes (Bill 22-EN).*

## SECURED LENDING REFORM BILL

*Presentation and First Reading (Standing Order No. 57)*

George Eustice presented a Bill to make provision regarding the rights of secured debtors; to reform the rights of certain creditors to enforce their security; to make other provision regarding secured lending; and for connected purposes.

*Bill read the First time; to be read a Second time on Friday 22 October, and to be printed (Bill 23).*

## Energy Efficiency

12.46 pm

**The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Gregory Barker):** I beg to move,

That this House has considered the matter of progress and prospects in energy efficiency.

Within the first days of taking office, the Prime Minister pledged to make this new coalition the greenest Government ever, and we are determined to deliver on that promise. Energy efficiency, the subject of today's debate, is at the very heart of our greening programme. Better energy efficiency offers a genuine win-win, because it not only enhances the competitiveness of our economy, but is also good for the environment in cutting carbon emissions. It is good for energy security in reducing our reliance on imported fossil fuels, and it is good for hard-pressed families, saving them money currently wasted heating inefficient and cold homes. Energy efficiency is not just a means to an end; it is a great thing in itself. In these times of rising bills and tight family budgets, there is one overarching simple truth: the cheapest energy we all have to pay for is the energy we do not use.

President Obama has gone even further. He recently said:

"Insulation is sexy stuff... Here's what's sexy about it: saving money".

In our own way—a more modest way—we are determined to make it sexy too, because for too long, energy efficiency has been the poor relation of British energy policy. Too many politicians have talked the talk, but failed to deliver. Energy efficiency has too frequently been relegated to the fluffy optional extra end of the energy policy agenda. Energy efficiency, however, is the key benchmark of a globally competitive 21st century economy.

Yet on the key test of energy efficiency, the UK currently trails behind most of our European competitors and risks slipping even further behind. If Members pardon the pun, we lag behind Germany, Holland, Spain and Italy, to name but a few. The average British home uses more energy than a home in Sweden—a country partly within the Arctic circle. One in five of our homes still has the lowest energy-efficiency rating.

**Mr Angus Brendan MacNeil** (Na h-Eileanan an Iar) (SNP): On the point of energy efficiency in comparison with Sweden, I understand that there is considerable use of heat pumps—both ground source and air source heat pumps—in Sweden. The previous Government gave assistance for the installation of heat pumps; will this Government continue in that vein?

**Gregory Barker:** We are very keen on heat pumps, but those pumps are not an energy-efficiency device; they are a renewable-energy device. Today, we are obviously concerned primarily about energy efficiency, but I take the hon. Gentleman's point on board, and we are certainly keen to encourage the use of a diverse range of new renewable technologies.

**Mr MacNeil:** Using 1 kW of electricity, an air source heat pump can generate 2.5 kW of heat and a ground source heat pump can generate up to 4 kW of heat. I would argue that that is quite an efficient use of energy.

**Gregory Barker:** And the hon. Gentleman would be absolutely right to do so.

Looking beyond homes, about one in 10 of our businesses and public buildings has a G rating and fewer than one in 100 has an A rating. Something must change, and it has got to change big and change now. But here is the good news: the UK has the potential to lead the way on energy efficiency, and our transformational agenda is a huge commercial opportunity worth billions of pounds for British business, with the potential for new jobs, technology and innovation in every single part of the UK. The challenge for our new Government is to spur consumers and businesses to take action, because, to date, successive Government programmes have simply failed to engage on the scale that we need. Some progress has been made in recent years, and I do not belittle the good intentions of the previous Administration, but despite some interesting initiatives, nothing we have seen so far has been commensurate with the enormous size of the challenge we face.

**Mary Creagh** (Wakefield) (Lab): I have received a letter from Mr Cameron Holroyd of Kingspan Solar in my constituency, which manufactures solar panels. He is very concerned that the new Government have not yet stated publicly whether they intend to proceed with the renewables heat obligation. Can the Minister tell us when he will respond to the recent consultation, and thereby give firms in my constituency, and consumers who may be planning to invest, some sort of comfort that that support will go ahead?

**Gregory Barker:** Renewable heat is a renewable form of generation; it is not equivalent to energy efficiency. However, we are committed to an ambitious renewable heat agenda. We have a challenging renewable energy target and renewable heat will be a key part of that. We will be looking at how to move forward and at having the right incentives in place. Because we are aware of the concerns of businesses, such as the one the hon. Lady mentions in her constituency, we will be making an announcement on this as soon as possible.

**Neil Parish** (Tiverton and Honiton) (Con) *rose*—

**Barry Gardiner** (Brent North) (Lab): I welcome the Minister to his position. He has taken a long and careful interest in the matters for which he has responsibility, and I welcome his enthusiasm. So far in this debate, however, he has been quick to parry any questions that are not specifically about energy efficiency and has responded in a very constrained manner. If we are to have the debate that all of us would wish this afternoon, we need to be able to discuss the energy context in which it takes place and the broader financial measures that will be available to the industry in the future, in order to consider the wider aspects of the green deal the Minister has talked about.

**Gregory Barker:** Obviously, I take on board the hon. Gentleman's comments, and he is an expert in this field, but the key point I made at the beginning of my speech is that energy efficiency has always been the poor relation and that all too often people leap to discuss other, perhaps more sexy, matters such as heat pumps, the renewables heat incentive or renewable energy. While I want a full debate—and, of course, I will answer the

hon. Gentleman's questions as best I can—I also want to focus the discussion on energy efficiency, because it is the most important and the best value-for-money consideration in terms of saving carbon.

**Neil Parish** *rose*—

**Chris Williamson** (Derby North) (Lab): Can the Minister confirm that the coalition parties will agree to implement the previous Government's commitment to ensure that all new homes are carbon-neutral by 2015?

**Gregory Barker:** That is an important target. We are committed to carbon neutrality, and I know that my colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government are looking to see if there is any room for making the target more effective. Perhaps I may write to the hon. Gentleman with the very latest on that?

**Neil Parish** *rose*—

**David Wright** (Telford) (Lab): The Minister and I served together on the Environmental Audit Committee a few years ago. Will he comment on the future of the boiler scrappage scheme, a tremendous energy-efficiency measure that has been very successfully delivered, and will he look at the possibility of extending the scheme to cover gas fires? A company in my constituency produces very energy-efficient gas fires. If we were to support it, we would see real progress not only in boiler scrappage, but in the scrappage of other lower performing products such as wasteful gas fires.

**Neil Parish** *rose*—

**Gregory Barker:** The hon. Gentleman is right: the boiler scrappage scheme was highly effective. Although it was not a large scheme, it was both very good and very timely, and I will be closely examining whether we ought to take it further. I know that the hon. Gentleman has expertise on this, and if he would like to talk to me about it, I would be very grateful for the opportunity to pick his brains.

**Mr Speaker:** Order. May I interrupt the Minister to try to help a new Member? I very gently say to the hon. Member for Tiverton and Honiton (Neil Parish) that whatever gifts and traits the Minister possesses, he does not have eyes in the back of his head, so if the hon. Gentleman wishes to intervene, it is not enough simply to stand; he must make himself audible.

**Gregory Barker** *rose*—

**Neil Parish:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Gregory Barker:** With pleasure.

**Neil Parish:** Thank you for your advice, Mr Speaker.

My hon. Friend has talked about energy saving on the continent, and one thing that they do very well there is install central boilers for different sorts of energy generation when constructing new housing developments. That must be done at the planning stage, of course, so that the amount of hot water going to each house can be metered and households can then pay for their own supply, but central boilers can produce savings of up to 50%. Will my hon. Friend the Minister consider that option?

**Gregory Barker:** Absolutely. My hon. Friend makes an excellent point. I am very interested in such matters, and think there is far greater scope for us to be much more ambitious in terms of community combined heat and power. Such a decentralised energy agenda offers huge scope in Britain. However, for a variety of reasons, both local as well as central Government ones, we have not pushed it. In countries such as the Netherlands and Denmark, however, community combined heat and power make up a substantial part of energy output. As my hon. Friend says, it is much more efficient and I assure him we are looking into it.

As I have said, despite some interesting initiatives in recent years, nothing is commensurate with the enormous size of the challenge we face. The reality is that we still have a multi-billion pound investment gap. It is hardly surprising, however, that progress has been patchy. Since 1997, we have had a veritable alphabet soup of acronyms, schemes and quangos, leaving both the consumer and business somewhat bewildered: EEC, CERT, CESP, LCIF, EST, LCCC, CT, ETF, CRC and CCA. The list goes on and on, and each scheme is accompanied by new pamphlets, advertising and messages, further complicating the landscape for confused consumers and businesses. Individually, all those schemes have merit, but taken together they have failed to deliver on the scale that we need. The fact is that we need to pick up the pace dramatically if we are to reach the remaining 14 million households in the UK within a meaningful time scale.

It is clear that in these difficult times, with a record deficit, the current model is simply not up to the scale of the task. We need a game changer. We must remove the blinkers that have constrained previous policy thinking. We need to bring in new models of installation, innovation to drive down costs, new financing methods and new players to the market to deliver on a far more ambitious scale.

**Mr Brian Binley** (Northampton South) (Con): On innovation, the Minister will respect the fact that coal remains a vital part of our energy requirement for the future. When the Prime Minister was Leader of the Opposition, he promised to create four carbon capture and storage-equipped power plants. Will the Minister give us a quick update on progress, and perhaps a timetable for that, because it plays a major part in the objectives he wishes to reach?

**Gregory Barker:** My hon. Friend is an expert in this field. He is chair of the all-party group on clean coal, so I speak with respect for his expertise. He is right to say that the coalition Government are committed to carbon capture and storage, which will be a major plank in our efforts to decarbonise our energy supply by 2030; we are committed to the generation of 5 GW of CCS by 2020. We see the potential of CCS, not just for our domestic use and as part of our plan to decarbonise the economy, but as a huge potential export industry for the UK in which we can not only capture new markets for British jobs, but help the world in striving to decarbonise the global economy.

**Mr Tobias Ellwood** (Bournemouth East) (Con): My hon. Friend talks about game changers, so may I recommend another important one, which will cost him not a penny? We could move our clocks forward by one

hour to take advantage of the last bit of energy that we have in this world—the sun. It seems completely wrong that our working day is out of alignment with that free energy source. I am happy to provide him with a copy of a study showing the benefits, which would include Scotland too.

**Gregory Barker:** That is a very interesting point. I believe that my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris) will be introducing a private Member's Bill to that effect, in order to test the opinion of the House on this matter. I do not believe that that subject was covered in the coalition agreement, so I am sorry but I cannot give any commitment on it.

**Several hon. Members** *rose*—

**Gregory Barker:** I shall make a little progress before I take further interventions.

The Government want to end short-term, stop-start schemes. We need a bold long-term approach that will deliver certainty and stability, and will unlock private capital and trigger green investment right across the economy. We must give businesses the confidence to invest, not just in the infrastructure of our buildings, but in developing new skills and training programmes in order to help create the thousands of new jobs that could follow. These would be jobs that could provide decent salaries to support families and build careers of which people could be proud. We must empower British business, not burden it. We must use smart legislation to incentivise the wealth creators and the innovators. Local firms and enterprising local communities must be encouraged to be part of the new solution.

**Mary Creagh:** I am grateful to the Minister for giving way to me for a second time. On his point about innovation and local firms, may I say that Logicor Ltd, a firm in my constituency, has developed a plug that automatically turns off after a set period of time? When people iron for three quarters of an hour or an hour—or, in my case, five minutes—the plug will then automatically turn off, so there is no danger of someone forgetting about the iron, leaving it on and potentially setting their house on fire. Such appliances have huge potential to make energy and financial savings for homes, be it through turning off the light on someone's microwave or the light on their dishwasher—those devices also use energy. Small companies face the problem of obtaining certification through the carbon emissions reduction target—CERT—scheme and huge issues relating to cash flow, because if they are going to manufacture in China, they have to save, pay the bills up front and then get the money back. How does the Minister propose to provide real help on this? Will he work with the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills to ensure that small companies such as Logicor Ltd can be given the financial support to deliver these energy-efficient products to the nation?

**Mr Speaker:** Order. May I gently suggest to the House that we also require efficiency in interventions, which are gradually becoming a little longer?

**Gregory Barker:** That is an excellent subject for an Adjournment debate, but perhaps we have just had it. I entirely accept the hon. Lady's point, but ultimately the

private sector is the best engine of ingenuity and growth, and it is not the role of Government to pick winners such as that company and give them special treatment. However, I agree that there is a role for Government in creating an enabling, encouraging and supportive framework for enterprise. I can assure her that increased cross-cutting work has been taking place across Government, involving colleagues from the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills, the Treasury and the Department for Education, to ensure that the right frameworks and the appropriate support are in place.

I shall now draw the House back to my speech. What needs to change? As a first step, I am announcing today my intention not only to extend CERT, but to refocus it radically. It obliges energy companies to carry out energy-efficiency measures in people's homes and it has historically involved a range of other things too. CERT will be extended until the end of 2012, but the original scheme has not been without criticism, much of it justified. So CERT will be refocused on those most cost-effective measures that can make a real difference to the energy efficiency of our constituents' homes, the most obvious being insulation.

Over the new extension period we will require the big energy companies to deliver far more insulation than originally planned, and the new target on lagging lofts alone will be the equivalent to covering Wembley football pitch more than 35,000 times. The new extension of CERT will work in tandem with the roll-out of our pioneering green deal. In order to bring greater focus to the project, I will insist that more than two thirds of this new carbon target must be delivered through approved, professionally installed loft, cavity wall and solid wall insulation. We will act to stamp out the mistakes of the past. We will introduce a complete ban on the subsidy of compact fluorescent lighting, thereby ending the farce of people having cupboards full of light bulbs which save no energy at all. We will go further. We are actively talking to industry about similar restrictions on other low-value gadgets and appliances. There will be no short cuts or get-outs for the big six under this Government.

**Martin Horwood** (Cheltenham) (LD): I welcome the Minister to his responsibilities. On low-energy light bulbs, he is right to criticise aspects of the CERT scheme, but one promising new development was the inclusion of the replacement of halogen lights, which are extremely energy-inefficient, with new, more efficient forms of technology. I declare an interest, because two companies in my constituency promote alternatives to halogen lighting.

**Gregory Barker:** The hon. Gentleman is right to say that some very exciting developments are taking place in lighting, not the least of which will be light-emitting diode—LED—technology in the longer term. However, we must be brutal and realistic in the use of CERT; we must opt for the most effective, most value-for-money carbon abatement schemes. That means opting for loft insulation, because any exercise that one chooses to undertake shows that key insulation delivered to our constituents' homes offers the best value for money and the best use in terms of carbon abatement. We have to be far more focused on that. I checked how many light bulbs had been distributed as a result of the previous

CERT scheme and I found that the answer was a phenomenal number. This begs the old question of how many light bulbs it takes to change a Labour Government—the answer turned out to be 262 million.

**Joan Ruddock** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): A vast number of light bulbs were sent out, but does the Minister deny that that was an appropriate action to take at a time when the low-energy light bulbs on the supermarket shelves were far more expensive than ordinary light bulbs and consumers were very resistant to change? We encountered all forms of resistance but, despite that, by sending those low-energy light bulbs out we got them into people's homes, which saved people money and saved energy and carbon emissions.

**Gregory Barker:** The right hon. Lady is right and, of course, this is not a black and white issue. However, the bottom line is that if one has a finite pot of money to spend, light bulbs do not represent the most efficient way to save energy or carbon. As she knows, the most efficient way of doing that is to insulate, particularly given that we need to do so much more for the fuel-poor and there is so much more that we need to do overall. We must be focused, given the finite pot of money available. I do, however, take her point.

**Mr Alan Reid** (Argyll and Bute) (LD): I welcome the Minister to the Government. I was delighted by his announcement the CERT scheme will be extended and will concentrate on insulation, but I am sure that he is aware that the National Insulation Association has expressed concern that it is so heavily dependent on the CERT scheme that unless the scheme is extended very soon, its members could well run out of work over the summer. The NIA has asked for the regulations to be passed before the start of the summer recess, so I hope that the Minister will be able to lay these regulations before Parliament before then.

**Gregory Barker:** Obviously my announcement is effective today. We hope to lay the regulations before Parliament before we rise for the summer, because I am fully aware that there has been uncertainty in the market, and that is what we aim to eliminate.

**Mr MacNeil:** Usually, house construction is a great battle between insulation, as the Minister has mentioned, and ventilation. The part of the world that I come from suffers from having to have the same ventilation standards as an urban area in Kent; the rural west coast of the Outer Hebrides certainly does not need the same amount of ventilation as might perhaps be needed in Kent. However, we are stuck with that and the result—I am sure that the situation is the same in other places in the country—is that once the completion certificate is achieved and received, the house builder goes round with a tube of mastic or silicon and blocks off the vents that have been placed unnecessarily. Perhaps ventilation could be seen as part of the argument for energy efficiency, too.

**Gregory Barker:** That is a very good point. I think that my colleagues in the Department for Communities and Local Government would have direct ministerial responsibility for that point, but it is worth while, and if the hon. Gentleman would care to write to me about it I would be happy to take it up.

[Gregory Barker]

We will go further. We are also talking to industry about similar restrictions on other low-value gadgets and appliances. All these new measures are specifically designed to do more for the fuel-poor, because we fully recognise that fuel poverty is a growing challenge, with the number of households in fuel poverty having risen every year since 2004, to 4.6 million households in England alone in 2009. Given that legacy of rising fuel poverty, we are creating a new CERT category of those who have the greatest need, in addition to the priority group of vulnerable households, which will already account for at least 40% of the total CERT extension measures. Pensioners, people with children and the disabled will form a super-priority group on whom at least 15% of the new programme must be targeted. That means that more than £400 million will be focused over the next 18 months on the poorest and most vulnerable.

**Barry Gardiner:** Would the Minister be good enough to clarify whether, when he says families with children, he means all families with children or whether he is talking about families that are in receipt of working families tax credit and so on? Is it targeted specifically at the poor or will it include all families with children?

**Gregory Barker:** It is targeted at all people with children—that is, at all households where there are young children and where income is low. I would be happy to write to the hon. Gentleman with further details. We will need to bring these measures to the House, and perhaps we could debate that point then.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): Will the Minister kindly let us know whether it will extend to pensioners as well?

**Gregory Barker:** Yes indeed. I think I mentioned pensioners in my speech and I can give the hon. Lady that assurance.

**Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): Does the hon. Gentleman intend to provide any additional facilities for ensuring that the extra categories that he has mentioned that will be a part of CERT can be identified by those energy companies that are required to identify them to and take action, or is the 15% target that he has suggested an approximation based on what the energy companies actually do?

**Gregory Barker:** The hon. Gentleman will know that data sharing is a very difficult issue, to which there is no easy ready answer. I do not underestimate it—any attempt to focus in such a way is in some way problematic, given the sometimes limited tools that we have and the restrictions on sharing data. We are considering that project in the Department, because we realise that data sharing poses real challenges. All I can tell the hon. Gentleman is that we will use our best endeavours and, if he has interesting and innovative ideas on how we can make it effective, we will try to frame them in the regulations that we will table before the House rises. I fully take his point on board; data sharing to ensure that we target the most vulnerable is a challenge.

**Mrs Anne Main** (St Albans) (Con): Will the Minister outline whether people in receipt of the higher disability living allowance, who often have impaired mobility,

will be included in the super-priority group that he has just mentioned, as they often have a greater need of heating?

**Gregory Barker:** I am very happy to confirm that for my hon. Friend, who takes a keen interest in these matters. I can also confirm, in response to the question that I was asked earlier about children, that we will focus on those in receipt of child tax credits whose income is less than £16,190.

**Mark Durkan** (Foyle) (SDLP): Given the importance that the Minister rightly attaches to fuel poverty and the categories that he has said should be prioritised, does he believe that 15% will be adequate? If, in the context of spending pressures, the budget for the overall programme is cut, will he enhance their prioritisation by going above 15% of his residual budget?

**Gregory Barker:** Of course, CERT is an obligation on the fuel companies and is not part of the Treasury tax and spending regime as such. It will not be included in the comprehensive spending review. I share the hon. Gentleman's concerns, given that we want to focus on the fuel poor and that 15% seems a relatively limited amount of money. That is why, as I am going to say—he is pre-empting my speech—when we come to consider the long-term basis for the right form of supplier obligation when CERT ends at the end of 2012, we will need to ensure that it is effectively focused on the most vulnerable households and on the fuel-poor. That will be the key consideration when we are looking to frame a new and appropriate supplier obligation.

As I have said, the green deal is a real game changer. It takes policy out of Whitehall and on to the high street. The green deal is a dramatic change from the status quo. The green deal, we believe, will fundamentally alter the scale of delivery. In terms of scale, to put it in context, the green deal is even more ambitious than Mrs Thatcher's sale of council houses in the 1980s. Whereas that transformed the lives of about 2 million families, the green deal has the potential to touch more than 14 million homes around the country. Now, there can be no one-size-fits-all model. Our green deal legislation must promote the emergence of a new and dynamic market, working for the incredibly diverse mix of homes in the UK. There must be greater consumer choice, but with a recognition of the need for fairness and, in particular, of the urgent and pressing challenges of fuel poverty.

The green deal will, we believe, unlock billions in new private capital to support energy efficiency, but that will not work effectively without the engagement and support of local communities. Local communities have a key role in driving this ambitious change. We have seen that in Kirklees, where community engagement has been vital for a universal take-up.

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): The Kirklees example is an excellent one, and Green councillors have been instrumental in that. They were rolling out free insulation—that was the difference; it was free. Where does the hon. Gentleman think that the money will come from for the Government to be able to roll out such a scheme? Does he agree that we ought to be considering mechanisms such as levying a windfall tax

on the energy companies, given that they will be getting windfall profits from their involvement in the emissions trading scheme—at least until 2013? Should we not be using money like that to enable such a scheme to be rolled out to everybody rather than depending on people in poor households having to take out what looks like a loan?

**Gregory Barker:** First, I welcome the hon. Lady to the debate. I am sure that she will be a key—and welcome—feature of such debates for the rest of the Parliament. Of course, CERT is already a levy on the energy companies and we have a clear idea of where the money is coming from. She mentions that in Kirklees the scheme is free, and that is an important point. We simply cannot afford to give free insulation to the whole country, even though it worked extremely well in Kirklees. However, through legislation and opening up new markets with new regulation, we can ensure that there is no cost up front to every single householder. Unlike other pay-as-you-save schemes that were trialled by the former Government, there will be no reference to the credit score of the household. It will not be a personal loan, a green mortgage or a charge on the property.

What will happen is that the right interventions for that particular property will be delivered and the costs of those interventions will be rolled up in their entirety and repaid through the energy bill for that property over 25 years. If that owner moves away, the cost will simply transfer to the energy bill of the next occupant. If the occupant changes energy company, the cost will simply transfer to the new energy company. We will make sure, through legislation, that it is impossible for a new energy provider to come in and provide energy without taking on the costs associated with the green deal finance. There is a real golden rule.

**Mark Tami** (Alyn and Deeside) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

**Gregory Barker:** If the hon. Gentleman will allow me to continue. I am risking scrambling my speech by jumping ahead, but this is a really important point.

**Mark Tami:** Will the Minister give way on that point?

**Gregory Barker:** I will give way.

We cannot guarantee that this will be the case in all instances, because behaviour change is also relevant, but the guiding principle is that the savings in every household that receives such interventions on the pay-as-you-save model must always be greater than the financing costs. The householder, be they in rented or private accommodation, should see not only an increase in the insulation in their home, a reduction in their carbon emissions and an increase in warmth and quality of life for them and their family, but—and this is an important point—a reduction in their total energy bill. That needs to be put clearly and fairly on the bill. We must scotch the idea that the green deal is a loan, a mortgage or a charge, because it is not, and it is really important, in order to get consumer confidence, that we communicate that message.

**Mark Tami** *rose*—

**Gregory Barker:** I shall give way to the hon. Gentleman before he bursts.

**Mark Tami:** I thank the Minister for giving way. I hear what he says, but is not the danger, as the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) has said, that this will be seen as a loan? Will the most vulnerable people, in particular, who find themselves indebted from a whole range of loans, not see it as one more loan and choose not to take it?

**Gregory Barker:** No; I hope that by the time we have finished explaining it properly and getting over this new paradigm, it will not be seen as a loan because it is not a loan. I hope that the hon. Gentleman—and, indeed, all Members—will join me in explaining that to our constituents. This is a really fundamental point, because he is absolutely right that if people perceive it as a loan, which it is not, there will be a reluctance to take it up, particularly in the current environment. There is another element. We accept that for the poorest in society, who cannot make the savings because they do not have the cash to heat their homes in the first place, there will be a need for direct subsidy or intervention. It is on those people and the hard-to-treat homes that we want to focus the ongoing obligation on the energy suppliers.

**Barry Gardiner:** The final point that the Minister made is particularly important, but let me go back to the main point about the up-front funding costs of installing the energy-efficiency measures. Will he confirm that although those costs will be met through the energy companies, the Government will none the less have to guarantee those costs? Will he confirm that the cost of that guarantee to the public finances could be in the region of £162 billion if every family in the country took up the Prime Minister's offer of the £6,500 limit?

**Gregory Barker:** I am happy to reassure the hon. Gentleman that no such guarantee is involved or required. I have had extensive meetings not only with the chief executives of energy companies, but with very senior members of the banking community, active participants in the capital markets and retailers such as Marks and Spencer, B&Q, which has been extremely supportive, and others, including installers. Across the industry—in financing, instalment and retail—there is universal acceptance of this model and there will be innovation in the capital markets. Some companies will choose to take the charge on to their balance sheets, but others will choose to participate in partnership with a financing company. I think there will be a real appetite among UK institutions—this is the game-changing element—to purchase what will in effect be a form of bond with a 25-year life. I think they will be securitised together and parcelled up, and will then make attractive investments for UK pension funds, which currently suffer from a relatively limited choice of secure, long-term investments from which to fund their annuities. I can guarantee for the hon. Gentleman that, just as the green deal is not a personal loan, mortgage or charge, nor will it sit on the Government balance sheet or require a Government guarantee.

**Dr Whitehead:** To make sure that the customer makes a net profit out of green deal investment, the Minister will presumably have to categorise what will be admissible for green deal insulations. If he categorises any form of microgeneration as admissible, as increasingly it is under Warm Front, he will have to make those calculations in

[Dr Whitehead]

the green deal programme in respect of any incentives that might be given for the use of that heat, in particular for insulation such as solar-thermal. Has he therefore excluded microgeneration from the green deal programme? If so, does that mean that the net amount per household that he would imagine being used with the green deal is much lower than the £6,500 suggested prior to the election?

**Gregory Barker:** It has never been the intention for the green deal to encompass, in its purest form, microgeneration, for which there is the separate support mechanism of feed-in tariffs. We will look closely at those tariffs to ensure that they are appropriate. We want to drive a far greater sense of ambition around microgeneration than was anticipated in the Energy Act 2010, which was passed in the previous Parliament. We are keen and ambitious for microgeneration, but I do not want it to be confused with the green deal, which is about energy efficiency, so it will not be included in that. However, we hope that providers that insulate homes under the financing of the green deal will, as I have outlined, take that opportunity to offer packages for appropriate microgeneration that also might not require any up-front payment because they are supported by a feed-in tariff.

It is important to stress the priority of energy efficiency over microgeneration, because there is no real point in adding microgeneration systems to energy-inefficient homes, but there is a great deal of sense in adding them at the same time as increasing energy efficiency. Of course, that would also require a smart meter. I hope that this package of measures will be available under the green deal umbrella, but the green deal financing we have been discussing and the £6,500 are for energy-efficiency measures. There is nothing magic about the £6,500 figure, but we had to come up with a figure and there has to be a cut-off point. We reached the figure with the help of BRE, but we might consider increasing it when proposed legislation comes before the House if that proves sensible. However, £6,500 is what we are committed to now. We hope that the game-changing nature of the new deal, the involvement of new players and the creation of new markets and financing tools will create a host of opportunities as well as driving real behaviour change.

**Mr MacNeil:** I am listening quite closely to what the Minister says about insulation, carbon footprints and new financing. Is he saying that when it comes to the householder paying, they will not be facing any higher than average bills in any particular year than they would have faced had they not entered the green deal? It is quite important that people fully understand. Is the Minister saying that bills should go down and that householders should not experience any greater costs than they had prior to entering the green deal?

**Gregory Barker:** That is what I am saying, with the caveat that there are two big variables, the first of which is behaviour change. If someone decides, in their newly insulated home, to turn up the dial and Hoover in the nude, that will affect the energy bill. Likewise, if there is a spike in oil prices or a surge in gas or electricity prices, that will affect bills. On an equalised basis, assuming there is no major behaviour change, the assumption in

the model we are working on will be that the financing costs will always be less than the overall costs of installation.

Our ambition goes way beyond just household energy efficiency. Households, businesses, industry and the public sector all need to pull together to achieve the change that we need. For businesses, energy efficiency can make sense provided that they are not constrained by unnecessary bureaucracy. The green deal will apply to businesses too, and especially to small and medium-sized enterprises. It has the potential to help many companies improve not only their green credentials but their bank balances and their overall competitiveness.

I want our reforms to take energy efficiency away from the corporate social responsibility managers and plant it firmly on the desk of Britain's finance controllers. Pioneers in this area are already demonstrating that energy efficiency makes real sense for business. To pick just one example, Marks and Spencer made a saving of £50 million last year alone through energy-efficiency measures. It is just one of thousands of progressive British businesses that realise that energy efficiency has a direct impact on profitability.

Marks and Spencer launched Plan A in January 2007, in which it set out 100 commitments to achieve in five years and the aim of improving fuel efficiency by more than 20%. Critical to Plan A has been genuine and consistent leadership from the very top of the organisation. Providing leadership from Government Departments is a responsibility that we cannot shirk, and that is why the new Prime Minister has committed the coalition to cutting emissions from central Government Departments by 10% in just 12 months. I am pleased to inform the House that work is well under way, but the 10% cut in Whitehall is just the starting point. We are engaged in a major, long-term drive to reduce emissions and save energy costs right across the wider public sector, which alone accounts for 3% of total UK carbon emissions.

The public can watch our progress: all Government Departments are now committed to publishing their energy use online and in real time. Seventeen Government Departments will publish energy consumption data for their headquarters buildings by the end of July, following the first meeting of the new cross-departmental energy committee. However, I am pleased to say that the Department of Energy and Climate Change, the Home Office and the Ministry of Justice have already made their energy-use information available online and in real time. We have also asked the private sector to join Ministers in this cross-cutting group, so that we can hold Government Departments to account and ensure that we learn the very best practice from business. This Government are determined to get our house in shape in short order, and we are already delivering clearer leadership, greater transparency and real change.

**Caroline Lucas:** I am grateful to the Minister for his support of the 10:10 campaign, which aims for 10% cuts in 2010. However, he will know that the campaign will not finish at the end of 2010 and that, if we are serious about tackling climate change, we need 10% cuts year on year thereafter. Can he make any statement now about what will happen at the end of 2010?

**Gregory Barker:** The hon. Lady is absolutely right. The important thing about our 10% cut is that it is a commitment made by the Prime Minister and it is being driven from the very top in government. She is absolutely

right that 10% in one year is simply not enough, but it will be a terrific shock to the system in Whitehall and a great start. In the committee of which I am a member, and which is chaired by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, I have been very clear that it is only a starting point.

Achieving such reductions will get progressively more difficult, because behaviour change and the simple interventions that can be made at first cannot be repeated once they have been done. The task will require investment, but we are confident that most of that investment will pay for itself. The new models of investment—involving the energy services companies and the private sector, as well as enlightened and progressive facilities management contracts—mean that the cost of the infrastructure changes that will be needed will not necessarily fall on the public purse.

We are pushing very hard to draw in expertise from the private sector, and I am glad to say that that is largely being provided on a pro bono basis. We want to ensure that the Government, instead of being a national embarrassment, become a showcase for the best in British energy conservation. It is not at all impossible that, if we attach renewable energy sources to our estate, the public sector could one day become a net exporter of energy. Those are lofty ambitions and strategies but we will not superimpose arbitrary targets on them. There have been too many targets cluttering the landscape in the past. We know what we have to do, and the best thing that we can do is to get on and do it.

The potential benefits of energy efficiency are absolutely clear. This coalition Government are committed to making the UK a leader in energy efficiency, and to doing so with a completely new level of ambition and at a scale never before attempted. We are radically improving and refocusing existing policy measures, and we plan to bring forward completely new measures to deliver a real step change in ambition and delivery across both households and the business sector.

However, I would say this to the Opposition: there is much that unites us on this whole agenda, and we are building on the work begun by the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) and her Front-Bench colleague, the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry). The Liberal Democrats and the Conservatives supported the Climate Change Act 2008 in a constructive spirit, and I hope that we can forge a new consensus across the new House of Commons on energy efficiency and tackling fuel poverty. We should send a strong and united message to business and consumers alike that the time for action is now, and that we are united in laying out a new and clear framework for the long term.

I am glad to report that the new coalition has hit the ground running. We have a strong and ambitious green agenda, with energy efficiency at its very heart. The green deal will be at the centre of this Session's flagship Energy Bill, along with other measures to drive low-carbon transformation and build energy security. It is clear from the Chancellor's Budget, which committed to introducing a floor price for carbon, and yesterday's publication of the work of the green investment bank commission, that we are making real progress already. There is a great deal more to do, and time for action is short, but I know that, by focusing on energy efficiency at the very outset, we are starting in the right place.

1.37 pm

**Joan Ruddock** (Lewisham, Deptford) (Lab): I begin by welcoming the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker), to his new position. I am sure that he will find it as stimulating and rewarding as I did.

This debate is entitled "Progress and Prospects in Energy Efficiency", and I am delighted to have the opportunity to record the very considerable progress made by the Labour Government over the past 13 years. Today, the Minister of State announced his plans for the carbon emissions reductions target scheme, but I have to remind the House that I announced in 2009 that there would be an extension of the scheme to 2012. I also announced that the new scheme would have an insulation minimum, and that there would be a super-priority group that would receive benefits from the scheme. I also announced that there would be an end to fluorescent bulbs—so I congratulate the Minister on following through on all the things that I said would happen a year ago.

I am glad that the Minister intends to lay the statutory instrument as soon as possible. It was, of course, the advent of a general election that made it impossible for the previous Government to proceed with that. Overall, however, he is of course fortunate to have such a good framework on which to lay his future plans, and I am grateful to him for the acknowledgment that he just gave. Labour's Climate Change Act 2008 led the world in establishing the first national legal limits on greenhouse gas emissions, and I share the Minister's pleasure at the fact that it finally achieved an all-party consensus.

Energy efficiency is central to addressing both climate change and energy security. That is why, in September 2008, we announced the home energy saving programme, a package worth £1 billion. We did so, of course, for exactly the reasons that the hon. Gentleman has outlined. There is no disputing the failure to build well-insulated homes in this country, but at no time was the situation worse than under the previous Conservative Government, when Mrs Thatcher's ban on council house building drove people who could not afford to buy into decrepit private sector housing with the lowest possible insulation standards. I regret to say that history is about to repeat itself, with housing benefit changes certain to drive already poor standards down further. Will the Minister regulate private landlords, as we planned to do, to ensure that privately rented accommodation is properly insulated?

In 1999, we inherited a £19 billion backlog of repairs to public housing. No such legacy exists today. Our decent homes standard has resulted in 95% of England's social housing stock reaching decent homes standard, with considerable improvements in energy efficiency. As a result, social housing today is more energy-efficient than housing in general.

Furthermore, Budget 2009 announced £100 million of funding for local authorities to deliver new energy-efficient homes, and "Building Britain's Future" announced up to £250 million for direct development by councils of around 3,000 new energy-efficient homes. Will the Minister tell us whether those programmes will go ahead? Or will the draconian cuts in local authority budgets, announced by the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, put an end to all the progress made on

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energy efficiency in the social housing sector? What will happen to local area agreements, under which 97% of local authorities had opted for at least one of our three climate change indicators? What is happening to the £25 million fund to help local authorities support community heating infrastructure? When will the Minister make an announcement on that topic?

We have been told that the Minister for Housing “is moving quickly to toughen building standards.”

Can the Minister of State tell us how far the plans to tighten those standards will go, and how fast that will happen? What discussions has he had with the construction industry? I remind him that the Labour Government consistently raised building standards. We introduced the code for sustainable homes; a target of a 25% reduction in carbon emissions this year, relative to the 2006 part L building regulations; the target for a 44% reduction in 2013, leading to a zero-carbon standard for new homes in 2016; and a target for zero-carbon non-domestic building by 2019. Does he really think that the Housing Minister can better that?

The Minister of State’s main argument was that reducing energy use is a much greater problem in existing homes than in new homes. That is absolutely obvious. That is why Labour, in government, placed an obligation on energy companies to deliver energy efficiency measures through CERT, including 100% subsidies for the poorest pensioners and low-income families.

When answering an intervention, the Minister said that we could not afford free insulation. He—or his colleague the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, the hon. Member for Wealden (Charles Hendry)—may like to clarify that in the winding-up speech, because of course we have been providing free insulation to millions of people through the CERT programme.

**Gregory Barker:** It is not that we cannot afford free insulation; I have made it very clear that for vulnerable groups and hard-to-treat homes, there will continue to be a need for free insulation. What we cannot afford is to insulate the homes of the entire population for free. I do not think that it was ever anticipated that CERT would be able to do that job. There is a multibillion-pound black hole in the plans that we were left with by the Labour Government. We need to bring in private capital to fill that gap.

**Joan Ruddock:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely wrong. Of course the schemes were never intended to provide insulation for every home in the country; we were talking of millions and millions of homes. The fact is that we prioritised getting insulation for the most vulnerable and the poorest, but we also had additional programmes, none of which he has said that he will match today.

**Gregory Barker:** The fact is that in the consultation that the right hon. Lady oversaw, it was assumed that 10% of the poorest would be in a super-priority group. We have extended that to 15%, so we have increased by 50% the amount of effectively free insulation that will go to the homes of the most vulnerable. We have not minimised the commitment; we have built and expanded it, so that under our proposals, more money will go to the most vulnerable.

**Joan Ruddock:** The hon. Gentleman is talking about one small element of one of the programmes. We had a consultation on the subject, and it was perfectly reasonable to move to 15%. The 10% was the starting point. I remind him that the figure in the CERT scheme is 40% anyway; it was uplift on that. There are many other programmes, and I will come on to what is planned in them when I ask the other questions that I think the Government need to be asked, because it would in no way solve the problems if we were left only with CERT.

It is utterly untrue to say that there was a huge black hole. As I shall illustrate, we had plans and programmes set in place to move to a stage beyond 2012. The Minister has not said anything today that will move the programmes of additional work beyond what is already in the pipeline. We insulated 5 million homes between 2002 and 2008. We aimed for another 6 million to be tackled in the 2008 to 2011 programme, which was on target when we left government. We aim to have every cavity and loft, where practicable, insulated by 2015. The Minister has not said today that he will achieve that, but unless he says otherwise, we have to assume that he will continue those programmes.

We developed and extended the obligation, launching a £350-million community energy-saving programme that works on a street-by-street basis in the areas of the poorest decile of people in the country. That is a well-targeted programme that works in a different way, but the Minister has not said anything about it today, so perhaps, in response to my points, he will clarify the issue of the future of CESP.

**Gregory Barker:** The problem with the programmes that the right hon. Lady has specified, which are all good in themselves, is that they are not up to the scale of the challenge. CESP is a good programme, but it deals with tens of thousands of households. We have to reach, within the time scale that she mentioned, 14 million. At that rate of progress, we would still be lagging by 2030. We are not abandoning her programmes but bringing in an entirely new level of ambition. We are consolidating and building on those programmes, and bringing in more resources and ingenuity, as well as demand from the private sector, so it is a plus-plus agenda from this new coalition.

**Joan Ruddock:** Again, I have to tell the Minister that I think he is rather mistaken. The fact is that, whatever his green deal—I shall discuss that in more detail in a moment—it depends entirely on who opts in. He may get nobody to do so. He is talking about a grandiose scheme covering millions of people, but it depends entirely on individual households deciding to opt into the scheme. The benefit of CESP, on which we expected to build further, was that it involved the whole community, local government, energy companies and partnerships in a way that allowed for an holistic approach. That is clearly what his scheme will fail to do.

Let me make a little more progress. We also introduced the CRC energy efficiency scheme—again, there has been no mention of that today—which is an extremely important energy efficiency measure. It is a new mandatory emissions trading scheme to improve energy efficiency in the large public and private sector organisations that were not otherwise covered by the climate change levy, or indeed the emissions trading scheme, which is, of

course, European-based. Consequently supermarkets, banks, universities, hospitals and other organisations were all brought into an energy efficiency framework. The scheme is intended to target emissions from the energy use of those organisations, which represent no less than 10% of all UK emissions. What is the future of the CRC energy efficiency scheme? Again, the Minister has been silent on the issue. Will he guarantee that this important scheme will continue?

Let us not forget the boiler scrappage scheme, which my hon. Friend the Member for Telford (David Wright) mentioned. It was a great success. About 125,000 heating systems have been or are due to be upgraded under the scheme. It helped sustain work for installers and UK-based boiler manufacturers throughout the economic recovery, and it saved carbon. Replacing 125,000 G-rated boilers should save about 140,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> every year—the equivalent of taking about 45,000 cars off the road.

I have reminded the House of the big changes that Labour was making in energy efficiency and in putting the country on track to meet our climate change targets of a 34% reduction in greenhouse gases by 2020 and at least 80% by 2050.

**Caroline Lucas:** According to the Committee on Climate Change, the emission reductions achieved in the past year have been almost entirely a result of the recession, not a result of Government action. To hear the right hon. Lady talking as though the previous Government did wonderful things to achieve climate change targets beggars belief.

**Joan Ruddock:** I am so sorry. I was going to—I do—welcome the hon. Lady to the House, but her intervention is not welcome. We more than doubled—hon. Members know better than to laugh at this—our Kyoto commitment. At the last count, when I was in my place, we had seen a 21% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions over 1990 levels, and we were very much on target to achieve what we had set out. We introduced groundbreaking legislation that constrained us, with carbon budgets year on year—three budgets already in place and programmes that could enable us to meet those budgets.

**Martin Horwood:** In the same vein as the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), I must point out that the achievement of the Kyoto targets was due to other factors—in that case, the dash for gas, which transformed the pattern of greenhouse gas emissions in this country. That and the recession achieved far more than the previous Government.

**Joan Ruddock:** Again, I am sorry to say that the hon. Gentleman knows better than that. Nobody disputes the fact that the dash for gas was a factor, and more recently the recession has, indeed, been a factor, but the independent Committee on Climate Change has acknowledged the difference that Government programmes over that period made. Lord Turner, the chair of the Committee on Climate Change, said very recently that the last Government

“set out a whole series of policies, and as long as we drive those through we will make a difference.”

[*Interruption.*] The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) mutters from a sedentary position, “That’s about the future.” Climate change and what we need to address is indeed the future. I pointed out our considerable

achievements in the past. No other Government had made the leap forward that we made, and as I said at the outset of the debate, we left a very strong framework from which any Government could proceed to reduce carbon in the UK.

**Barry Gardiner:** Will my right hon. Friend remind the House that notwithstanding the dash for gas, the achievements during that period were against a background of a 25% growth in GDP? That must be taken into account. We would all accept that however good the achievements of the previous Government, we must do better in future to make sure that we meet the stringent targets set by the Government for 2020, and let us hope that we can exceed them.

**Joan Ruddock:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for the points that he makes, particularly the telling one about the level of economic growth that occurred during a time when carbon was, for the first time, being constrained.

**Dr Whitehead:** In order to dispel some of the wild hyperbole on the matter, I hope it will be helpful to observe that the Committee on Climate Change said today that 1 megatonne of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions out of a total of 4 megatonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions could be directly attributable to Government measures on energy efficiency and associated activities in the past year.

**Joan Ruddock:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who always manages to read more comprehensively than I do. I meant to look at the detail before I came to the Dispatch Box, but we were rather busy, so I am grateful that he was able to make that point and that the House has heard it.

I was referring to the fact that we had made changes and were putting the country on track to meet our climate change targets, but we were never complacent. That is why, one year ago, we launched our great British refurb programme, and in July last year published the UK low carbon transition plan. Our proposals signalled a step change in the level of ambition for the household sector over the next decade—precisely the game-changer of which the Minister spoke.

The House should not just take my word for it. Paul King, the chief executive of the UK Green Building Council, said:

“This is a bold and welcome move. The biggest barrier to low carbon refurbishment—the upfront cost—is set to fall. Pay As You Save is a radical scheme, which could trigger a revolution in household refurbishment—creating at least 100,000 new jobs, saving money and conserving energy.”

That was the opinion of our transition plan.

Everything that the Minister outlined today could be found in Labour’s transition plan. We said that we would introduce clean energy cashbacks—the feed-in tariffs—to enable households to profit from generating their own electricity. We did. We said that we would legislate for a mandated price support for poorer people and raise the level of Warm Front grants, and we did. We said that we would pilot “pay as you save” ways to help people green their homes, and we did.

The Minister has made the Tories’ green deal proposals the centrepiece of his departmental policies, but for us it was part of a much more comprehensive strategy. None the less, we were very clear that we needed to engage the public directly in energy efficiency. That is why we

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began to test the concept of “pay as you save”—what the Government now call the green deal. We established five pilots. The partners in those pilots included 500 households, a housing association, an energy company—British Gas, Birmingham, Sutton and Stroud councils and the Severn Wye Energy Agency, the whole programme being overseen by the Energy Saving Trust.

Can the Minister report on the progress of the pilots? Will they run their course? Does he plan to take any account of them? Is it part of the learning that the Government plan to do, or do they intend to leap in, having cooked up some programme with somebody?

**Gregory Barker:** Of course the Government will look at all such evidence, where it is helpful, and learn what we can. I am puzzled—I hope it is not just “not invented here” syndrome—that the right hon. Lady does not understand what I tried to explain at length. Our green deal will require primary legislation because there is a fundamental difference between her scheme, which ultimately relied on credit scoring, personal debt, a green mortgage or a charge on the property. None of those things applies to the new green deal. It will not be personal debt. It will not be a charge, a loan or a mortgage. It will be secured on the property, not on the people who live in the property. It may sound technical, but that is a fundamental difference. It requires primary legislation and it is not the same as the small test pilots which, useful as they may be, the right hon. Lady was trailing.

**Joan Ruddock:** There is no dispute between us on that matter, and I have not suggested that there is. I asked the Minister if he would take any credit—any benefit, rather—[*Interruption.*] He takes credit for plenty of things that he has not started himself. Will he take any benefit from this in terms of finding out what motivates people and how interested they are? It will be completely central to his plans that people are motivated and can be persuaded. These things require people to have many people in their houses doing many things. It is not easy to motivate people to undergo a great deal of change and upheaval. Such pilots show how acceptable they are, how interested people are and how best to make things work.

**Gregory Barker:** The right hon. Lady is absolutely right: finance is only part of the issue, as we found in Kirklees. Two things are vital. Community involvement is very important, but the other exciting thing about the green deal is that it is not just reliant on the big six energy companies, which have mixed reputations, but brings in some of our most trusted high street retailers and brands, such as Marks and Spencer and Tesco, which have strong degrees of consumer trust, and I hope that new companies, not yet formed, will also come in. It is exciting that there will be new participants, on a far greater scale than was ever imagined under the previous Government.

**Madam Deputy Speaker (Dawn Primarolo):** Order. Please may we have brief interventions as many Members wish to speak? I appreciate that the Minister is responding promptly, which I am sure the House is grateful for, but brief interventions would help enormously.

**Joan Ruddock:** When I was speaking about the partners, I may have left out B&Q, which is also participating in the pilots. We certainly had a similar scope of possibilities. We knew and said clearly that primary legislation would be required. We said clearly that we would need to legislate to link the finance to the property, not to the individual, and that is what we were working through. We also believed that in order to motivate people it would be necessary to present a financial package which meant that when they paid their energy bills, they were paying back the upfront costs. So there were no upfront costs, and that is why we called it pay as you save. To that extent, the kernel of this is something that we prepared for and intended. I am delighted that the Minister is going ahead with it. There is no question about that. We will certainly support him as the plans come forward and examine them in great detail. We clearly believe that this is a way forward and we want it to work.

None the less, there are questions that the Minister must answer. In opposition, the Prime Minister spoke of an entitlement. How will an entitlement be created? How many households does the Minister expect to undertake what the Labour Government called an eco-makeover by 2020? Our best-informed target was 7 million. What is his target for 2020? I would be grateful if the Minister could make that clear when he winds up, bearing in mind that people have to opt in. This is not something that they are being given without their own participation. It is unclear whether it is £6,500 or up to £6,500. Ministers know that a single-glazed, solid-walled house would cost at least £10,000 and could be much more. Is there an upper limit to the scheme that can be accommodated in the payback plans, and how many years would it take to pay back if that kind of money is being provided?

That brings me to fuel poverty. The Minister talked a lot about helping vulnerable people, but there was little mention of any concrete action to tackle fuel poverty. Warm Front, the Labour Government’s scheme for the fuel-poor, helped more than 2 million vulnerable households across England from June 2000, including 500,000 households in the last two years alone. It provides grants of up to £3,500, or up to £6,000 for those off the gas grid. Do the Government intend to scrap grant payments for central heating and insulation? I hope the Minister will be able to give us a precise answer to that question today. What evidence does he have that people in poorer households will be able to get help with insulation and improved heating under his green deal?

National Energy Action is sceptical. It has seen the details of the Government’s scheme and it says:

“The overwhelming majority of fuel-poor households currently underheat their homes and the beneficial effects of energy efficiency improvements would generally be in the form of a warmer dwelling rather than in financial savings. NEA is deeply concerned about how these people would be expected to service loan repayments, let alone gain access to loans at commercial interest rates given their often precarious financial circumstances.”

The Minister will say, “But they are not loans.” But somebody has to put the money up front, albeit that it is the energy companies, and somebody has to pay back, so we must know what will happen to the most vulnerable people. How many pensioners and poor families does he think will be able to take out the green deal?

We have discussed energy efficiency in the context of reducing the energy used by better insulation. But climate change dictates that we not only reduce our use, but decarbonise what we do use. That is a much more comprehensive strategy.

**Christopher Pincher** (Tamworth) (Con): The right hon. Lady speaks about fuel poverty, which is terrible for many people. But despite what the Labour Government did in terms of CERTs, CESP's and Warm Front, all of which are laudable, can she explain why fuel poverty increased?

**Joan Ruddock:** It was because there were unprecedented fuel prices. No Government could have instituted a programme that could have erased the effect of the dramatic global increase in oil prices.

Let me continue with my case that we need a more comprehensive strategy—a point that was made by a number of my hon. Friends, intervening on points of interest at the beginning of the Minister's speech. Heating accounts for three quarters of home energy use. No matter how much we improve our insulation or reduce consumption by our appliances, we will inevitably still use considerable amounts of energy. At present, we depend on fossil fuels—natural gas, liquid gas and oil. That cannot continue indefinitely, which is why we planned to introduce a renewable heat incentive from next year. That would guarantee payments for those who install technologies, such as ground source heat pumps, air source heat pumps and biomass boilers.

Under our proposed tariffs, the installation of a ground source heat pump in an average semi-detached house with adequate insulation would be rewarded with £1,000 a year, and lead to savings of £200 a year if used instead of heating oil. The heat incentive would help thousands of consumers who are off the gas network to lower their fuel bills and gain a cash reward for greening their heating supply.

In government, we were pleased to achieve a wide consensus for our Climate Change Act 2008 and Energy Act 2008. We were gratified by the enthusiasm with which our 10-year transition plan for low carbon was received, particularly by the CBI and the TUC.

Today, I can promise our broad support for coalition Government plans that reflect and continue on the path that we have set, and I can promise that we will scrutinise fairly the details of any legislation. But the big question remains: will they will the means? Can they resolve their differences, or will Tory ideological cuts totally undermine the critical progress that needs to be made—*[Interruption.]* The Minister laughs, but he said not a word about public sector housing, or private sector housing where landlords are completely and utterly unwilling to assist with energy conservation. There is so much that needs to be addressed by proper public policy, but ideological cuts cut across that.

Government is about leadership, setting priorities and, yes, making hard choices, but it is also about holding one's nerve and seeing things through. The coalition had a choice. It could have balanced deficit reduction with investment in the future, investment in manufacturing, such as Sheffield Forgemasters, and investment in decarbonising the electricity supply. However, it clearly lacks the vision to do so.

The Minister promised to make his Government the greenest ever. All I can say is that he has made a shaky start. We will judge him on his strategy to deliver a low-carbon future that tackles climate change, on his record of creating green jobs and on whether the transition to low carbon is made fairly.

2.11 pm

**Martin Horwood** (Cheltenham) (LD): I thank the Minister for his statement. He was absolutely right to highlight our collective failure to address energy efficiency adequately, but he seems so keen to do something about it that I could almost mistake him for a Lib Dem—*[Interruption.]* Not quite, perhaps. On the green deal, the ministerial team has imaginatively built on proposals. Obviously, I shall claim that the Lib Dems were the very first to produce such a scheme, but the Conservatives did, too, and towards the end the Labour Government were—*[Interruption.]* We will check whether the Green party was ahead of the Lib Dems.

**Caroline Lucas:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Martin Horwood:** Not on that one; I am sorry.

All the parties, and even the Labour Government in the end, were working on variations on that scheme, but the one that the ministerial team has come up with is truly imaginative, and its unique financing raises the ambition for energy efficiency in this country in a way that, if successful, will represent a step change in energy efficiency. As the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) pointed out, it is not guaranteed to be successful, and we do not know exactly how many people will take it up. The point, however, is to wish it well and for all Members to promote it, support private companies, communicate the scheme's success and hope that it achieves the step change that we are looking for. I congratulate the ministerial team on coming up with that proposal.

**Mrs Main:** I thank my hon. Friend for giving way on that point, because under the previous Government communication problems were often among the reasons why some very good schemes did not take off. I therefore wish this scheme well. Does he agree that this Government's big effort to introduce a scheme instantly is a positive move, and that all parts of the House will welcome improved communication?

**Martin Horwood:** I am sure the hon. Lady is right to emphasise the importance of communication. I was going to go on to pay tribute to the outgoing Administration, and in particular to the right hon. Members for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) and for Lewisham, Deptford, who towards the end of the Labour Government brought some urgency to the issue and improved things. However, it is true that at times they were tempted to take credit for things that were the result of larger factors, and that, given the number of consultations and pilots in which they indulged, they did not get round to implementing some of the schemes that they had contemplated. It now falls to the coalition to increase the pace of change, and the early signs are good.

The need is urgent. If we are to achieve throughout Europe a target of 30% cuts in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020, which I believe should be the target for the

[*Martin Horwood*]

whole European Union, we will have to make those radical step changes in policy. Indeed, we need to do so if we are to have any chance of reducing the concentration of atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> to 450 ppm or lower, which I believe is absolutely necessary. If we do not do that, the chance of global warming increasing by more than two degrees above pre-industrial levels rises, threatening food production, conflict and, ultimately, the economies on which we depend to finance public sector and Government programmes.

In that respect, energy efficiency is no panacea. Not long ago, I visited a company near my constituency called Messier-Dowty, which provides world-class aircraft parts, particularly undercarriage. I remember having a conversation with its staff, in which they extolled the virtues of those parts and the aircraft industry's efforts to make aircraft more efficient and lighter, and use less energy as they flew. However, I pointed out that eventually the industry would have to adjust to a world in which people learned to fly less and used alternative means of travel and communications. The same analogy is true for the whole economy. Energy efficiency is the first and most cost-effective area to address, but it is no substitute for the wholesale decarbonisation of our economy, which we also need to work on.

I shall focus on three areas of energy efficiency: first, energy efficiency in buildings, especially the skills needed to deliver it; secondly, smart metering; and finally, energy markets and pricing. In the first area, it is right that we concentrate on buildings. Throughout Europe, apparently 90% of our time is spent indoors and 30% of our energy consumption is devoted to heating and lighting buildings, so the green deal is an important step in trying to address that scale of energy use. However, there are traps ahead, and I have spoken to training suppliers in the further education sector and those hoping to run apprenticeships in architecture and building trades in and around my constituency. They point out a severe lack of skills in those new building technologies, particularly the skills needed not just in isolated instances, such as the installation of renewable technologies or the provision of insulation, but in new building materials, in the different approach that we need to take in the building trades and in architecture, and in constructing and retrofitting buildings. Such skills must be fundamental to training in those sectors.

**Thomas Docherty** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): I am slightly confused. Given that the hon. Gentleman supports deep and savage cuts to the training budgets of our colleges, how does he expect them to produce those vast numbers of desperately needed skilled workers in order to bring about that step change that we all want?

**Martin Horwood:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his intervention. One answer is clearly the green deal, which will incentivise private companies to invest in such training themselves. Apprenticeships might be part of the solution, too. However, when I asked Gloucester college, a forward-looking and innovative FE college based partly in my constituency and partly in Gloucester, what was the single biggest step that could be taken, the answer was not to fund extra courses. It suggested allowing FE colleges that provide such training to accredit their own courses, rather than having to defer constantly

to universities. I commend that recommendation to Ministers and their colleagues in other Departments. The college believed that that would enable it to respond much faster to market situations and design courses much more flexibly, and that it was the single most important change that could be made. I hope that provides an answer to the hon. Gentleman.

On new buildings at least, the other possible pitfall is the rather prescriptive and increasingly complex code for sustainable homes. I welcomed the code when the previous Government introduced it, and generally, as an instrument of policy, it is a welcome development. However, it has been painfully slow at raising energy efficiency levels in new buildings, and it risks becoming so over-prescriptive that it defeats our objectives.

I know the Secretary of State well, and he is no friend of over-prescription; he prefers the creation of the right market environment, which would avoid the need for such complexity and enable the process to move faster. Instead of having standards of such complex design, perhaps we should reinforce one or two simple measures—for instance, a measure of kilowatt-hours per square metre for every building, old or new. To follow up the point made by my hon. Friend the Member for St Albans (Mrs Main), that would be easy to communicate to the public and easy for estate agents, politicians and everybody else to understand. It might become a powerful measure of energy efficiency, with no need to prescribe such complex details as we find in the current code.

This morning there was a round-table discussion hosted by *The House Magazine*, and one point repeatedly came up. Examples were mentioned of earlier civilisations—even the Romans—that were very good at preserving openness and light in buildings and making them energy-efficient through the communal use of heat; the renewable heat issue has already been mentioned. More traditional wooden buildings within the Arctic circle still seem to require less energy to heat than many buildings in this country. I know from my own experience of villages in India where buildings made basically out of mud were beautifully cool in summer and beautifully warm in winter. They were very energy-efficient, but used materials that would probably not be allowed under current building regulations. Incidentally, I am not suggesting that we should all start living in yurts or anything like that; that would be a bit too Liberal.

**Gregory Barker:** That did not quite make it into the coalition agreement.

**Martin Horwood:** Indeed.

We should be wary that over-complication and over-prescription could risk the defeat of our own objectives, and lead to our prescriptions to the industry for low-carbon homes being too inflexible and therefore too expensive. More flexibility might enable the private sector to deliver some of the objectives more simply and efficiently.

I shall now talk about smart metering. I was a shadow environment spokesman under the previous Government, and assorted people lobbied me heavily—as they did my opposite numbers, I suspect—about their particular designs of smart meter. I am aware that the field is very competitive. I make no judgment between the different systems, but I am increasingly aware that smart metering

covers a multitude of sins. There are tough decisions ahead for the ministerial team about exactly which designs we might favour.

At the most basic level, we are talking about something that just generates information that can be read out on a display, and might be reflected on a bill. That would be useful, but rather limited. More sophisticated systems influence the timing of devices such as washing machines and dishwashers so that they operate at different times and improve the efficiency of the whole household.

The most interactive technology feeds real-time information back to the energy companies themselves and could improve the efficiency of the whole network. I would draw a line at the kind of systematic smart metering that enabled people to switch suppliers minute by minute, which I know has been suggested by some hon. Members. The machine itself searches for the best deal and tariff at any particular minute. That would lead to indescribable confusion over billing and might destabilise businesses from week to week. However, we need to look at the various different technologies and be ambitious about what smart metering can deliver.

On energy markets and pricing, the Minister rightly said that we suffered from a plethora of different energy efficiency programmes under the last Government. Many were well intentioned and individually well designed, but there was a lot of stopping and starting and different, confusing and overlapping requirements. Last Christmas I visited the Cheltenham Royal Mail sorting office and found postal workers falling over heaps of low-energy light bulbs as one energy company in particular had mailed out huge numbers of the things at the last possible moment. I am not surprised that the Minister said that 262 million had been supplied.

In a way, I suppose that the bulbs were a good thing, but they spectacularly missed the point. While price still rewards energy consumption, it will always be difficult to mobilise the energy companies really to get behind energy efficiency. For the longer term, I commend to the Minister one other Lib Dem policy that did not quite make it into the coalition agreement. It was to take energy bills and set a historic baseline amount for each household, taking into account the number of children and so on, which would be reflected in the historic consumption. Thereafter, the cost to consumers would rise if energy consumption rose, but the energy company would not be allowed to profit from that rise.

Instead, the surplus would be taken, for example, into a fund administered by the company for energy efficiency or environmental programmes. At a stroke, that would break the link between profit and increased energy use; it would actually cost the energy company money if energy use rose. The company would have a direct financial business case for increasing energy efficiency. That would be hugely simpler than all the complicated schemes in which the companies were set targets and sought various ways—some of them rather untestable and unverifiable—of trying to meet Government objectives. If the Minister adopts that policy, I really will think that he is turning into a Liberal Democrat.

If the coalition is to deliver on these ambitious targets, and on its ambition to be the greenest Government yet, we will need, in the Minister's words, to change the game and be really ambitious, bold and radical. I fully expect that we will be.

2.26 pm

**Meg Munn** (Sheffield, Heeley) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome the Ministers, the hon. Members for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker) and for Wealden (Charles Hendry), to their places. I am delighted that the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle has been appointed; he has long been interested in these issues and I am sure that he will make a great contribution. As he said, much of the debate about the reduction of carbon emissions tends to focus on renewables, which, of course, make an important contribution. However, immediate gains are much more likely to come from energy efficiency, so our having this debate today is a positive sign.

If I were to tell the Ministers that there is a technology that could reduce domestic fuel usage by 30%, I expect that they would want to hear about it. If I said the same thing but added that the Government were holding the technology back, I hope that they would ask me what we needed to do to bring the technology along. However, I have already written to the hon. Member for Wealden about these points, and his response to date has been somewhat lukewarm. Today I shall try to persuade both Ministers to take the claims seriously and take the action required to help bring that technology to the market quickly.

I am talking about micro-combined heat and power, which involves small appliances that are efficient and beneficial for the consumer, and will help the UK reach its carbon reduction targets and encourage manufacturing; hon. Members on both sides will realise that we are keen on manufacturing in Sheffield. Importantly, such appliances generate electricity in the home, reducing household energy bills at a stroke. Electricity can also be generated for sale to the national grid, giving an income to householders and reducing reliance on large expensive generating plants.

I particularly want to highlight one appliance, which is suitable for both the domestic and commercial markets. It is produced by a small Sheffield-based company called Inspirit Energy. The appliance is the size of a washing machine and the highly effective boiler is a 3 kW electrical system capable of working at 92% efficiency. The appliance can supply all the hot water and heating requirements of a home, up to 70% of electricity needs at peak times, and it can generate up to 50% of a user's annual electricity consumption. The development of the appliance is well under way and I hope that it will be ready to go to market in the near future. I shall explain why the Government are holding the technology back.

As the two Ministers well know, a particular feature of micro-combined heat and power appliances is that they generate electricity at precisely the times when there is significant demand, helping the national grid to cope. The systems would particularly help the elderly and vulnerable, who may be worried about putting on their heating for fear of the cost. They can heat their homes knowing that the cost of doing so is partly or completely covered. If they sell some electricity to the national grid, they could make a small amount of money back. Importantly, such appliances could cut the carbon footprint of a home significantly, perhaps reducing CO<sub>2</sub> emissions by up to 70%. These products are intended merely to cover any interim period before the world runs entirely on renewables. However, with development, the units themselves could in time run on renewable fuels such as biomass or solar.

[Meg Munn]

The Minister talked about the important role of Government in this respect, not necessarily in directly supporting the private sector in the development of these appliances, but in providing the architecture, structure or framework that will allow them to develop. One way of encouraging their further development and future sales is through feed-in tariffs. Around the world, tariff schemes have had a positive effect in cutting the cost of renewable technologies, as well as in creating employment opportunities. Such schemes offer incentives to individuals and companies, by providing clear and effective financial incentives for companies developing appliances for householders and small businesses.

Earlier this year, DECC produced a paper on feed-in tariffs which stated that the tariff should comprise two components: one for total kilowatt-hours generated, and another for kilowatt-hours exported to the national grid. The technologies covered in the paper included micro-combined heat and power, but only up to an electrical capacity of less than, or equal to, 2 kW. I had already raised this matter in the House, and lobbied the previous Government on it, during the Christmas Adjournment debate in December 2009. I point out to Ministers that having an upper limit of 2 kW would exclude the unit produced by Inspirit Energy—and, no doubt, units that may be produced by other companies. The ability to generate feed-in tariffs has the potential to make the unit very attractive, but not having them could impact on the potential return to the company and thus the attractiveness of its further development and manufacture in the UK.

We have already, rightly, spent a great deal of time talking about how we enable people in poorer households to access a wide range of technologies and resources that will reduce their carbon emissions. If householders fear that they cannot get a payback on a boiler of this type, they will be unlikely to invest in it. By having such a low threshold of 2 kW, we are damaging the country's prospects in what will surely become an important industry of the future. We must change the rules to allow feed-in tariffs for 3 kW appliances. I agree that anything over 3 kW is more suited to industrial use, but excluding a 3 kW machine means that properties with more than three bedrooms are excluded from the micro-combined heat and power programme.

Products such as the appliance being developed by Inspirit Energy could not only help to meet the UK's target of reducing energy but drastically reduce the excessive use of fossil fuels. This technology can make a major contribution to saving carbon generation. By focusing on what can be done now to make our homes more energy-efficient, we can go a long way towards changing our fuel usage, emissions and ever-increasing fuel bills.

When I wrote to the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, the hon. Member for Wealden, in May, to request a meeting with him, I was advised that the demands on his diary are considerable at present—as I am sure is the case—and that such a meeting could not take place. However, let me say to both Ministers that if they, or anybody here, were to meet the people who are developing this technology, I am sure that they would become as enthusiastic as I am about the product.

**Gregory Barker:** The hon. Lady knows that I hold her in high regard, but that has increased even more, as I had not previously appreciated what expertise she has in this particular area. May I invite her to come to the Department to join the round table on microgeneration that we will be holding—in July, I believe? If she would care to bring representatives from the company in her constituency, they would be very welcome to participate with other stakeholders from the industry on how we can have a more ambitious microgeneration strategy.

**Meg Munn:** I thank the Minister for that very generous offer. I am delighted that in securing the opportunity to have such a meeting, I have achieved the aim that I set myself in making this speech. He is very generous in saying that I am an expert, but indeed I am not; that is the last thing I am. I am, however, persuaded by the experts that this technology that can make a real difference. I am delighted to accept his invitation.

2.35 pm

**Richard Drax (South Dorset) (Con):** Thank you very much, Madam Deputy Speaker, for calling me to make my maiden speech today. I follow distinguished speeches by many hon. Members on both sides of the House, and I do so with some trepidation, a feeling I am sure that they will recall from the time when they had to make their first speeches. It is an immense privilege to make a maiden speech in this great House, where so many extraordinary men and women have gone before. The sheer weight of tradition and history are overwhelming, and a reminder to us all of Parliament's ancient permanence, which is not to be tampered with lightly.

What a great honour it is to represent the people of South Dorset. The county is my home, and has been my family's home for generations, and I am proud to be elected to speak for it. I follow an almost unbroken line of Conservative South Dorset MPs, with occasional, notable exceptions. The most recent, of course, was my predecessor, Lord Knight of Weymouth—a title that will, no doubt, throw a few. I congratulate him on his ennoblement and on serving the people of South Dorset so diligently for nine years. Ironically, perhaps, fate threw us together before my political aspirations took hold. As a local BBC television reporter, I was, for some years, frequently sent to interview my former opponent. Little did we know then what lay ahead. Suffice it to say that his elevation to the peerage was splendid news to us all, and a relief to me.

My foray into politics ends a slight drought of Draxes here in the Commons. In an earlier deluge, six ancestors graced this place between 1679 and 1880—all representing the long-lost seat of Wareham. One, John Sawbridge Erle-Drax MP, spoke only once during the entire 32 years of his parliamentary career, and that was to ask the Speaker of the House to open the window. Unsurprisingly, he was known as the "Silent MP". After his death, he arranged for *The Times* to be delivered daily to his mausoleum through a specially built-in letterbox; mine is under construction. In view of his Trappist tendencies, for his descendent to be making his maiden speech a mere eight weeks into the parliamentary Session must seem like indecent haste.

South Dorset is a place of monumental beauty. The people are proud and fiercely independent. Years of history have forged this constituency, not least during

the second world war, which saw its beaches, bases and ranges nurture tens of thousands of young men as they prepared to fight for our freedom during those dark days more than 60 years ago.

Today, the resorts of Weymouth and Swanage are home to a wide range of activities, from light industry and retail, to tourism and fishing. Farmers, the guardians of our countryside, and sadly neglected for so many years, have cared for the lush interior for centuries. Nor should we forget the quarries of Portland, which still offer up the stone for which the island is so famous. The island of Portland is also renowned by sailors for its huge tides, which offer great hope for future energy provision.

Another island in my constituency is worthy of note, not least because of its red squirrels. I am, of course, talking about Brownsea island, set in the middle of Poole harbour, the second largest natural harbour in the world. The marshy southern reaches of those waters provide a spectacular haven for sailors, birds and wildlife, including the human variety, which occupies one of Europe's largest nudist beaches at nearby Studland. I have yet to arrange one of my surgeries there.

The entire constituency is dominated by our Jurassic coast, now a world heritage site. Dinosaurs once roamed the constituency—there is proof of it. Judging by comments made by opponents during the election campaign, people might think one was still out there. Maybe that is the case, but a strong Conservative heart beats underneath these scales, tempered for a moment with a dash of liberalism. I shall represent my constituents according to my conscience, without fear or favour.

On that note, and despite being at the bottom of the food chain at the moment, I sense a shift of mood in the House. The new intake, of which I am one, has brought with it a fresh perspective. While understanding the need for party cohesion, I believe that MPs should have their own minds and, above all, be mindful of those who put us here. That was very much my guide during my four years as a candidate, when I met a vast range of people who enriched my knowledge of the constituency. It was that experience that revealed to me that appearances can often be deceptive.

What do I mean? South Dorset may be lavishly endowed with natural gifts, but it has traditionally suffered from a lack of investment in its infrastructure. We have lost shops, pubs and bus services, and a shocking 50% of our post offices have closed over the past 10 years. Out of season, the hotels and guest houses fall silent. In Weymouth alone, we have six of the most deprived wards on the national index of deprivation. The fishing industry, quarrying, agriculture and the ports have all taken a knock during the recession, and although unemployment remains below the national average, wages are resolutely low.

We have two prisons in South Dorset, HMP The Verne and the young offenders institution. I have visited both on several occasions and work closely with the governors and the Prison Officers Association. The POA's plight has been ignored for too long. As in so many other areas, the pendulum has swung too far in one direction. Today, officers feel powerless to do their job effectively as the prisoners appear to have more rights than they do. With 50% remission as the norm, it is difficult to apply meaningful sanctions to prisoners who do not toe the line. It is important to remember, in

my humble opinion, that the Prison Service is just that—a service. Without proper support, officers will continue to feel, as they repeatedly describe themselves, a “forgotten army”. I warmly welcome the Government's intentions on minimum sentencing and I urge them to look at the matter as soon as possible.

I also applaud the Government's interest in, and support for, our armed services. In South Dorset we have two major Army camps, Bovington and Lulworth. The courage and sacrifice of the families who live there cannot be overstated. Take, for example, just one of our county regiments, The Rifles. The regiment has now lost 53 riflemen in Afghanistan, and more than 200 have been seriously injured. That is the human cost of war. As a former soldier myself, I hold our servicemen and women in high regard. I am greatly reassured by the coalition Government's actions to ensure that the military covenant is properly respected.

As to the future, it holds great promise, with the Olympic spotlight well and truly focused on the best sailing waters in the United Kingdom. Already, top athletes are training for competitive events both this year and next in preparation for the 2012 games, all hosted by the Weymouth and Portland National Sailing Academy, the first Olympic venue to be ready and officially opened by the Queen herself. None of that would be possible without the co-operation of Portland port, the former naval dockyard now in private hands. Despite grim predictions at the time, the port now employs more civilians than it did in its heyday as a naval base. There are some exciting projects in the pipeline that promise hundreds more jobs.

I have entered public life because I could no longer sit on my hands and watch our beloved country lose her pride. There is so much to fight for. However, unlike my ancestor, who did not say a word for 32 years—I will not ask you to open the window, Madam Deputy Speaker—I have every intention of standing up for my constituents who put me here.

2.45 pm

**Mrs Mary Glendon** (North Tyneside) (Lab): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech during this debate. First, I congratulate the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) on an excellent and entertaining speech. Over the past few weeks I have listened to many maiden speeches, and each time I felt a pang of emotion as I listened to other new Members speaking with heartfelt pride about their new role and their determination to work for their constituents. I now speak with heartfelt pride myself. I am proud to stand here as a native of North Tyneside having the great honour of representing my fellow North Tynesiders as the first woman Labour MP for the area since Margaret Bondfield in 1926.

North Tyneside constituency underwent some boundary changes at the general election, so I find myself paying tribute to both the former MP and two colleagues in the House. The right hon. Stephen Byers represented the constituency for 18 years. Not only an able parliamentarian but an excellent constituency MP, he is held in high regard by the many constituents he helped.

Two wards from the constituency of my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East (Mr Brown) have come back into North Tyneside. I

[Mrs Mary Glindon]

know that my right hon. Friend and Steve Byers worked together on a number of issues, including the Swan Hunter campaign “Life for Swans” and most recently to help with the reinstatement of the Findus factory in Longbenton. I believe that the north-east is indebted to my right hon. Friend for the excellent work that he did in his role as Minister for our region. The evidence of his popularity as a constituency MP is there to see in the busy case load that I have inherited from him.

Riverside ward, where I spent the first 19 years of my life, has come into North Tyneside from the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth (Mr Campbell). My hon. Friend worked hard as a Minister in the last Government, and his success as an MP was confirmed with his fantastic general election victory, when he increased his majority despite the Tory party spending some of Ashcroft’s millions over several years in a vain attempt to unseat him.

North Tyneside constituency stretches along the River Tyne from North Shields to Wallsend, through Killingworth, Benton and Longbenton to the former mining communities in Seaton Burn, Burradon, Annitsford and Camperdown. The people of North Tyneside have a sense of fairness, and their commitment to their area is demonstrated by the array of community groups that have developed over the years, from youth groups such as the Longbenton Youth Project to more established residents’ groups such as the Burradon forum. We are particularly proud of our excellent schools, many of which have been enhanced and developed under Labour’s Building Schools for the Future, and we have our own college of further education, TyneMet, which has helped launch the careers of many North Tynesiders, including mine.

Modern business parks have brought employment into the area, and Tesco is about to create 1,000 jobs at Balliol business park. However, I, like many others in the area, am saddened that we are to lose the Twinings tea factory in North Shields. Despite a good campaign to save it, the company has decided to relocate to Poland, leaving its workers jobless. Everything must now be done to help those workers find suitable alternative work, and I know that the unions have started the process to help them through this difficult time.

North Tyneside has no shortage of cultural and industrial heritage, with famous sons including Robert Stephenson, Robert Westall, Owen Brannigan and Sting. The world of football has been graced with players like Peter Beardsley, Alan Shearer and Michael Carrick, who all started out at the famous Wallsend boys club. Wallsend is also home to the Roman fort Segedunum, which is a world heritage site and sits alongside the world famous Swan Hunter shipbuilding yard, which sadly closed in 1995. The former Rising Sun pit, where my late father-in-law, an overman, was in the last cage to leave the pit, now forms part of our countryside park.

On several occasions, I have listened to Members opposite mock when those of us with great mining and shipbuilding traditions tell of the devastating effects of the Tory cuts during the 1980s and 1990s. What they fail to understand is that those cuts were not simply about economic ruin for individuals, but dealt severe cultural blows to close-knit communities. I congratulate the

Labour Government on trying to right those wrongs with positive policies during the last 13 years. I know that one of our best hopes to reinvigorate industry in North Tyneside is to invest in the wind turbine industry. Already my right hon. Friend the Member for Newcastle upon Tyne East and my hon. Friend the Member for Tynemouth have been working with Shepherd Offshore to that end, and I want to work with them to bring this modern, skilful and sustainable industry to our former shipyards.

I have hopes and aspirations for North Tyneside, but this debate shows that this Government will make the attainment of those aspirations a hard slog. Fuel poverty has been tackled on a large scale in North Tyneside, thanks to support from the previous Labour Government. As a councillor and former energy champion for the constituency, I saw the excellent work done, with the help of Eaga, to develop a strategy to combat fuel poverty with partners from all sectors. The introduction of the warm zone, under our previous elected Labour mayor, not only improved energy efficiency in residents’ homes, but—because the scheme included supporting people to access benefits—realised more than £1 million in extra benefits, to which people are rightly entitled. I only hope that the Government’s green deal proposals will continue to deliver this level of success for those people still in fuel poverty in North Tyneside.

I cannot finish my maiden speech without reference to my former colleagues working in the Child Maintenance and Enforcement Commission. As an administrative officer, I worked with the staff in manual payments at Longbenton until April this year. I know how committed these and other public sector workers are to delivering good services. As Members of this House, we are elected public servants and we should do all that we can to protect our colleagues across the public sector from Government cuts.

My commitment to North Tyneside is total. I will do all that I can to justify the trust that the people of North Tyneside have placed in me, and I will busy myself, in this House and in my constituency, to get the best deal possible for them.

2.52 pm

**Lorraine Fullbrook** (South Ribble) (Con): Thank you, Madam Deputy Speaker, for allowing me to make my maiden speech today. I congratulate you on your new role. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) and the hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mrs Glindon) on their fascinating and excellent maiden speeches.

It is a great honour to be in this Chamber representing the people of the South Ribble constituency, and I wish to pay tribute to my predecessor, David Borrow. For 13 years, he worked hard for his constituents and he was renowned for his support of many local charities and organisations, particularly those involved in the developing world helping those suffering from HIV and AIDS.

I feel very proud in being the first woman Member of Parliament for South Ribble, but I follow in the illustrious footsteps of Edith Rigby from Penwortham in my constituency, who was a founding member of the Hutton and Howick women’s institute. In 1904, she joined the Women’s Social and Political Union, popularly known as the suffragettes. She was arrested and sentenced to a

month in prison for taking part in a march to the Houses of Parliament. She went on to serve a total of seven prison sentences, and her activities culminated in her planting a bomb in the Liverpool cotton exchange.

South Ribble can be divided into four distinctive areas and locations, each with its own beauty and rich history and, under this new Government, a better future ahead. Leyland, of Leyland Motors fame, is the main town of South Ribble and has its past in both the cotton and engineering industries. The Cromwell tank was built in Leyland in 1943 by Leyland Motors, which was a world-beating engineering firm of its time, exporting lorries and buses around the world, including to Cuba. The Leyland cotton mills wove fine cambrics and fancies for many fashion houses of the day, in addition to cotton bandages, woven and bleached in Leyland to supply the military front lines of British campaigns around the globe.

Although the heavy engineering and cotton mills of the past have long ceased, these industries have been replaced by highly skilled, technical engineering companies such as Clean Air Power and Torotrak, providing hi-tech solutions for the reduction of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from large haulage vehicles and articulated lorries. In the case of Clean Air Power, CO<sub>2</sub> reductions of 50% to 60% are the norm. Leyland is also the home to Schwans, which makes the famous Chicago town pizza.

The people of Leyland and I strongly agree that regeneration is the key to the future success of local business, along with improved infrastructure and leisure facilities. I am delighted that, under the leadership of Councillor Margaret Smith, the leader of the Conservative South Ribble borough council, the Leyland regeneration board has been formed. The board is made up of prominent local businessmen and women with a wealth of local expertise, but more importantly, this is being carried out through the private sector and is not hamstrung by the red tape and bureaucracy of the public sector. All in all, the future for Leyland is a million miles from humdrum.

The villages of Tarleton—where I live—Hesketh Bank and Banks were where the Normans “harried” the north in 1069 and they were allowed, under law, to continue their recreational violence of slaughtering any Saxons whom they came across in the “freelands”. The fenlands, or marshes, surrounding the villages are now home to a 2,000 acre bird sanctuary and conservation area in the Ribble marsh estuary.

Fortunately, the “freelands” are now some of the richest agricultural land in the country, which supports the horticulture, or growing, industry, producing crops that are an important source of the nation’s food. That is one of our largest industries, with the growers supplying the major multiple retailers in both the UK and other parts of Europe. However, these companies, both large and small and employing large numbers of local people, feel weighed down and burdened by the rules, regulations and taxes imposed on them by the previous Administration. They, like many other businesses, feel pumelled by ever increasing business taxes, vehicle excise duties and fuel duties, and I welcome this Government’s measures to help private business and enterprise flourish. The growers are desperate for new infrastructure to enable them to get their food crops from the growing fields to the main road network. In the bonfire of the quangos, the horticultural industry is looking to this Government

to set fire to one of the last remaining dinosaurs of its type—the Agricultural Wages Board.

Other villages of South Ribble are famous for many past and varied pursuits by the locals. Albert Pierrepoint, Britain’s last official executioner, after his retirement owned the Rose and Crown public house in Much Hoole, the pub being affectionately known by its patrons as “the drop in”. Jeremiah Horrocks, the curate of St Michael’s church in Little Hoole, accurately predicted and witnessed the transit of Venus, last seen—after 121 years—in 2004. Mawdesley was the centre of basket-making in Lancashire, thanks to the fine willow grown on the banks of the River Yarrow. The village of Eccleston was once famous for growing more than 200 varieties of apples, and I am delighted that the community has recently come together to replant apple trees in gardens, on the green and in other public spaces.

Small and medium-sized businesses are the mainstay of employment in South Ribble and the risk takers and innovators of our economy. These business people will certainly benefit from the measures outlined last week by my right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer and fellow north-west MP, through his freedom, growth and enterprise agenda, and thanks to the new Government’s regional growth fund, I am delighted that businesses in South Ribble will benefit to the tune of up to £5,000 per employee in national insurance contributions for the first 10 new employees.

My constituency is home to many highly skilled and specialist employees in the defence industry in the north-west—one of the UK’s pre-eminent defence industrial areas. BAE Systems, Europe’s largest defence contractor, has a strong presence in my constituency, with many constituents having a deep-rooted and strong interest in the future of the Typhoon fighter aircraft and tranche 3B of the programme; in the Mantis, one of the world’s leading unmanned air vehicles; and, of course, in the F-35 joint strike fighter aircraft, which is a Lockheed Martin programme with BAE Systems as its main partner. No one can pre-judge the outcome of the strategic defence and security review, but it will come as no surprise to the Front-Bench Defence team that I will be campaigning hard and fighting for my constituents for the Typhoon tranche 3B project to go ahead.

I am very pleased to be making my maiden speech in this important debate on the progress and prospects in energy efficiency. It is with great regret, however, that the previous Government’s Warm Front initiative has not been the success that was envisaged. Indeed, a number of my constituents, including a wheelchair-bound, 81-year-old gentleman, have come to me for help, following both initial consultations and installations by Warm Front agents in the north-west. They all have a sorry tale to tell—from being without hot water and heating for months on end after Warm Front carried out work on their properties, to vastly excessive charges over and above the £3,500 grant, appalling and shoddy workmanship and faulty equipment installed with no further responsibility from the companies involved.

After a particular constituent was advised that he would be required to stump up an additional £8,000 to replace a boiler and central heating system in a two-bedroom bungalow, I contacted a local and well respected Corgi-approved heating engineer to give me a quote. That came in at a total cost of £2,800—£700 less than the grant of £3,500—for the same specification as Warm

[Lorraine Fullbrook]

Front's agents. I implore the Minister to review the Warm Front scheme urgently, as I believe there to be unscrupulous companies exploiting both the taxpayer, who is certainly not getting value for money, and my constituents, who in many cases are families with young children and elderly and vulnerable individuals. I respectfully request that the Minister ensure that the Government's excellent green deal programme does not go the same way.

Above all, the people of South Ribble wanted the Government off their backs and on their side. They believe that they know how to spend their hard-earned money better than any Government, and they voted for power to be handed back to the people. It is with great pride that I am in the House representing the people of South Ribble. I have vowed to put it on the map and to be South Ribble's voice in Westminster, and not the Westminster voice in South Ribble.

3.4 pm

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): I congratulate you, Madam Deputy Speaker, on your elevation. I also congratulate the three maiden speakers on their fascinating accounts of their constituencies, in particular the hon. Member for South Ribble (Lorraine Fullbrook), who was just ahead of the hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mrs Glindon). I am now wondering where to spend my holidays—I was going to go to Florida, but I might go to all the different places mentioned as well. Dorset is on the map, too; it is not out of the question.

As a Unionist, I would normally back off from green politics or policies, but this is one occasion when I am fully in support of the green agenda. I never thought I would come to the House of Commons and say that, but today I can, with all honesty. I congratulate the Minister on bringing his thoughts and ideas to the Floor of the House; he said lots of things from which I can take comfort. However, there are many other things I would like to comment on. First, I want to outline some areas where I believe advances can be made.

Hopefully, the policies and targets we are trying to achieve are attainable. These days, efficiency is a word I dread. When someone mentions it, I think, "Oh my goodness, not more cutbacks. We're in trouble again." If we mention efficiency savings in schools, we are talking about school clubs being cut back, and if we mention them in hospitals, we are talking about night-time X-ray centres and accident and emergency departments being cut back. Those words send dread into the soul. However, there is one kind of efficiency that we are all happy to hear about—energy efficiency, and how it can be achieved and ultimately how it can bring about savings and a better way of life. We need to meet all our targets, including on carbon emissions. That is because the general public will be the winners from any efficiency that comes into play and which can be put to our advantage.

I am further encouraged by the number of Members who have within their constituencies companies that are go-ahead and inventive and have genuine ideas for providing energy savings. It is good to have that vast knowledge and expertise to hit upon. As someone who represents a mixed urban and rural community, I am

faced with the needs of each and the difficulties that the different sectors have faced. I am also faced with the opportunities that come from that, because each has to make a lasting difference to the future of Northern Ireland and the UK as a whole. I mention Northern Ireland because I represent a constituency there, so it is important for me to make that point.

Wearing my other hat, as a Northern Ireland Assembly Member, I was part of a committee that highlighted energy efficiency. The rural community has a large input into energy production and development and the consideration of other uses of land. Will the Minister consider the issue of diversification for landowners into wind farms, sea turbines and opportunities for growing biomass, where energy savings and efficiencies can be made, and through which, ultimately, we can achieve the savings and efficiencies that we need? Strangford and Portaferry are leaps and bounds ahead of other places in many ways. I am saying that not just because I represent those areas, but because we have the first use of a tide turbine in the loch—the SeaGen project—which has begun to generate electricity for the area. It is a very successful and innovative idea. There are many others places in the United Kingdom where such an opportunity can be taken, and I hope that it will be encouraged.

Wind turbines can go a long way towards creating the energy levels and efficiencies needed. I would also make the point—I have made it in the past—that many birds and wildlife migrate to Strangford, in particular Strangford loch, in the winter. Brent geese are one of the important birds that go there. However, wind turbines and migrating fowl together will create problems, so I have suggested to those involved that perhaps we need a balance and some protection. We are all playing the renewable energy game, but the provision of wind turbines must strike a balance and integrate well with nature. It is wonderful that the SeaGen turbine has become the source of electricity for thousands of homes in my constituency. I believe that we can do this even better; we should replicate the SeaGen turbine in Portaferry right across the United Kingdom. One size does not fit all—I accept that—but we have to look at the ways we can achieve those things.

I put down this marker when it comes to offshore renewable energy: one thing must be protected, and that is the position and interests of the fisherman. Any future plans must ensure that they do not detract further from or decrease fishing locations, which would put the fishing industry under even more pressure. Given the potential for perhaps 300 sea and wind turbines on the coast, I believe that there will be an impact on a great many areas around the Irish sea coast, the Scottish coast and the rest of the UK.

The fishing industry is very important in my constituency. As such, although we all want to see the benefits and opportunities of energy efficiencies and renewables, we also want the fishing industry to be protected. By its very nature, and because the European Union is mostly responsible for the restrictions, the news for the fishing industry is not always good news. We want to make sure that we strike a balance. We need to make sure that the targets for renewable energy are met; that fishing can continue and co-exist; that the threat of habitat extinction is recognised; that fishing boats are not allowed near the sea turbines due to collision risks. Noise is generated by wind turbines; those who have one not too far away

know that. If that is multiplied by 10, 20 or in some cases 100, we can see the problems. We need to be sure that people's quality of life is not affected.

Targets have been set for 40% of all electricity generated in Northern Ireland and the area I represent to be provided through renewable energy by 2020. Location is important, and co-existence and co-operation are vital if we are all to be supportive of goals that must be achieved. We cannot allow fishing fleets to be displaced; they can co-exist. The mussel and shellfish beds off the Copeland islands off Donaghadee are an important habitat and they must be protected.

There are benefits to the economy, too. This has not been touched on so far, but as I understand it, wherever we have a sea or a wind turbine, we create jobs. Perhaps that jobs factor has not come into the equation so far, and the Minister will comment on it in summing up. In other parts of the UK, renewable energy generation has been approved and there are abundant examples of how it co-exists with other industries. That is just one of the many challenges for 2020 that I believe we should look at.

In his introduction, the Minister mentioned that there would be no targets—I may have heard him incorrectly; I would like some clarification. Targets are not set just for the sake of it, but it is important to have them, so that we know when we are achieving some of our goals. It is not a matter of setting targets and then failing to achieve them; it is important to have something to aim for. We all set targets in our life—I know I do, and I presume other Members do, too. We need to have something to aim for in relation to what can be achieved.

I referred earlier to the willow biomass project—another example of renewable energy of which Northern Ireland has taken advantage. I believe that it will reap benefits. There has to be a fairly vast acreage in order to get the advantage from it. Again, I would like to hear what incentives are available. It is not always about what grants are available; if there is an incentive for someone to plant willow biomass, why not do that? Perhaps the Minister will give us some indication of the incentives to encourage landowners, farmers or others who have the opportunity to develop it.

I am also very aware of the CRC—carbon reduction commitment—energy efficiency scheme, which is being brought into operation throughout the UK. It applies to any public body which in 2008 had at least one half-hourly electricity meter. The half-hourly market is required to register for the scheme. The Environment Agency estimates that some 1,100 public bodies will be participants in the scheme. Other registered public sector bodies must make a simple information disclosure at registration at the start of each phase of the scheme. It is hoped that the scheme will raise awareness in business, which I think is important, and there must also be the promotion of consumer efficiency. Those are the joint goals to try to aim for. I have been a part of a group aimed at encouraging the promotion of the Energy Saving Trust in the Province. Again, the scheme could be pushed elsewhere in the UK.

In these times of economic constraint, every pound saved will make a difference. It is not an exaggeration to say that pounds saved today will help balance the books at the end of the week. People need to understand that they can save around £37 a year by turning applications off standby, while reducing room

temperature by 1° C can cut heating bills by up to 10%. Being a modern man—I am sure there are plenty of modern men in this Chamber—I know that washing clothes at 30° C instead of at higher temperatures uses around 40% less electricity. That may sound a trifle boring, but it is something that the modern man has to address. If people are committed to energy saving and to renewable policies, they should consider all these things.

It is my hope that this Government will consider an initiative by which the regular working family can get help with grants to enable the installation of solar panels to generate hot water among other things. In the Minister's opening speech I think that there was mention of the legislation being put forward, and I would like to know more. Perhaps when I get a chance to read *Hansard*, I will have a better idea of exactly how any system might work. We are keen to see how it might happen. The cost of solar panels, for example, is sometimes prohibitive to those who cannot access grants. Yet long-term benefit to the environment, which is what we are aiming for, will far outweigh any cost factor. I have been contacted by a great number of young couples who would like to be green in their lifestyles, but who are working to pay off their mortgage and simply cannot afford the upgrades. Again, how will that work? The idea of the system that I got was that there would not be grants as such, but I would like to know more about how it would work.

Before I left to come here this morning, I saw a TV programme showing how energy-efficiency savings could be made in households—somewhere in London, I believe—whether it be through solar panels in the roof, the insulation of the walls or the collection of rain water in a downpipe, which is then put to household use. It provided a few examples of how that could happen. The person concerned spent a fairly large sum to make that happen, so the question I ask is how we can help those people to do more. How can we help families who cannot afford to do any of those things? That is something that we should look at, whether it be through a direct subsidy or through another method. If there is one, I would like to know what it is.

The future of energy efficiency lies in renewable energy that co-exists with business; it lies with encouraging people to do the small things that make a big difference in their homes; and it lies with this House making the prospects attractive and in every way encouraging businesses and homes to go the extra mile and see what the benefits will be.

3.18 pm

**Tessa Munt (Wells) (LD):** It is an honour to follow the hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) and to address the House for the first time on behalf of the people of Wells, the most beautiful constituency in the country. [*Interruption.*] Yes it is.

First, I wish to pay tribute to my predecessor, David Heathcoat-Amory, who sat in the House for 27 years, a longer period of service than that of any other MP for Wells since the Great Reform Bill. He was, perhaps, best known as a passionate Eurosceptic, and he voluntarily stood down from John Major's Government in order to pursue his convictions in that area. Although I do not share his views on Europe, I believe we should respect

[Tessa Munt]

MPs who put such a premium on their principles. Mr Heathcoat-Amory has recently announced that he does not intend to stand for election again. He is a man with other interests and activities, and I wish him well for the future.

Members will be familiar with the names of many places in the Wells constituency. It runs from the coast at Brea and Berrow, and Burnham-on-Sea and Highbridge in the west, to Shepton Mallet and Chilcompton in the east, and from Street in the south to Star and across the Mendips to Ston Easton in the north. My constituency also encompasses England's smallest city, Wells, with its glorious cathedral, and the towns of Glastonbury, Axbridge and the villages of Cheddar and Wedmore, and 170 other rural communities. I celebrate the addition of the village of Stratton-on-the-Fosse within the boundaries of the constituency at the last election, and recognise the service of my hon. Friend the Member for Somerton and Frome (Mr Heath) in previous years.

Wells is rural Britain at its very best. The Mendip hills, reaching over 1,000 feet high, look down over the Somerset levels and moors, much of which is below sea level. Somerset is well known for its farming, its Cheddar cheese and its cider.

**Ms Louise Bagshawe (Corby) (Con):** Hear, hear!

**Tessa Munt:** Yes.

Somerset is heavily reliant on tourism, with 26,000 people employed in attracting and serving tourists. Perhaps, in this of all weeks, it is most familiar to the 145,000 music fans, 35,000 staff and over 20,000 volunteers who visited or worked in the village of Pilton for the 40th Glastonbury festival. Many people have enjoyed some or all of Michael Eavis's 40 years of festivals, including those devotees who watched some of the 60 hours of live BBC coverage—some of it from yurts, I might add in reference to earlier conversations in the House. People were living in teepees and in camps but this time there was no rain, so we suffered not the mud. The BBC coverage was even in competition with the World cup and Wimbledon.

This weekend, I met people who first attended in 1970 at Worthy Farm, when the tickets cost £1 for the whole festival, which included free milk for the duration. The real benefit of the Pilton, or Glastonbury, festival is long-lasting: the huge support that Michael's festival brings to local communities and businesses and its promotion of Somerset and all it produces.

My constituency is a place of both great history and great legend. People can trace the footprints of King Alfred and King Arthur, as well as of our first tourist, Joseph of Arimathea, who reputedly brought the holy grail to Glastonbury for safekeeping. However, despite its long history, I would not want anyone to think the area is anything other than a collection of thriving modern communities sharing many of the challenges confronting the country as a whole.

I have entered the House because of my shouting at the radio in frustration for the past 20 years. I have spent most of my time saying, "People should be able to see that things can be done in a different way, and someone should do that." That frustration led me eventually—it possibly led my father initially—to think that that someone might be me, and that I should actually stand up for what I believe in.

I therefore stood for election, and I hope that in my time here I will be able to bring a little more common sense. By way of example of that, let me offer some of the issues that have struck me over the past couple of weeks. One of my constituents has come to me and said that her village has just replaced two bins at a cost of £340 and that everyone accepts that. I think that is an absurd amount of money to be paying for two bins, particularly as they are to be used for dog poo. That sort of thing cannot be sensible, and must not be done unquestioningly on behalf of people. We need to check that we get value for money and insist that our councils and authorities across the country ensure that that is the case.

My second example comes from Cross in my constituency. Again, the local authority has accepted that something may need to be done in that local community to alleviate some of the traffic problems, but a roundabout might cost £600,000. I cannot see how we can accept these things; we must ensure that in economically difficult times we question what is happening right the way through our land. I hope that I can bring a level of common sense.

When I was standing for election, I did not expect to find myself on the Government Benches—that was a nice surprise. I was delighted that when I looked at the coalition agreement I found that 27 different Liberal Democrat manifesto pledges had found their way into it. I have been questioned on several occasions about what it is like to be in the coalition team. I have told people that it is not absolutely where I thought I was going to be, but that a seven or eight-year-old child might dream about playing for West Ham and then at the age of 21, having spent 12 years training, they might suddenly get an offer from Fulham. What do they do then? Do they say, "No, no, I am going to hold on and wait until West Ham spot me"? They are not going to do that, and it is better to work with people and try to get spotted from somewhere else. Therefore, I view the coalition as a positive opportunity for Liberal Democrats to make progress in government and bring some of our manifesto pledges to bear.

I wish to take this opportunity to draw to the House's attention some of the problems that I have experienced and that some of my constituents have experienced in relation to the subject of this debate, "Progress and prospects in energy efficiency". National Grid has put forward proposals to plant a series of pylons across the beautiful Somerset levels and the moors, and up through the neighbouring constituencies of Bridgwater and West Somerset, and North Somerset; the route goes from Hinkley Point to Seabank, in Avonmouth. It covers a distance of some 40 miles, but National Grid insists that it must transmit power from Hinkley Point through cables on overhead pylons. It wishes both to upgrade the current network and to prepare for some future transmission, which may come from wind farms, from a possible use of the Severn river—the barrage, the lagoon, the reef or whatever other method of transmission may come from that—or from microgeneration.

The people of Somerset understand that there is a need to transmit electricity from A to B, but they surely have a right to some say in how that is done and how it might come about. National Grid sounds like a lovely beneficial or philanthropic organisation, but people need to remember that it is nothing like the National

Gallery or the National Trust; it is a multinational corporation with its shareholders' interests at its heart. I say to hon. Members that it should be allowed—this House has a place in making this happen—to bring modern practice and thinking into its research and development functions. Pylons are a 1920s technology, and they are not the solution to 21st century transmission problems.

The pylons that the National Grid Company proposes will be 400,000 KV, they will be 46 metres high—that is 152 feet in old money—they will hum, they will buzz and, most importantly, they will completely destroy the tourism opportunities in my constituency. The Campaign to Protect Rural England is trying to remove overhead lines and make moves to ensure that National Grid does not put pylons through areas of special landscape beauty, such as the national parks, or areas of outstanding natural beauty, such as the Mendip hills. It is also trying to prevent green belt land from being used. However, in a rural area an awful lot of land is not designated as such.

When questioned, National Grid said that although a great deal of my constituency is under consideration for the 17th world heritage site in the country, since we had not achieved that status it did not have to have any regard to that fact. It seems that those who live in an urban area—the northern part of the line passes through bits of Bristol and Avonmouth—get automatic protection from this blight, because National Grid intends to put the power underground as it is near housing.

This problem does not just affect 38,000 people. There are already 22,000 pylons in this country and 4,370 miles of overhead lines, and with the movement towards more nuclear power and, as I have said, the other forms of transmission that will be necessary, they will be coming to a place near all of us soon. So I come back to the fact that National Grid insists that pylons are the cheapest and most efficient means of carrying electricity. It does that because the framework in which it exists and the decisions that it is allowed to make fall within, as far as I can see, the Electricity Act 1989 and various other rules, such as the Holford rules, which date back to 1959. Those rules are stopping National Grid from considering the other options.

All that people in my constituency want is a choice, and as of last October National Grid went out to what it called consultation. People have a choice of three routes—just two in my area, really. Those routes go near schools, they go across open land and they go near housing. We should not only consider economic efficiency and financial cost, as the Electricity Act 1989 insists. Views of efficiency must have changed since 1989. We must consider the whole-life costs of the construction of pylons. Surely we should be considering the environmental cost and the cost to land and farmers, such as those who are prevented from running organic farms because of the proximity of pylons. Most importantly, we must consider the issues of health, specifically that of children's health. Finally, we must consider transmission losses.

National Grid faces opposition from thousands of local people. Some 38,000 are considered to be directly affected by the Hinkley to Avonmouth line alone. National Grid admitted that it was surprised by the number of responses that it received from people in Somerset and along the line. Up until now, it had

received only 247—the maximum number of objections that it had ever had to any proposal. Now, after this so-called consultation, it is trying to respond to the 4,106 responses that it has received. The objectors notably include Griff Rhys Jones and Carol Vorderman. Bill Bryson, the CPRE's president, is on record as saying:

“This is crazy—more pylons do not equal progress.”

Let me draw attention to the issue of health, in particular. There are illnesses—among them cancers, childhood leukaemia and depressive conditions—that are believed to be a health effect of living near high-voltage power lines. Studies at Bristol and at the university of California rate other illnesses and conditions as directly associated with electric and magnetic fields.

In particular, I want to draw the Minister's attention to a huge study in Sweden, in which the effects of overhead power lines have been measured on 500,000 people over a period of 25 years. That study found overwhelming evidence that electrical fields generated cancer in children at four times the normal rate and at triple the rate in adults. Sweden now lists electromagnetic fields, which is exactly what we find with overhead lines, as a class 2 carcinogen along with tobacco. I could also quote from studies in Russia, India and the United States, and our Department of Health found a link between proximity to power lines and childhood leukaemia that was sufficient to warrant a precautionary recommendation, including the option to lay new power lines underground where possible and to prevent the building of new residential buildings within 60 metres of existing power lines.

We should consider the framework in which National Grid must exist and think carefully before we force overhead power lines on to people in Somerset and across the country. What local people want is choice. It would be sensible and logical for them to be told the costs, risks and benefits of all the different types of transmission that could be used. It is clear from practices across the world that power can be put overground, as is proposed, but also underground and undersea. Surely, the most logical way of joining Avonmouth to Hinkley would be undersea. That is what people require. People should have the opportunity to say what they want having received all the information that they should have received. National Grid is running a new consultation, which involves it shouting at local people what it has already said: all it is doing is explaining in more detail why it is right and why people should not have that choice.

Looking purely at the economic argument, even that can be dismissed because although National Grid says that underground routes might cost 10 or 20 times as much, its counterparts in Denmark and Germany have been able to use underground lines at between two and a maximum of five times the cost. Undersea lines are also being used, and there are grids around Europe and across the world. National Grid even admits that that would cost a fraction of a penny per kilowatt-hour. I and some of my electorate have costed its £1.2 billion plan, if there is such a thing—its proposal if it wanted to go undersea—and it comes out that the cost, over 50 years, would be but 33 pence per person per year. We should consider Bill Bryson's comments on progress and the very bleak prospects for the people of Somerset in terms of this proposal and energy efficiency.

[Tessa Munt]

I ask the Minister to consider the draft national policy statement and to retrieve it from the black hole into which it may have disappeared before the election. I hope that he will look again at how we might make it work—for example, we could reconsider the Holford rules. Various paragraphs could be replaced by more balanced and neutral commentary on the pros and cons of undergrounding. Perhaps we should ask Ofgem to commit, in the next five years, to undergrounding a percentage of its network and to removing all the old pylons. We should also consider amending the Electricity Act 1989, particularly schedule 9, to require Ofgem and electricity companies to mitigate the landscape impact of electricity network infrastructure and to lay reports before Parliament on achievement.

I thank the Minister for considering the issues I have raised and for realising that the threats to rural communities are real, particularly in relation to tourism, which is our lifeblood in Somerset. Thank you for allowing me the luxury of time to speak, Mr Deputy Speaker. I promise to be an active and enthusiastic Member of the House in representing the people of Wells and Somerset.

3.39 pm

**Barry Gardiner** (Brent North) (Lab): May I take this opportunity to welcome you, Mr Deputy Speaker, to your new elected role? I look forward to serving in this House under your guidance. It is a pleasure to follow the hon. Member for Wells (Tessa Munt), who gave a very thoughtful and considered speech on the various aspects of her constituency. I am delighted to have been here for that.

In March the Conservatives proposed a “radical overhaul of Britain’s energy policy”.

The right hon. Member for Witney (Mr Cameron) was not above taking a sideswipe at what he called

“a succession of eleven energy Ministers and eight Secretaries of State”

in the 13 years under Labour, so I welcome the fact that, less than 13 weeks since that document was published, the Prime Minister has already appointed a new Minister with responsibility for energy efficiency, and a new Secretary of State.

However, it was not only the Energy Ministers who got a radical overhaul; Conservative energy policy did as well. The House will recall that in the Prime Minister’s “husky days”, when he went to Greenland to hug glaciers, we were told that nuclear power would be the Conservatives’ “energy of last resort”. Even so, in March they talked about fast-tracking the process of building new nuclear plant. Fast-tracking their energy of last resort?

That, of course, was Conservative policy BC—before Chris. The new Secretary of State was obviously keen to recycle the old policy—some might say that he would rather have composted it—as his views on nuclear energy are well known. As long ago as 5 November 2007 he set out his position on his website, as follows:

“Ministers must stop the side-show of new nuclear power stations now. Nuclear is a tried, tested and failed technology and the Government must stop putting time, effort and subsidies into reviving this outdated industry.”

No wonder it is called a coalition Government: some of them like coal, the rest of them prefer nuclear fission. It is a coal-ission—or perhaps it is more of a coll-ision.

The fact is that by 2020 the following nuclear stations will have closed: Wylfa, Oldbury, Hinkley Point B, Hunterston B, Heysham 1, Hartlepool and Dungeness B. The stations at Torness and Heysham 2 will follow soon thereafter. That is approximately 18% of the UK’s power generation that we will have to source elsewhere, just to maintain our current level of consumption. However, that description fails to account for any increase in population or consumption patterns, and it also means that a huge effort will be needed just to maintain an unsustainable status quo—a perfect description of Conservatism in general.

**Thomas Docherty:** Is my hon. Friend aware that a large number of coal power stations are also going to close? The Scottish Power station at East Lothian is one of many examples, so the Government will have an even bigger gap to close.

**Barry Gardiner:** My hon. Friend is entirely right, and the example that he gives illustrates the extent of the gap opening up between our generation capacity and our predicted levels of consumption. I hope that he will pursue that point, perhaps in his own remarks later this afternoon.

Of course, the best way to manage this shortfall in supply is to engineer a corresponding shortfall in demand. That is where energy efficiency is critical, and I was delighted that the Minister of State with responsibility for energy efficiency visited the Mark Group’s home energy efficiency academy earlier this month to welcome their 1,000th graduate—Shaun, I believe his name was. The academy is exactly the sort of resource that we need if we are to make sure that our small and medium-sized construction enterprises have the skills that they need to retrofit insulation to all the UK’s housing stock.

I trust that the Minister will acknowledge the fact that the Mark Group academy was set up in November 2007 as part of the Labour Government’s green homes initiative. In fact, Bill Rumble, the Mark Group director, said at the time:

“We welcome the Prime Minister’s”—

that is our Prime Minister, not the Conservative party’s Prime Minister—

“environment plans as a real step in the right direction in the task of arresting climate change and reducing the UK’s carbon emissions.

The Mark Group agrees with Gordon Brown’s assertion that the UK can take a global lead in tackling climate change and in doing so generating thousands of jobs.”

I do not wish to detract from the Government’s green deal; indeed, I applaud it. We need to accelerate the work of insulating the millions of homes without adequate loft insulation, and the millions of homes without cavity wall insulation. However, I would simply make two points. It is all very well to celebrate the 1,000th graduate trainee, but it sits uneasily with the abolition of the Train to Gain programme, which helped small construction and other companies to acquire precisely such skills, and to equip themselves and their workers for the green jobs of the future.

The second point is that it makes no sense to ask householders to improve the energy efficiency of their homes at the same time as increasing the cost of doing

so by 2.5%. I challenge the Secretary of State to show that deep inside his new Teflon Tory exterior there is still a limp Liberal longing to get out—to show us that the Liberal pledge before the election not to raise VAT was more than just the point scoring that his right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills has claimed it was. I ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change to speak to the Chief Secretary to the Treasury. The latter is another Liberal, and is, I think, the Member with the longest constituency name—Inverness, Nairn, Badenoch and Strathspey. After yesterday's oration to the House, he is also the Member with the shortest political credibility. They should agree to reduce VAT on the materials and labour used for increasing the energy efficiency of domestic properties. That would make a real difference. If the VAT on such work was 5% instead of 20%, that would go a tremendous way towards incentivising householders and other property owners to make sure that they do the necessary work.

If the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change will not do that, rolling out smart meters in every home; piloting pay-as-you-save and ways to make homes greener; introducing clean energy cashback schemes; and making the UK a centre of green industry—all that—is just so much recycling of the stated policy of the last Government, as set out in the “The UK Low Carbon Transition Plan”, published in July last year. The truth is that approximately 90% of what Ministers have announced in their green deal comes from that document. No wonder earlier this month the Department issued a YouTube video entitled “Chris Huhne launches Wind Week”.

Today, the Committee on Climate Change released its second annual report on progress towards a low-carbon economy. The committee makes it clear that we can deliver on our commitment to reduce emissions by at least 34% by 2020, but only if we accelerate our roll-out of renewables and effect a step change in domestic energy efficiency. So let me welcome the Secretary of State's remarks today, in which he said:

“we mustn't rely on economic recession to cut emissions.”

I agree. He continued:

“There has to be an enduring shift to low carbon...locked into the fabric of our economy in good times and bad.”

I commend to him “A Woodfuel Strategy for England”. After a very modest investment of about £16 million—million, not billion—a year for only seven years, it would show net benefits of approximately £30 million a year in energy cost savings, and would save 400,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. More than that, it would improve the biodiversity of our woodland heritage by cropping, lopping and clearing deadwood from under-managed woodland. The equivalent of 250,000 homes could be heated for a net £30 million benefit per annum, and the reinvigoration of our broadleaf woodlands—a truly efficient ecosystem-based solution. I hope the Minister will speak to his colleagues in the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and implement this strategy as part of his green deal.

**Gregory Barker:** The hon. Gentleman is an acknowledged expert and has a distinguished record in the field of woodland and forestry, in particular. It is hard to conceive how that would fit into the green deal, but I acknowledge his expertise and I personally have an interest in being more ambitious in relation to the wood economy. If he

would care to come into the Department and discuss it with me and officials, we could look at ways in which, in the context of these straitened financial times, we could do more to support that industry.

**Barry Gardiner:** I am grateful to the Minister for that offer, and I would be happy to take him up on it.

The wood fuel strategy is an important element of our energy efficiency programme. Wood is renewable and can be sourced locally, minimising transport costs. It is incredibly efficient, and represents part of the way in which we could transform local communities. I think that the Minister was present when there was an intervention from the Opposition Benches about the bulk provision of heat to communities and the importance of large biomass boilers, which could provide for communities in a much more energy-efficient way. That fits in with the wider aims of an energy efficiency strategy. I am grateful to the Minister for his offer, and look forward to speaking to him further about it.

If we are to make real progress on energy efficiency, public transport must become a priority for the new Government, which currently it is not. To put it simply, public transport must be the easiest, most accessible, most affordable and most reliable service available to the public. I was disappointed that the Minister said not one word about public transport as an instrument for delivering energy efficiency. Transport represents a fifth of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions; it did not represent so much as one fiftieth of his speech.

However, I welcome the new Government's proposal to introduce a minimum price for carbon. The second progress report from the independent Committee on Climate Change, which was published today, states:

“The carbon price within the EU Emissions Trading Scheme (ETS), and future expected prices, remain low. For the interim period before new electricity market arrangements are introduced, and in the absence of EU-wide action, there is a strong case for introduction of a UK carbon price floor”.

If the private sector is to be encouraged to invest in a low-carbon future, it must be given confidence that its investment will reap appropriate rewards. A floor price for carbon gives stability, and that certainty for the market that will drive investment. I welcome it.

Sometimes in this debate, party Front-Bench spokespeople have been tempted to imply that only their party has seen the light, saw the light first, or uniquely has the solutions to our energy problems. I was a late convert to environmental matters. Indeed, my family sometimes still admonish me for putting apple cores in the wrong bin. The environment was not on my political radar when I entered the House 13 years ago. Now I hold it to be the most vital topic on the political agenda, so I welcome the Conservative party's proposals for improving energy efficiency. However late they are I welcome them, especially where they have adopted good Labour party proposals. I welcome them even more when they get Liberals to go nuclear, even if under the coalition agreement the Liberals do not have to vote nuclear.

I hope the new Government will live up to their undoubted enthusiasm and undoubted good intentions on energy efficiency and climate change, but I warn them that we on the Opposition Benches will hold them to account where they backslide, and for the areas in which they fail to make the progress that we all need.

3.55 pm

**Ms Louise Bagshawe** (Corby) (Con): It is a pleasure to be called in the debate and to follow such excellent maiden speeches, most recently from my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Lorraine Fullbrook) and the hon. Member for Wells (Tessa Munt). My hon. Friend invoked the spirit of the suffragettes, and I am sure that she will have to plant no bombs in order to make an impact in the House. Her colleagues were most satisfied at her victory at the general election. The hon. Lady the Member for Wells gave a full and beautiful account of her lovely constituency, which I have visited, and I have enjoyed the Glastonbury music festival myself. She also touched briefly on the wonderful produce available in her constituency—the cheese and the cider. That was rather cruel on those of us who have been sitting here since before Prime Minister's questions and have not yet had lunch. Those are two very different constituencies, but they share one thing in common—they have fluent and talented Members of Parliament who are prepared to stand up for their constituents and fight passionately for them in the Chamber. I congratulate both Members on their maiden speeches.

There can be no doubt that we have, in this coalition Government, a Government who are prepared to make huge changes in our energy policy, including in respect of energy efficiency, and we have heard much about that from those on the Front Bench today. This is something that my constituents in Corby and east Northamptonshire will welcome very much. In my constituency, 12.8% of households still live in fuel poverty, and any measures that the Government can bring to bear that will assist them will be incredibly welcome. I was encouraged to hear my hon. Friend the Minister touch on the Government's commitment to lead from the front by reducing energy consumption by over 10% in Whitehall Departments in this year alone, 2010—the 10-10 programme.

One aspect of energy saving that has not yet been touched on in the debate is the way that the transparency revolution, which the Prime Minister intends to bring into all areas of government, will effect energy savings. Maidenhead council led the way by putting online in real time its energy consumption, and as soon as ratepayers could see the amount of energy consumed by the council, energy use in the council dropped during the next few months by 15%. Transparency is one other avenue that we can explore at local and national government level to ensure that we lead by example.

As various other hon. Members have mentioned—my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) and the hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), and even the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) touched on this in her opening remarks—efficiency in energy goes two ways: we must play defence but we must also play attack. I am in the unusual position of agreeing with the hon. Gentleman when I say that we must look at energy policy in the round. We cannot consider energy efficiency if we do not also look at the ways in which energy is being generated. This is of great concern to my constituents in Corby and east Northamptonshire, who are very concerned about saving the planet. I am a Conservative; I wish to conserve. I wish to conserve both the world in which we live and the beautiful countryside of east Northamptonshire, which I represent.

In north Northamptonshire, 10 separate wind farms have been applied for or are in development, of which three threaten my constituency and are very much opposed by local people. I hope that when Ministers consider energy policy and the vital importance of renewables, they will maintain our true commitment to localism. The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) said that one size does not fit all, and that must remain true. East Northamptonshire has one of the lowest wind areas in the United Kingdom, and energy must be efficient when it is produced just as when it is consumed. My constituents remember the right hon. Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband) saying that he intended to impose onshore wind turbines even when they were not wanted. He said:

“Government needs to be saying it is socially unacceptable to be against wind turbines in your area—like not wearing a seatbelt.” I happen to believe that it is both sensible and prudent for the people of east Northamptonshire to oppose wind farms in their area, given that they are in the lowest wind area in the United Kingdom. They live in an area of extraordinary natural beauty, and it is my duty to help to preserve it.

Let us compare the efficiencies of onshore and offshore wind. I shall try not to blind the House with statistics in the manner of the right hon. Member for Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath (Mr Brown), but a couple are worth listening to, because the difference in output is so remarkable. Out of 262 UK wind farms, 250 are onshore, and they produce about 3,500 MW between them. The mere 12 that are offshore, however, produce about 1,000 MW between them, and that level of efficiency must be taken into account when we look at wind power and how it is generated.

My hon. Friend the Minister spoke about a step change, and given our current situation, and the fact that we are considering energy efficiency and a low-carbon economy, that is exactly what is needed. We will not shift to a low-carbon economy unless we embrace nuclear power. If we are to embrace nuclear power and bring it in to provide for energy efficiency, energy security and a low-carbon economy, we must bring the public with us, but we will not do so unless we look at safe ways of disposing of nuclear waste.

My constituency also faces the prospect of a nuclear dump in the village of King's Cliffe, 20 miles from which 250,000 people live in various towns and cities. The dump is opposed by local authorities of all stripes, from Labour-controlled Corby borough council to Tory-controlled East Northamptonshire council and Northamptonshire county council. I am a huge supporter of nuclear power, but it cannot be delivered if applications for dumps completely ignore safety levels. The application in my constituency is essentially nothing more than a large hole in the ground. An application has also been made to transport huge volumes of low-level waste across the country. The previous Government introduced that change in policy, and until then the site could not even have been considered. When rain reacts with the waste, radioactive leachate forms, and that will have to be pumped out and transported to Avonmouth.

**Dr Whitehead:** I have listened carefully to the hon. Lady. She is in favour of nuclear but not in her area, because of the consequences; and she is in favour of wind but not in her area, because of the consequences. Are there any appropriate low-carbon technologies for her area which she could support?

**Ms Bagshawe:** I am in favour of nuclear power. I am in favour of the safe disposal of nuclear waste. I am not in favour of the unsafe disposal of nuclear waste, which is proposed for my area, where there are no nuclear power stations for miles around. I am in favour of wind power, and, as I said, I am in favour of offshore wind power, which is highly efficient. Sadly, however, my constituency is landlocked, so I cannot give the hon. Gentleman the assurance that he seeks, namely that I am in favour of offshore wind power in my constituency, because there is nowhere to put it.

In contrast, let us look at safe nuclear waste disposal sites—the type that will encourage public confidence in a new generation of nuclear power stations. The Dounreay site in Caithness has already received planning permission, and in contradistinction it proposes to put waste in steel drums, compact them and place them inside steel containers within a concrete-lined and covered vault. I can see how that would instil confidence in people. The people in King's Cliffe and its surrounding areas have all the confidence of knowing that there is a certain type of clay at the site. The application does not even possess a roof.

Is it any wonder that my constituents have asked me for help? My predecessor said that he would not get involved because it was “a planning matter”, but I happen to believe that on such major planning matters people cry out for an MP's protection. A true carbon economy must be based on nuclear power. Is it nimbyism to say that an application is completely unsuitable? I do not think it is if one can make the case. Hundreds of my constituents have made that case in their representations to me, and when the application comes up for appeal in October I shall write to the relevant Secretaries of State to oppose it most vehemently.

In my mind, the most important thing that has happened in the field of energy over the past couple of years is the announcement in Japan by Toyota that it is developing a solar cell that can power a car. That will truly change geopolitics, energy security and our planet. Indeed, “Passion”, the excellent book that I wrote in 2010 and was nominated as romantic novel of the year—I highly recommend it to the House—was a thriller based around just that theme. I urge the Minister and the rest of the Front-Bench team to look long and hard at investing in solar power once the technology is in place to harness the power of the sun. There will no local objections anywhere to the power of the sun, so we will be in very good shape.

Meanwhile, I know that the Front-Bench team are doing everything that they can. I ask them again to look at the transparency revolution and encourage local councils to bring forward efficiency measures and put their energy use online, so that people see savings being made in real time.

In the speech that he made when standing for the leadership of my party, my right hon. Friend the Prime Minister famously said:

“Let sunshine win the day”,

and a little transparency in energy conservation would surely not go amiss. Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker; I look forward to hearing further contributions.

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Nigel Evans):** I am new to this job, so I shall have to have another look at “Erskine May” to see what it says about product placement.

4.5 pm

**Nia Griffith (Llanelli) (Lab):** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker; you have taken the words out of my mouth. Perhaps the Minister will place some very large solar panels in the constituency of the hon. Member for Corby (Ms Bagshawe).

Let us get on with the issue of prospects in energy efficiency. First, I should like to talk about the situation of the Welsh Assembly Government and the cuts. As we know, energy efficiency does not often get called a front-line service. Housing and education are clearly front-line services, but they take a large proportion of the Assembly budget. What money is left for the measures such as those carried out by the Department for Communities and Local Government in England—housing issues—and the excellent Welsh Home Energy Efficiency scheme, which is similar to the English Warm Front scheme? It worries me that the cuts to the Assembly Government could disproportionately affect what energy efficiency measures they are able to implement.

The Assembly Government have some innovative schemes in the valleys, where they are renovating ageing properties, which have traditionally had poor energy efficiency. That type of scheme could be under threat. I hope that the Minister will make representations to Treasury Ministers that particular consideration needs to be given to protecting energy efficiency budgets. That also applies to the money passed to the Assembly Government.

Sometimes, there are special schemes that attract a “Barnett consequential”—a technical term for additional funding for a recently announced Government measure that had not previously been put into the budget. The boiler scrappage scheme came under that title. If we do not get the funding in, a lot of the good work that has been going on could easily dry up.

We have to give much greater priority to energy efficiency than has been evident in much of the talk about which services we can protect. We all understand that if we get the investment in and continue to push for considerable amounts of energy efficiency savings, that will have considerable impact on savings made by individuals and public bodies.

During the last Government, there were productive discussions about feed-in tariffs and in April this year a scheme was launched, incentivising those who produce their own energy to produce extra, which they can feed into the grid. Such people are often extremely conscious of energy efficiency measures in their own homes, and they also contribute to the energy needs of the nation. I am disappointed that feed-in tariffs have not yet been extended to people who already had energy-saving equipment installed in their homes—the pioneers who two or three years ago, when such things were much more expensive and not so many Government grants were available, were putting photovoltaic systems, solar panels or wind turbines on their properties and were able to feed electricity into the grid. The coalition Government need to look carefully at what they can do to ensure that those who already had these installations benefit from the feed-in tariffs, not necessarily backdating that to cover all the electricity that has ever been produced from such installations, but from April, when that benefit was introduced for people who had new installations put in.

[*Nia Griffith*]

That relates to an issue that I am sure that my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) will mention—renewable heat incentives. I will leave him to elaborate further, but it is another matter that the coalition Government need to look at again. They should support the plans that we had for 2011.

A difficulty appears to have arisen across the country in terms of electricity costs, which are allowed to vary because Ofgem accepts that varying costs in different geographical areas reflect the cost of service provision. However, that leaves people in south Wales with an average electricity bill of perhaps £467 per year, while those in the midlands may pay £433 per year. Surely such regional differences are an outdated anomaly when the market has been opened up so that all providers can now supply different areas and one supplier no longer supplies one area alone. Will the Minister have talks with Ofgem to see whether the current pricing arrangements can be looked at again, because they do not seem to be very fair and equitable?

I am also very concerned about rented property. It is often the poorest families who find themselves in private rented accommodation, some of which is frankly disgraceful. It can be very draughty because it has never been properly insulated, and the costs that residents pay for their energy provision are enormous. They often do not have central heating and are paying for the bar on the electric fire or the most inefficient forms of gas fire. There has been no encouraging sign from the Government, or from the Minister today, that they are going to regulate landlords in the way that Labour planned to do. This needs to be tackled head on, not only in regulating the types and standards of property but in incentivising landlords to upgrade the energy efficiency ratings of the properties that they rent out. The lack of such energy efficiency is a serious problem for those members of our society who are least able to pay.

Another issue that the Minister would do well to tackle is waste in commercial premises. When we put on our coats to go and do our shopping in the autumn, in the run-up to Christmas, we find ourselves in various forms of shop or shopping centre with open doors and enormously overheated areas. Of course we must have a reasonable amount of heat for the shop assistants working there, but an awful lot of people complain that they are absolutely boiling when they are walking around these shops. Obviously the shops would benefit from spending a lot less on the heat that they are producing, but as yet they still seem to be doing it. There is a great need for discussions with the Minister about ways of trying to keep temperatures down to sensible levels and thereby make considerable savings; perhaps there could be voluntary codes. Linked to that is the huge amount of money that is spent on heating and lighting shop displays for 24 hours a day. Perhaps we could think about guidelines on the excessive amount of energy that is used in commercial premises at all hours, even when they are not open to the public.

Public transport is a major source of energy use, and it contributes significantly to what we can do about our carbon emissions. I share with my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) considerable disappointment that we have not heard a lot more about it, either from the Minister today or in the coalition Government's programme.

We need to continue to invest heavily in rail infrastructure, whether through electrification of the line from London to south Wales, which I hope will go further than Swansea and out into west Wales, or through building terminals that enable freight to go by rail more easily. That could be achieved through increased rolling stock, because people do not enjoy a journey when they are packed into an overcrowded train like sardines in a tin, and they therefore revert to going by car. All those matters need to be considered carefully if we are to reduce the amount of car traffic.

There is rolling stock for Sunday trains, and it is a great shame that it is not used more extensively. In my area, people of course go shopping on Sundays, and they like to go to sporting events and the seaside. However, we are on the main line from London to west Wales and the earliest train that we can get on a Sunday from Llanelli to Tenby, a well known seaside resort, is at quarter to 3 in the afternoon. When someone gets their family there it is quarter past 4, by which time there is no point being there for a nice day at the seaside. Instead, people pile into their cars and cause traffic jams and huge queues at Carmarthen. When they get to Tenby, the traffic is so bad that there is a park-and-ride scheme to keep the town centre free for pedestrians. It is an absolute nightmare, but if people could go by train it would all be avoided. We need to reconsider people's ability to go away for weekends to stay with their families and so forth, and we need a much clearer picture of franchise requirements for Sundays, which should reflect changed lifestyle patterns. I hope that the Minister will talk to his colleagues in the Department for Transport to see whether they can give public transport a greater priority.

Another matter that I should like the Minister to take up with his colleagues in the DFT is encouraging people to think about their fuel consumption in their private cars. I think a few Members are in their places who will remember the 1970s, when a limit of 50 mph was imposed because of the so-called fuel crisis. A lot of people are unaware of the different fuel consumption patterns of their vehicles and the fact that going at very high speeds can often increase consumption considerably. We need a public information campaign, as we have had on other energy efficiency matters, to point out to people what savings they can make. People are incentivised by the idea of saving, but they are unaware or forget that savings exist. Obviously the situation is not the same for all vehicles. They vary, and technology has improved enormously, but there are still savings to be made and well informed public information campaigns could help considerably.

I shall finish now, because I know that many other Members would like to get in. We have to ensure that we do not let the whole issue of reducing our emissions and being as energy efficient as possible become sidelined by people who say, "We cannot afford to do that because of the financial crisis". We cannot afford not to do it, because great savings can be made from both the public purse and private individuals' pockets. We must all make the most of every opportunity to push the Government for a much more energy-efficient programme.

4.19 pm

**Neil Carmichael** (Stroud) (Con): Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker, for calling me to speak. I missed the opening speeches, and I am very sorry about that. It was an error

on my part—I was somewhere else when they were taking place, and I regret it because I would have liked to hear what the Front Benchers said. I may well repeat something that has already been said. Nevertheless, energy efficiency is a really important subject, and it is great that we are having this debate.

While I was sitting here and hearing about the fuel crisis of the 1970s, when Ted Heath was Prime Minister, I was reminded of the fact that the Department of Energy was created at that time to solve the crisis of the shortage of fuel and deal with the issue of coal. More recently, the Department of Energy and Climate Change has been created to carry out the different task of ensuring that our energy use is more efficient and carbon-friendly. I welcomed its new guise when it was introduced by the Labour Government and I salute it now as it is still in place.

The most important thing that we can do is liberalise the energy market to encourage more transparency and competition. By doing that, we would effectively introduce new systems of energy provision, which would to some extent be micro—and I will have much to say about one particular form later. It is essential that we recognise that the energy market in the future has to be much more liberal in both supply and demand terms, although I shall concentrate on supply today.

The coalition Government have made some fantastic strides forward and have in place an excellent team of Ministers in DECC. The Government have also introduced the green deal, and I note that that has been well saluted by Labour Members as it has by my colleagues. The Government are also talking about a smart grid approach. It is important that we have a grid that is much more receptive to new types of energy from smaller micro locations. I made much of feed-in tariffs during the election campaign, because my constituency is really excited about such issues, and those tariffs will be a huge step in the right direction. The green investment bank will also encourage new technologies to be developed and launched.

One of those new technologies must be modern micro hydro schemes. The role that micro hydro generation can play will be enormous, and it will help in several other areas. What is a micro hydro scheme? A small scheme generates between 1 MW and 15 MW, a mini scheme generates less than 1 MW but more than 100 KW and a micro scheme generates between 5 KW and 100 KW. The latter is sufficient to supply half a small community or small rural industry, and that is what I want to talk about in some detail today.

It is true that sometimes it is difficult to introduce technology of any description, because there is always someone to say that it should not be adopted. Wind power has that difficulty, and actually so does hydro power. We must think more in terms of incentivising, rather than of yielding to the “not in my back yard” approach. That is an important point for all micro energy schemes.

Hydro schemes, by their very nature, will be bespoke. They deal with water, and it does not come in square tins ready for tapping, but in rivers, ponds, pools and mills that are all different shapes. The other important aspect of hydro schemes is that they can help in dealing with other things, such as flood management. In Stroud, we have quite a lot of flood problems, including floods down valleys and along the vale. Controlling water

through some sort of flood management scheme can lead to a hydro electric solution, and we can consider that as part of our overall environmental policies.

In Stroud, for example, I can see opportunities where introducing hydro schemes would also help flood problems by harnessing water halfway up a valley rather than allowing it to flood at the bottom. In fact, I am hoping to speak to the Minister shortly on this very subject, because he has been to Stroud and looked at a typical mill pond with all the characteristics one would need, first, for flood management and, secondly, for electricity production through a hydro scheme. I hope that will be developed in some detail. There are plenty of opportunities for that elsewhere in the country. Stroud has more than 200 old mill, but there are more than 20,000 across England, all of which, to some extent, could play a role in hydro generation. We need to bear that in mind.

**Gregory Barker:** May I assure my hon. Friend that although I visited his constituency while we were in opposition, I well remember the visit and was extremely impressed with that micro hydro installation? There is plenty of scope for increasing the role of microgeneration technology in particular. He is absolutely right that it plays a dual role in generating electricity and in flood abatement, and I can assure him that the Department is looking with fresh eyes at this issue.

**Neil Carmichael:** I thank the Minister very much. That is more than worth the time I waited to make this speech.

I want to expand my argument. Small households can also have micro schemes, which I would like to see and which we can enable. This country has so many waterways open to that very small potential scheme. However, there are things to be aware of, one of which is the Environment Agency’s responsibility for managing waterways. It has functions connected with, for example, fish management. Fish and hydro schemes do not, of course, necessarily go together, because as somebody pointed out to me the other day, a hydro scheme is a very good fish masher. So we need to find ways of protecting fish and allowing them to flourish rather than simply putting them through a masher. However, the Environment Agency also needs to be encouraged to note the advantages of flood management and hydro power when considering its overall responsibilities for waterways.

When I went last week to an npower-sponsored event encouraging universities to think about new technology, particularly energy technology, I noticed just how imaginative students can be. Two universities won. Bristol university came up effectively with a mobile telephone tariff system for energy supply, which is well worth considering and expanding. I am hoping to talk to the university in more detail about its scheme, because I think it could be quite useful. The university of Birmingham came up with a scheme for hydro power and made it clear that it is not so much the flow that matters as the amount of water available. It did some interesting mathematical calculations to make that point. Again, I want to take that up in more detail. In essence, we need to liberalise the energy market, particularly in small-scale areas, and hydropower can, and will, play a significant role.

[Neil Carmichael]

My second point is about nuclear power. The hon. Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) talked about nuclear power and commented on the Liberal Democrat's position on it compared with our own. I am keen on nuclear power because I recognise that it is obviously the provider of a base load. We have to understand that a significant amount of energy will always be used at any time, and the kind of facilities needed to produce that will include a nuclear power station.

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, the President of France from 1974 to 1981, tackled energy pressures in France quite well, by recognising that France should not be dependent on oil, but instead move over to nuclear power. Today, more than 80% of French energy is produced by nuclear power, with the rest produced by renewables; and anyone who drives down as a holidaymaker, as I often do, can see quite a lot of renewables.

**Damian Collins** (Folkestone and Hythe) (Con): My hon. Friend is making some important points about nuclear power. Does he agree that sensible planning for the future needs of nuclear power and the amount of base load energy that we might require from nuclear energy is important? It would be sensible to advance with as many viable sites as possible, in order that we can get as much new nuclear on stream as soon as possible, so does he also agree that Dungeness power station in my constituency should be considered as an additional site for the new build programme?

**Neil Carmichael:** I concur with everything that my hon. Friend has said. We need to plan ahead and recognise that even if we start building a new power station tomorrow, we would still be getting less electricity from nuclear power for some time to come because of the decommissioning process, so we need to take action and get on with it. However, there are some key points to be made, and one of them must be this: nuclear power has to be cost-effective. It is important that we recognise that. The second most important thing—this is especially important for me, as I have a nuclear power station in my constituency that is being decommissioned—is that the cost of the clean-up must be included in the cost of the overall nuclear bill. We cannot go on mopping up afterwards. We have to be sure that the cost of building and running a nuclear power station includes the cost of clean-up.

**Thomas Docherty:** I used to work at Berkeley power station a few years ago, so I am familiar with it, and I can assure the hon. Gentleman of the deep affection in which nuclear power is held in his constituency, as I am sure he knows. One thing that would perhaps concern me about the coalition's plans for cuts is the effect on the Nuclear Decommissioning Authority. One point that I hope he will be raising with the Minister is that when the NDA's budget is set for the next five to 10 years, the important thing will be getting the right decommissioning strategy, not keeping his right hon. Friend the Chancellor of the Exchequer happy.

**Neil Carmichael:** I certainly recognise the public expenditure pressures on the decommissioning costs at Berkeley, because I was there when a reduction was made in the spending round towards the tail-end of the previous Government, so I tend to agree with what the

hon. Gentleman has said. I am pleased that he was at Berkeley and I hope that he enjoyed it there. It is in a beautiful part of my constituency, notwithstanding the fact that the power station is still there in its concrete form. The rest of the area is absolutely beautiful, and it is a perfectly safe place to be. I have been there several times myself, so if the hon. Gentleman still has any friends there, I will pass on his greetings.

That is what I wanted to say about nuclear power—that it has to be cost-effective and include the cost of clean-up—but I agree that we need a plan to ensure that we know where the next power stations are going to be.

**Ms Bagshawe:** My hon. Friend is making some excellent points about nuclear power. Does he agree that in order to advance the programme, we need to take local people with us? Does he also agree that his constituency and those of my hon. Friends the Members for Folkestone and Hythe (Damian Collins) and for Suffolk Coastal (Dr Coffey) are perfect examples of where local people are welcoming and embracing nuclear power, which is what we need to bring forward?

**Neil Carmichael:** We certainly do need to have localism in our planning system. It is great that this Government are so determined to ensure that local people have a proper say in all aspects of planning—certainly in housing, and also in infrastructure and energy—and quite right too. The answer to a lot of these issues is to incentivise local communities to take up the things that are not only necessary in our national interest but able to reflect their concerns. It is quite right that our people are keener than one might imagine on building nuclear power. I am from the north-east, so I know a little bit about Windscale—it is Sellafield now; I am quite old. There is support in those places, so I agree with my hon. Friend.

I want to say a few words about transport, as public transport in particular was mentioned earlier. The key thing is that we need to consider electric cars more than we have in the past. We need to recognise that they are a reality and that we can develop the technology in ways that would impress someone like Jeremy Clarkson. The brutal fact is that the electric car will in the long run be a reliable thing to get about in for long journeys, and the charging of those cars might well turn out to be easier than we first imagined.

I am delighted to say that my constituency has a manufacturer—Himag—producing transformers no bigger than a fist that can propel a Hummer vehicle. If anyone knows anything about a Hummer vehicle, they will know that it is large and heavy. That sort of technology is already out and about, and some large car manufacturers—Renault is one example, I believe—are already preparing to launch a range of models that would suit families or individuals quite well. I believe that those cars will be on the market in two or three years' time. We should celebrate and encourage that sort of technology.

Trains are also really important. I use the train all the time. From Stroud, it has to be diesel because we do not have electrified lines, but we need to think more about that. We also need to think about getting more trains on the track, as we now have the technology that allows that to happen. We should invest in that technology so that we can produce the train that takes people to where they need to be and thus increase traffic flow.

I was impressed by the excellent speech of my hon. Friend the Member for Wells (Tessa Munt), who talked about pylons. She is quite right that pylons crossing the landscape are not particularly attractive, but I would end on this important point about electricity supply. There are people living in Amberley who would just love to have a reliable electricity supply; they are waiting for underground cables to be put in, so that a proper electricity supply can get to all parts of the area. It is important to realise that there are ways of doing these things and also that local communities, such as Littleworth in Amberley, have needs.

In summary, I think that liberalising the market is the key. Having confidence in technology is also essential, as is being willing to take those technologies forward by incentivising local communities and individuals to grasp the opportunities before them. Those are the ways in which we can, first, secure our energy supply and, secondly, make sure that that supply is good for our environment and good for the communities that use the energy.

4.38 pm

**Dr Alan Whitehead** (Southampton, Test) (Lab): I have detected that in recent contributions we seem to be falling into something of a nuclear idyll, so I want to try to pour a little cooling water, shall we say, on that particular idyll. We need to recognise that nuclear power and its consequences—irrespective of whether they are loved by local citizens or built in the Corby constituency—are some way away. There will in all probability be no nuclear power coming on stream until the early 2020s. If and when it comes on stream, assuming that new nuclear power stations are built at no public expense, they will be relatively small in output over the early years.

This emphasises that nuclear power is not coming over the hill tomorrow to save us all as far as low-carbon energy is concerned. The targets on carbon emissions reduction and, indeed, the replacement of something like 40% of our generation and transmission capacity by the early 2020s will have to be achieved without nuclear power by means relating to renewable energy, the building of conventional power plants—I trust with carbon capture technology—and, of course, a very substantial step forward in energy efficiency.

**Thomas Docherty:** My hon. Friend has not mentioned the issue of life extensions to existing nuclear power stations such as Hunterston B and Torness, which would certainly take us through the gap period.

**Dr Whitehead:** My hon. Friend raises the interesting point of the possible life expectancy of nuclear power plants. I recognise that there is something of a dilemma in respect of old and new nuclear power stations and predictions of extensions, and that there are issues such as core cracking and whether extensions can be safely undertaken. He makes a fair point, however, that some extensions might be undertaken to bridge the gap. The key point, however, is that one of the best ways to ensure our energy supplies are secure over the coming period and that the generation meets the demand is to ensure that there is less demand for energy, and that the energy we do use is used much more efficiently.

**Mark Tami:** I agree with my hon. Friend that even if we start building nuclear power stations now, there will be a 10-year period before they really start to have an

impact, but unless we take that decision now we will face an even greater gap in future, which we will have to fill by some other means. Just putting that decision off until tomorrow will make the matter worse in future.

**Dr Whitehead:** My hon. Friend is tempting me into an entirely different debate, in which there are very interesting considerations relating not least to a new report on the renewable valuation around our coasts and on our land and how we might be able to use those renewables for our long-term, as well as our shorter-term, future energy supply. I suspect, however, that if I were to address that topic, you might suggest that I have strayed rather far from the issues we are debating today, on which I do want to concentrate, Mr. Deputy Speaker.

Energy efficiency is a crucial component of our future energy landscape. I am pleased that the energy efficiency ambitions that the new Government have set out continue those proposed, and acted upon, by the previous Government. I recognise that the new ministerial team has strong personal commitments to these issues, and therefore energy efficiency has a bright start in terms of ambition and of understanding that this area is crucial. After all, 40% of our energy is consumed in buildings and that represents 40% of our carbon emissions. About 80% of household energy goes on heating our homes and water, and that alone represents some 13% of the UK's greenhouse gas emissions. Therefore, getting a serious grip on energy efficiency in our homes and commercial and industrial buildings offers potentially enormous, and relatively early, rewards in respect of our overall position on carbon emissions and energy consumption.

However, we as a country face this situation from a poor position historically. It is true that the previous Government made enormous strides in improving energy efficiency, particularly of public sector homes, and homes provided by registered social landlords. The Committee on Climate Change report that was published today conspicuously states that its indicators for activity on loft insulation, cavity wall insulation and energy efficiency in homes were met during the last year of the previous Labour Government. Considerable progress has been made, but our private sector homes remain energy-inefficient. The average standard assessment procedure rating in private sector homes is 49, which is a long way from level that we ought to aim for if we are to have a reasonable expectation that homes will be relatively energy-efficient and will have a low output of waste and energy emissions as far as the activities of the people who live in them are concerned.

We can all agree that this House has substantial energy-efficiency ambitions, that there is urgent action to be undertaken and that a number of programmes are in process and a number of ambitious new programmes, some of which we have heard about this afternoon, could get under way to address those issues. We need to examine whether the ambitions are being met, whether we have the ability to make those changes in practice and whether other things might be done to ensure that the ambitions are realised.

As a small indicator of the difference between ambitions and realisation I shall discuss the new part L of the building regulations, which were published recently. I had anticipated that it would contain new guidelines on the energy efficiency of circulation pumps in central

[*Dr Whitehead*]

heating. If, as was suggested during consultation by the previous Government, the regulations had mandated new and very energy-efficient circulation pumps, we could have saved as much as 2% of the electricity consumption in households—that could have been done by that measure alone. However, the new regulations state that it is perfectly okay to have circulation pumps that are A to G rated, not the A to C rated that had been anticipated. That shows an immediate difference between ambition and practice. I sincerely hope that the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker), who has been inviting various other people to come to see him about various issues, will invite me in the very near future to a round-table meeting on circulation pumps and why they should be more energy-efficient. I am sure that he will find time in his busy diary to have a substantial round-table meeting on that pressing issue. I cite that issue as a small example to show that one needs to keep one's eye closely on the difference between the reality of achievement and the ambition that one has when one puts forward new plans.

The plan that has been the centrepiece of this afternoon's discussion is the green deal. I feel like someone who is being told that a great new concerto is coming out, that it is about to be performed and that when people turn up to the concert hall they will find that it is terrific, but who has not been told whether it is by Mozart or Salieri. I presume that when we get to the concert hall we will find out whether the green deal is as good as we are led to believe. On the surface, a green deal that takes away the idea of an up-front loan and places the onus on the long-term consequences of the bills of those household consumers, their descendants or the next people who come along to the house appears to represent a positive way forward. We must recognise that that has limitations. Just as the pay-as-you-save scheme implemented by the previous Government had its limitations, this green deal also has potential substantial limitations.

**Gregory Barker:** This is a very important point. The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right. We do not for a minute expect the green deal to be able to cover the whole gamut of energy-efficiency installations. I think I said in my opening speech that there will be hard-to-treat properties and that some of the most vulnerable fuel-poor will not be covered sufficiently by the green deal pay-as-you-save model. That is where we will look to restructure completely and focus even more the ongoing long-term energy supplier obligation.

**Dr Whitehead:** I thank the Minister for that clarification. He anticipates, to a little extent, some of the things that I was going to say about the consequences of the green deal and the issues that surround it, such as the problems of hard-to-treat homes, which we need to take seriously if we are to make progress as far as energy efficiency is concerned.

Let us be clear: the green deal will concern itself primarily with owner-occupied houses in the private sector where there is a deal on hand. I stand to be corrected, but it seems to me that there is substantial work to be done as far as the social housing sector, the public housing sector and, indeed, hard-to-treat properties are concerned.

**Gregory Barker:** The beauty of the green deal as conceived and as we intend to implement it is that it applies to all sectors of housing. It is most applicable to the area that has been hardest to treat and in which there has been least progress in the past—that is, the private rented sector. It will finally cut through that Gordian knot as landlords will not have to pay the up-front costs for benefits that will accrue to their tenants. There will now be a real incentive and no financial disincentive for landlords to upgrade their properties and increase the quality of life of their tenants while decreasing their energy bills. That will be a real bonus.

**Dr Whitehead:** Again, I thank the Minister for that clarification. The beauty of the concert that we are about to hear is being talked up again. However, the questions of hard-to-treat properties, rented properties, landlords and partnerships are all issues that we must consider very carefully in deciding how the green deal and other elements will work best together as far as energy efficiency is concerned.

We have heard mention this afternoon, for example, of the partnership between local authorities, third sector organisations and consumers in the comprehensive redevelopment of energy-efficiency retrofitting of homes. We have heard about the very good example of Kirklees borough council. Interestingly, the example of Kirklees was based on the injection by Kirklees of £10 million into the process in partnership with other local authorities.

In that context, thinking, among other things, about the debate that we had in this House yesterday on local government financing and local government cuts, I ask a question of myself. As a result of the cuts being handed out to local authorities, will there be local authorities that have £10 million to invest in future partnership arrangements? That will be very important in getting progress on the future arrangements represented at present by the community energy saving programme as far as whole-area developments in local authority areas are concerned. Will the enfeeblement of local authorities' ability to undertake such new initiatives be such that we will have eliminated one of the partners in that process in the not-too-distant future?

I have a small point to make regarding landlords. The changes in housing benefit that are coming about might cause landlords at least to question whether to invest in their properties given the return that they might get in rent, so there are side effects, in relation to other policy decisions, that might have an impact on ambitions for the green deal.

One important issue that I have mentioned is whether the green deal simply includes passive insulation and energy-efficiency measures such as loft insulation and cavity wall insulation. Does it go beyond that to include householders' ability to generate their own energy and therefore to operate much more efficiently in terms of net emissions? In the code for sustainable homes, the target for 2016, in terms of new build housing, will include accession to a level 6 arrangement, but that could not be adhered to without some form of microgeneration power production being built into those homes when the zero-carbon target is agreed.

The Minister is right to say that we should not substitute microgeneration for energy-efficiency measures, as they are consequent on each other. However, in a real

programme for developing energy efficiency in homes over the medium term, microgeneration has to be seen as very important within any efficiency drive in those homes. If we simply eliminate microgeneration from the process, we will put back for a considerable time the possibility of microgeneration following on from those energy-efficiency arrangements.

It was interesting to see nothing in the Budget for Warm Front. I assume that, in the vision put forward by the Government, it will effectively be subsumed into the green deal because it apparently has very wide effects. If Warm Front is simply collapsed within a few years' time, the works that have been undertaken under Warm Front, which include the possibility of putting microgeneration devices into homes, will be lost and a group of hard-to-reach consumers who might not be particularly advantaged by the green deal will also be lost in the process.

**Gregory Barker:** On Warm Front, let me assure the hon. Gentleman that more than £300 million is available for a programme of work through this year and the winter to March 2011. That stands, and no long-term decisions have yet been made about Warm Front. As I have said, we recognise that there will always be a need for special arrangements for the most vulnerable people and hard-to-treat homes, and that we cannot just depend on pay-as-you-save schemes. Obviously, Warm Front will be subject to the comprehensive spending review this autumn, as all other Government programmes will be.

**Dr Whitehead:** I thank the Minister for that further clarification, but his comments support my feeling that there is no clear understanding of what will happen to Warm Front after the current period of investment in that programme expires. Similarly—this relates particularly to my points about the need to include microgeneration in the aim of improving general household energy efficiency over the medium to long term—there seems to have been no clarification regarding the future of the renewable heat incentive. If, for whatever reason, the renewable heat incentive is abandoned—a process that I suspect is under way at the moment—the ability of homes to install equipment vital for long-term energy efficiency, such as solar thermal devices, or ground source or air source heat pumps, will be severely undermined.

The Minister has said that households that enter a deal, whether it is loan-based or part of a pay-as-you-save arrangement, will have to pay the money back when the investment period comes to an end. The RHI is therefore absolutely essential, and I fear for the sector's future if it is abandoned or undermined.

**Gregory Barker:** I am not in a position to make a statement about the RHI today, but I can assure the right hon. Gentleman that we are committed to an ambitious renewable heat agenda. We hope to make an announcement as soon as possible.

**Dr Whitehead:** I thank the Minister for that intervention, and for promoting me to the Privy Council. I look forward to that announcement, and I sincerely hope that my concerns about the RHI are misplaced. It is essential that the initiative goes ahead next year, so that it can underpin the revolution that is taking place in the development of microgenerated heat.

The Minister also said that it will cost something like £10,000, at the very least, to treat each hard-to-treat property. Inevitably, therefore, such properties, whatever they are like, will be outside the green new deal. It is essential that programmes are brought in alongside the green deal at an early stage, to ensure that the 6 to 7 million homes in the hard-to-treat category get the energy-efficiency upgrading that they need.

The other point that I want to emphasise is that energy efficiency is not just about conserving the energy that we use in domestic properties. We have heard already this afternoon about the great gains that can be made by increasing energy efficiency in commercial and industrial properties, but we also have to look at the enormously inefficient way that we produce our energy at the moment. By the time that a single kilowatt comes out of a conventional electricity power station, 55% cent. of the energy in the fuel used to produce it has been lost. A further 15% of the energy in the original source is lost in transmission, and a further 10% is lost through the inefficiency of household equipment. In a very real sense, therefore, the so-called "10% light bulb" is real, and that is because, by the time we switch a light on, we have squandered 90% of the energy that we could have used to power the bulb.

For that reason, arrangements such as district heating and combined heat and power are absolutely vital if we are to make progress in using energy in the best way that we can. There is a huge capacity for CHP district heating schemes in UK cities. For example, Aberdeen Heat & Power Ltd has shown how that can be done, and similar results can be seen in Southampton and Birmingham. We need to take the role of CHP very seriously, either at the micro level—my hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Meg Munn) spoke about that earlier in connection with home energy improvements—or through district heating schemes. Finally, industrial companies that have their own heat networks can have their existing boilers replaced with CHP plants. Such commercial schemes can result in enormous gains in energy efficiency. Local authorities were given powers and resources to develop district heating schemes in the paper on home heating and energy supplies put forward by the previous Government. It would be encouraging if the powers envisaged under that programme were preserved and enhanced by this new Government.

We should not neglect the role that energy efficiency plays in combating fuel poverty. If all homes had a standard assessment procedure rating of, say, above 65, it is unlikely that much fuel poverty would exist in this country, simply because it would be difficult for households to spend more than 10% of their income on fuel. It is predicted that the target of eradicating fuel poverty under the terms of the Warm Homes and Energy Conservation Act 2000 will be missed by a large margin, and the main reason for that is that as fuel prices rise, more people are placed in fuel poverty. As we have already discussed this afternoon, enormous rises in fuel costs have blown off course some very creditable efforts to combat fuel poverty, not least efforts that target the homes of the fuel-poor to make them more energy-efficient.

For every 1% rise in fuel prices, 40,000 people are placed in fuel poverty, so we need to be aware of the obligations being placed on energy companies and the

[Dr Whitehead]

effect that they have on additional prices. If, as a result of the green deal and other new arrangements, we place additional obligations on energy companies and they pass on the effects of those obligations to their customers, we will find not only price rises but many more people going into fuel poverty as those new schemes unfold. There are already obligations on energy companies relating to carbon capture and storage, the carbon emissions reduction target, the community energy saving programme, and the smart meter roll-out. I imagine that the acceleration of that roll-out, which was recently announced by the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, the hon. Member for Wealden (Charles Hendry), will place additional obligations on companies, as they will have to underwrite that roll-out.

Either those additional obligations should be underwritten with public money to limit their effect on fuel prices, or energy companies need to be prevented from passing on the effect of the obligation to the customer. In that context, we need to look at the role of Ofgem. Should it be translated into a champion of escape from fuel poverty and an agent of a rapid rise in energy efficiency, or should it simply pass on the price of those changes to customers? That is worth examination.

I applaud the idea that we need to move rapidly on energy efficiency. If the green deal is as good as its proponents suggest, I will applaud it taking forward from the previous Government ways to build energy efficiency into how households work. However, we need to look at the detail very carefully to ensure that, this time, we get it absolutely right, because we have only a very short time in which to do so.

5.8 pm

**Mr Tobias Ellwood** (Bournemouth East) (Con): “Vote blue, go green” was one of our lasting slogans from the general election, so I welcome the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, my hon. Friend the Member for Wealden (Charles Hendry), to his Front-Bench position. I am pleased that we are having a debate on energy efficiency so early in the calendar, as the subject is so important in this day and age.

Before I go any further, I congratulate my hon. Friends, including my hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Lorraine Fullbrook), on their astounding maiden speeches. My hon. Friend, and close friend, the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), spoke passionately about the beauty of Dorset. As we in Bournemouth are sort of part of Dorset, although we have a unitary authority, I fully concur with him on that, and I wish him well in hosting the Olympics events that are to be held in that neck of the woods. I also pay tribute to the hon. Member for Wells (Tessa Munt), who spoke passionately about her constituency. She represents the Liberal Democrats, and ousted our good friend David Heathcoat-Amory. It is sad to see him go, but I must welcome her, because we are now all friends in this coalition.

As we are the custodians of the environment, such debates are important. We would like to think that the speeches that we make here will stand the test of time, but in fact, although it is horrible to think it, they may

be forgotten in the long term. What will not be forgotten are the actions that we take to protect the environment for future generations. That is why I am pleased to participate in the debate.

When we look at what is happening in the Gulf of Mexico, we can see how fragile our environment is. If we do not take care of it we ruin it, not only for our own generation but for future generations, and they will not thank us.

**Thomas Docherty:** The hon. Gentleman mentions the Gulf of Mexico. Does he accept that when the Government talk about cutting regulation, that is exactly the type of disaster that could come about, and must not be allowed to happen?

**Mr Ellwood:** The hon. Gentleman makes his point, but there is a distinction between the regulations that are expected to be adhered to during drilling in deep sea conditions using state of the art technology, and the bureaucracy and red tape that has stifled British business and which is quite separate from the safety regulations out at sea.

I had the pleasure of growing up in a number of countries, but mostly in Vienna, in Austria. It was interesting that in the 1980s measures such as insulation for new buildings, double glazing, and recycling using different wheelie bins were the norm there, yet it was only three years ago that such things were introduced in Bournemouth and the rest of the country, when our local authorities began to recognise the importance of recycling, energy saving and looking after our environment. As a nation, we are catching up with countries in Europe late in the day. That is why it is so critical for us to move forward on energy efficiency.

To me, the three principal elements of energy efficiency are how we supply and store energy, how efficiently we use that energy, and the lifestyle choices that we make by shifting away from energy-dependent activities—for example, how we use energy for heating, transport and electricity. I welcome some of the initiatives proposed in the coalition document, such as the establishment of a smart grid and the roll-out of smart meters.

It seems wrong that as we have looked to provide more efficient ways of charging for electricity, the people who have been punished most are the very poor, because of the charging systems and the meter systems, which have taken so long to provide them with the same benefits and deals that were available online to those of us who were able to use credit cards and standing orders.

I welcome the establishment of feed-in tariff systems for electricity. It makes sense that those who generate their own electricity can pump back any surplus electricity into the national grid and be paid for it. The creation of a green investment bank and home energy improvements paid for with the savings from lower energy bills provide an incentive to change attitudes and lifestyles.

I also welcome measures to encourage marine energy. I recently visited Felixstowe and saw some of the initiatives taken there and in other parts of Britain. It is sad that with one of the longest shorelines in the world, we have still failed to harness marine capability. We are starting to do that, placing wind turbines at sea. As a note specifically to Bournemouth, I visited Blackpool not long ago—

**Mark Tami:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Ellwood:** After I have made the point. I visited Blackpool recently and saw the wind turbines out at sea. I asked whether there was any anger or concern about them as the planning applications were going through. Yes of course there were, at that point. But was anybody complaining about them now? Not at all. The message that I would give to the people in and around Bournemouth and Dorset is: please accept the proposals for our area. The turbines will not disturb the view as much as people think. If they are concerned about that, they should pop up to Blackpool and see what is going on there. The turbines can hardly be seen in the distance.

The hon. Member for Alyn and Deeside (Mark Tami) is bobbing up and down in his seat. I cannot but give way to him.

**Mark Tami:** I agree with the hon. Gentleman. Will he speak to some in his own party in north Wales who not only actively campaigned against offshore wind turbines, but are still campaigning against them? Perhaps they have just not got the message that he clearly has.

**Mr Ellwood:** That is all the more reason to make passionate speeches to ensure that everyone in Britain understands and grasps the importance of harnessing this free energy.

I was saddened to see the outcome of the Amsterdam talks on climate change. I hoped that with the election of President Obama, the United States would show more involved leadership in this area. I certainly hope that in November in Cancun we will see a more convincing legal binding agreement, which will encourage countries to take climate change more seriously.

The issue of supply and storage came up when we debated carbon capture and storage during our consideration of the Energy Act 2010, on which the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) was the lead Minister. I was concerned last winter, as many in Britain were, at how close the lights came to going out. We must never again reach the position where we could run out of energy in a matter of days.

**Joan Ruddock** *indicated dissent.*

**Mr Ellwood:** I knew that that would provoke a response from the hon. Lady. We had about six days' supply left, and if the supply chain had failed, lights would have gone out. Instructions had gone out to businesses to alert them to the fact that their contract meant that their energy supply would be cut.

**Joan Ruddock** *rose—*

**Mr Ellwood:** I thought that that would prompt a reaction.

**Joan Ruddock:** I am sorry that the hon. Gentleman has had to provoke me. The fact is that the companies that were given the notices had entered into interruptible contracts, for which the price is lower because they are asked at times to lower their consumption of electricity. That is a reasonable thing to do. They chose to have the contracts. No one forced those contracts on them, and at no time were we in danger of the lights going out.

**Mr Ellwood:** I am having flashbacks here. I recall the hon. Lady making the same point during the debate. The point is that I never want to be in that position again, and to see contracts being threatened in this way. She may argue that those were the contracts that had been signed, but we as a nation do not want to be in a position whereby any business is threatened in that way.

The more immediate problem has been the fact that we are now a net importer of oil, gas and coal. The Government spent 13 years watching the dials on all those sources go down towards empty.

**Thomas Docherty:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for a second bite of the cherry. He mentions that we now import coal. Perhaps he has forgotten who it was who closed all the coal mines in our country.

**Mr Ellwood:** Then we have to ask whether we are a charity to keep the unions going, or are we—*[Interruption.]* Opposition Members chortle; no doubt they are all signed-up members of some union that makes sure that they look after their comrades. The point is that the coal mines were inefficient. We could not keep them open. Today's debate is about energy efficiency—having efficient means of getting energy. Using those coal mines when they were running out was inefficient, which is why they were closed. My point today is that one third of our coal is imported from Russia, of all places. That is not a secure place to import from, and it is certainly not clean coal.

**Damian Collins:** My hon. Friend makes the point that sources of energy change. Some sources become exhausted, be they coal, or oil and gas from the North sea. Does he share my concern that the previous Government waited far too long to consider serious investment and planning for new forms of power generation, and that we should have made preparations for those a decade ago?

**Mr Ellwood:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The Labour party is now in denial on this front. I will probably provoke another reaction, but to return to the coal point—yes, the coal mines were inefficient, but there are now more efficient ways of extracting coal, so some coal mines are being reopened because it is now economically viable to produce the coal.

**Chris Williamson:** Would the hon. Gentleman care to comment on the fact that while his predecessors were smashing the mining industry, the National Union of Mineworkers pointed out that we had more than 300 years of coal reserves under the ground, and were arguing for the very clean-coal technology that the hon. Gentleman now seems to be espousing?

**Mr Ellwood:** Those mining strikes, which almost brought Britain to a halt, took place when I was in shorts at school, so I cannot be blamed for that. I agree that we want clean efficient methods, and that is why we did not vote against the Bill on clean coal technology. It fell short, because the provisions on carbon capture and storage should have included gas, but that was ignored.

**Chris Williamson** *rose—*

**Mr Ellwood:** Let us have somebody else.

**Mark Tami:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for giving way. Does he not accept that gas and coal are imported because the market says that that is cheaper? Unless he is prepared to accept that there are times when we have to intervene in the market to stabilise things and give industry and energy sources in this country a chance, he will never alter the situation, particularly in the short term.

**Mr Ellwood:** I do not disagree. My point is about the efficiency and security of supply, and not until very late in Labour's tenure did they work out, "My gosh, we need to get some interconnectors here that actually work, so that we aren't reliant on just one." That is what led to the danger of our running out of gas supplies. I understand that the Government are now looking at security of supply, and at long-term contracts that will negate the problems that we faced last winter, when we came very close to some of the lights being switched off. Carbon capture and storage is important, and I am still upset that we did not have a chance to amend that Bill. We tabled amendments to include gas as well as coal.

The previous Government oversaw the demise of another area, our fleet of nuclear power stations—again, until our energy supply was threatened. It took 20 years to get a spark out of Dungeness; we cannot build those things overnight. Therefore, if we are to plan for the future, we cannot live in denial: we cannot live without nuclear power. My hon. Friend the Member for Stroud (Neil Carmichael) spoke passionately about the importance of nuclear power, and although it is an asset that none of us likes, we are forced into that position simply because of the absence of other sources of power.

**Caroline Lucas:** The hon. Gentleman makes a statement in favour of nuclear power, but it is not based on the facts. Climate change scientists tell us that we need to get our emissions down within the next 10 years if we are to have any chance of avoiding the worst of climate change. The hon. Gentleman just mentioned the time that it takes to get nuclear generation up and running, and that means that we are now outside the critical investment time frame, and there is a real danger that if we put the money into nuclear power we will not put it into energy efficiency, renewable energies or decentralised energy, all of which have a much better chance than nuclear power has of reducing our emissions.

**Mr Ellwood:** I actually agree with the hon. Lady, whom I very much welcome to the Chamber. She will add an awful lot to these, and indeed other, debates. The Labour Government left nuclear power very late, but what she said does not mean that we should not build nuclear power stations. I guess that she is not in favour of nuclear power, and I am reluctant, too, but she might agree that we should invest in and study nuclear fusion, rather than nuclear fission, because nuclear fusion is the utopia that we have been looking for. Everyone says, "Oh, it will happen 25 years from now," but they were saying that 25 years ago. If we fully grasped that technology, we would not need the nasty side of nuclear fission, which leaves all the radioactive mess for future generations. Nuclear fusion is very much the way forward.

**Nia Griffith:** Will the hon. Gentleman please list all the investment in power stations between 1979 and 1997? He will find that his list is extremely short.

**Mr Ellwood:** Where do we go with that? Do we continue going back in time and blaming previous Governments? In the first debate on the Budget a week ago, I heard Members say that Maggie Thatcher was responsible for everything. How many generations do we want to go back? We are where we are today, and I am concerned that when it comes to looking after our energy needs, we have had 10 years almost in abeyance, so I seek guidance from the Government to ensure that we will never be in this position again.

**Damian Collins:** In his earlier remarks about nuclear power, my hon. Friend was kind enough to mention Dungeness power station, which is in my constituency. On the points made by the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas), I should say that the site could be brought online quickly—before 2020, it is believed. The current power station was opened under the last Conservative Government. Does my hon. Friend agree that such is the urgency and national priority that one of the great considerations for new nuclear power should be the location of sites in strategic areas of energy need and the speed with which they can be developed?

**Mr Ellwood:** My hon. Friend makes a powerful argument. The people best educated about these issues are those with nuclear power stations in their constituencies. They already understand what is going on; they realise the benefits and what safety mechanisms are in place, and would embrace further such technology.

Other forms of technology can be built much faster—they are almost "off the shelf". The Canadians are using the CANDU systems, which are very simple and probably have the safest record in the world. They would be easy to build. The trouble in the UK is the planning process, which takes so long before the first bolt can be put in or concrete floor laid down. I am glad that one point of the coalition agreement has been to expedite the planning process to make sure that, yes, we take on board consultation and views, but that once the decision is made, we get on with it.

**Mark Tami:** The Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change seems totally opposed to nuclear power and has said so on a number of occasions. Is he the suitable person to drive this change through?

**Mr Ellwood:** That—that is—[*Laughter.*] That is a moot point, but it is on the record.

I am trying to get on to the issue of nuclear fusion versus nuclear fission, and I am sure that the Secretary of State would agree with the position on that.

**Caroline Lucas:** Will the hon. Gentleman give way?

**Mr Ellwood:** I cannot resist.

**Caroline Lucas:** I cannot resist either. I have two points to make. First, Dungeness is built on a floodplain; it is a bit short-sighted to put lots of nuclear power in the middle of a floodplain, given climate change.

Secondly, if we are still to hold out this great hope that some new nuclear technology will come along, that, again, will mean that resources and research will go into that instead of into the tried and tested technologies

that we know will work. We have been talking about energy efficiency. If we rolled out a free programme of energy efficiency to every household in the country, that would create hundreds of thousands of jobs and get us out of recession. It would also get our emissions down much more quickly and cheaply than going down the nuclear route.

**Mr Ellwood:** The hon. Lady is new to the House and I do not wish to be disparaging about what she has just said. But she seems to be saying that the issue is either/or, black or white. I am saying that it is not like that, and that we must invest extra research on an international basis. Work is being done, including in the United States, but it is not enough.

The hon. Lady is absolutely right that we must push for more efficiencies—in fact, that is what half today's debate is about. How can the home be made more efficient? How can we reduce our emissions and the amount of energy that we use? All those things are important. Is she suggesting that we should park any further advances or research on the idea of nuclear fusion? That is absolutely wrong.

**Caroline Lucas:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way; I appreciate that he is trying to make progress.

I am saying, very realistically, that there is a finite pot of money, which is even smaller as a result of the cuts that the hon. Gentleman's Government are about to make. The idea that that money can be put everywhere at the same time comes from cloud cuckoo land. We need to decide where the money can be best and most effectively spent; scattering it around the place is not the answer. If we were to implement a major programme of energy efficiency, including renewable and decentralised energy, that would be tried and tested and offer a much better bang for the buck than investing in the chance that we might some day come across a nuclear technology that is safer than what we have now.

**Mr Ellwood:** On that I stop agreeing with the hon. Lady. We are not talking about a technology that may or may not work. We know that it can work; it is a matter of harnessing it. Experiments have already been done. To park the issue, or put it on the back burner—that is probably the wrong phrase—would be wrong. If we can harness the technology we can roll it out, not only in Britain but in other countries, particularly developing countries that are thinking of using nuclear fission. We could say to Iran, "Here is nuclear fusion." An atomic bomb cannot be made out of a nuclear fusion reactor. This therefore makes sense in the long term, and generations will thank us for it. Given the position we are in, I am afraid that we cannot survive over the next 20 years without investing, reluctantly though it will be, in nuclear power. I think that there is agreement on that in all parts of the House.

Let me spend a few moments explaining why nuclear fusion is so important and useful. It is the fusion of hydrogen atoms to form helium, and an awful lot of energy. It is a safe process whereby there are no nasty by-products. Of course, hydrogen is found in water, so fusion power is a potentially limitless source of energy. In fact, it is recognised that in 100 years' time nuclear fission will be in the past, and everything will be powered by nuclear fusion. That may sound scatty, too advanced

or too romantic, but it is the case. However, I am afraid that we will slow down that harnessing of power unless we are able to ensure that we join with other countries to guarantee that money is not wasted or taken away to be spent on other important related products, as the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) passionately said.

The main focus of my speech is not nuclear fusion or carbon capture and storage, but the subject of my intervention at the beginning of the debate. It is about a very simple way of reducing carbon emissions, saving the Government money, and creating a feel-good factor—that is, moving our clocks one hour forward.

**Thomas Docherty** *rose*—

**Mr Ellwood:** If the hon. Gentleman could hold on for a second and let me make a bit of progress, I will be delighted to give way. I have not even begun the argument yet—I have only announced the subject matter—and he is already having a pop.

Let me take hon. Members back to last March and how people felt on the day before the clocks changed and on the day after. There is a natural feel-good factor for people when that lighter evening comes in, but it goes beyond that: there is also a financial benefit and an effect on the environment. Electricity prices would go down because we would be naturally aligning the time spent at our workplace during the day with the time when the sun, the last form of free energy, is in the sky. There is a natural recognition of how we could better use that time. When the sun is in the sky and we are all in bed, that is wasted energy.

Before I make further progress, I will give way to the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Thomas Docherty), as I promised.

**Thomas Docherty:** Let me gently point out to the hon. Gentleman that slightly north of Bournemouth there is great opposition to the idea of changing the clock. In Scotland and elsewhere, there are serious and genuine safety concerns about what that would mean. His own colleagues in Government have made it absolutely clear that they will not support that proposal for that very reason.

**Mr Ellwood:** I do not agree with the hon. Gentleman's final point, as I spent much of last year doing a study on this very subject. The point he raises about the far north of England and Scotland is relevant, however, and I will come to it in due course, when, no doubt, he will want to jump up and have another go.

According to Cambridge university, this change to our clocks would mean that electricity prices for the whole of the United Kingdom would reduce by about 5%. Moreover, the UK's carbon footprint would be reduced by about 500,000 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>. People should wake up and see that that figure is relevant. That was not even a consideration in the 1970s, when, as hon. Members might recall, there was a three-year pilot project to test this idea; some people enjoyed it, and others did not. It turned out that the voices who spoke most strongly against it were those of the farmers—and rightly, because the business that they operated meant that they had to make best use of the daylight, and it conflicted with their routine. However, the National

[Mr Ellwood]

Farmers Union, and indeed NFU Scotland, no longer object to the idea. When NFU Scotland is asked if it is the first thing it wants, of course it says no—it is not on its agenda at all—but it has withdrawn its objections to it, and that makes sense, because farming is now a 24-hour industry.

The experiment was very positive, and it saw a reduction in fatalities and injuries across the UK. You might be interested to learn, Mr Deputy Speaker, however, that the reason why the experiment was flipped back was that farmers told all the Conservative MPs who were in power at the time that they would be denied the poster sites that are so important during a general election were it to continue. That was why they said, “Okay, fine, we will get rid of this”. However, reading the *Hansard* makes it clear that the argument for dropping it was weak.

I have mentioned the reduction in the UK’s carbon footprint, but there would also be an important boost to British tourism, an industry that Parliament almost neglects. It is our fifth-biggest industry and brings in more than £90 billion a year. According to the Tourism Alliance, daylight saving would boost the industry by about £2 billion, which is worth considering. We are the sixth most visited place in the world, and if we can find other means to encourage people to come here and take advantage of British tourist attractions, particularly those outdoors, it is worth looking into.

Safer roads, which I believe have been mentioned, are another aspect of daylight saving. As I have said, when the experiment last took place there was a reduction in deaths. I agree that more deaths took place in the morning, but the net change was a decrease. That was because in the morning, people tend to make a journey from A to B, with A being their home and B being somewhere they know, such as work or school. In the evenings they tend to make a journey from A to C, with C being somewhere they have not been before. That means that they are not so familiar with the roads, which leads to accidents. Shifting the time so that it is lighter in the evenings rather than the mornings reduces the number of accidents that take place.

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. May I remind the hon. Gentleman that the debate is about energy efficiency, not road deaths, important though that matter is?

**Mr Ellwood:** I will take your guidance, Mr Deputy Speaker, and focus on how daylight saving is very energy-efficient. I will not cover the reduction in crime or the increase in international trade that it would bring, although they are important, or health and well-being, although they are also worth considering.

It is worth my mentioning Scotland, though, and the possible efficiency savings there. With daylight saving, in the Glasgow-Edinburgh conurbation there would be 83 more daylight hours before 4 pm and 5 pm, 120 more between 4 pm and 6 pm and 165 more between 4 pm and 7 pm. The numbers would be larger for the rest of the UK. It is a very simple move that would not cost the Government a penny to implement, other than to put the necessary legislation through. It would align us with our European colleagues, which would mean that we would become more efficient from a business perspective as well, so I recommend it.

I understand that there is finally a private Member’s Bill on the matter, so I am the warm-up act for my hon. Friend the Member for Castle Point (Rebecca Harris), who I understand will introduce Second Reading on—

**Rebecca Harris** (Castle Point) (Con): On 3 December.

**Mr Ellwood:** I thank my hon. Friend. I hope that hon. Members, convinced by what I have just said, will come on that Friday to support the Bill.

5.38 pm

**Thomas Docherty** (Dunfermline and West Fife) (Lab): I begin by congratulating all Members who have made their maiden speeches today. They have been fantastic, and after hearing some of them, including that of my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mrs Glindon), I suspect that the Chief Secretary to the Treasury could soon simply scrap all the tourist boards in this country, such is the eloquence of the case that hon. Members have made for their constituencies.

This has been a fantastic debate. There has been some good knockabout, but hon. Members have also made some serious points. I am slightly curious when I hear coalition Members talk about fuel poverty and the fact that they will square the circle by voting to freeze child benefit and cut housing benefit. We have not really teased out exactly how that will tackle fuel poverty.

I should like to put the subject of energy efficiency into the context of the wider energy debate. As part of my leisure reading I often have a glance at DUKES—the digest of UK energy statistics—a thoroughly interesting document that I get from the Department’s website. I had a glance at it this morning and it contains some interesting statistics about our consumption as a nation over the past 40 years—since 1970. We have seen a 60% increase in the amount of electricity we consume as a nation. However, manufacturing and industrial consumption has remained steady at some 14,000 GWh, and it has largely been domestic consumption that has driven up the figures, plus some transportation. One thing that brings a wry smile to my face is hon. Members talking of the need for more railways and electric cars. Those are admirable suggestions, and I support them, but it is never explained where we will get the energy to power those new electric trains and cars.

If we compare our consumption statistics with our supply statistics, the result is worrying. At its peak in 1998, the nuclear industry provided approximately 90,000 GWh. In 2008, the latest year for which figures are available, that had fallen to 48,000 GWh, although it has risen again slightly since then. At the same time, many of our coal-powered stations are coming to the end of their lives. By the end of the coming decade, all our Magnox nuclear power stations will have closed, as will almost all of the advanced gas-cooled reactor nuclear power stations and many of our coal-powered stations—either because of new European regulations on carbon emissions, which both sides of the House would support, or because they have simply come to the end of their lives. I suggest that we need to understand that, although the aim of being more efficient in our energy consumption is laudable, we face a massive energy gap that needs to be addressed. We have seen some consensus break out this afternoon on how we can achieve that.

I have a constituency interest in power generation, in Longannet power station—one of the two sites bidding for the Minister's money under the carbon capture and storage scheme. I notice that his colleague, when asked about carbon capture, gave us some warm words about the coalition's general support for it, but—I assume that it was an oversight on his part—did not give a guarantee that DECC will meet the previous Government's target of a decision by October. I would be delighted if the Minister could give the House that guarantee when he winds up.

The hon. Member for Wells (Tessa Munt) is unfortunately no longer in her place, but she made an excellent maiden speech. I suggest to her that, if we are to have a surge in the volume of renewables, especially those that come from offshore and elsewhere, we cannot simply say that we do not want improvements to the national grid. I suggest that the Liberal Democrats are in their usual situation of saying one thing in the House and doing something else outside. I look forward to seeing how the hon. Lady squares that circle with her constituents.

The wider issue is how we close the gap between our desire for a low carbon British economy and our need for energy. I suggest that we will do that through three forms of generation. I accept the role of renewables, although I am on the record as being slightly more sceptical than some of my colleagues about the size and scale of that. For example, biomass, which was seen until recently as the great white hope of renewable energy, has now, as I am sure my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) knows, run into serious difficulties with how quickly it is gobbling up forestry in the UK. It is now suggested that several schemes in Scotland proposed by Forth Ports will have to import wood from around the world.

**Barry Gardiner:** I would be delighted to expand on the question of imported biomass. It can play no sensible role in a model of energy efficiency; the transportation costs make it ludicrous to think we are being energy efficient in doing so. However, there are 4 million tonnes of biomass within not the forests but simply the under-managed broadleaf woodlands in England alone. That could be used to generate twice the amount of energy—

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle):** Order.

**Thomas Docherty:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend, who, it is fair to say, is an expert on this issue. He is entirely right that biomass has a role to play, but it must be UK-produced fuel, and he is right to give examples. Stevens Croft in Dumfriesshire has been doing an excellent job of taking cast-off from the timber industry. That is an excellent example. As I mentioned, however, we should not be importing fuel from Europe or further afield.

**Guy Opperman (Hexham) (Con):** On the renewable obligations certificate in relation to biomass, the effect of the subsidy introduced by the previous Government is that a variety of companies are effectively being underwritten for the work they are doing. Consequently, the taxpayer is paying for energy companies to do biomass. That cannot be right. Does the hon. Gentleman not agree?

**Thomas Docherty:** I thank the hon. Gentleman for his thoughtful intervention, but I do not agree with him. I believe that Government have an important role to play in supporting the market, although I suspect that he does not see it that way. One reason why the gap is going to grow over the next few years is that the Conservative Members and their predecessors over-liberalised the market, and there was no incentive for companies to make long-term financial commitments to building new generating sources, whether nuclear, coal, gas or other base load suppliers. Only through Government support will that go ahead; so I think the Government should play an important role in the marketplace.

There are, however, some flaws in how the market works, and I want to touch on one that concerns my constituency and other parts of Scotland: the way in which the transmission charges work. Obviously, if we have a vast expansion of offshore renewables, it will almost certainly be around the Scottish coastline. If we are to build a new carbon capture and storage plant in my constituency, and if we are to have these nuclear power stations, the new plants will be penalised under the current transmission charges scheme. I hope therefore that the Minister will find room in his diary to meet me and other colleagues to consider how we can build a cross-party consensus on making it a more equitable system, while retaining the principle that those who use the grid pay a sum of money.

I was slightly astonished by the comments of the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) about coal mining. I gently point out to him that, as my hon. Friends have said, there are 300 years of reserves within our borders. However, that too will require Government support, which the Government will have to consider, because if we are to have energy sources that are free from carbon emissions at generation, we need to have that mix.

**Mr Ellwood:** I am trying to recall what I said, but I went on a bit and I am not sure that I remember everything, but I do not recall saying that I do not support coal mining in the UK. I sat on the Committee that debated the Energy Bill, which dealt with carbon capture and storage. We had extra thoughts, tabling about 90 amendments—I am thinking about my hon. Friend the Minister—and, although not a single one was accepted, we did not vote against the Bill, because we very much support coal mining in the UK. However, it has to be clean. My concern was that we are importing one third of our coal from Russia—coal that is not clean and certainly not from a secure source of supply.

**Thomas Docherty:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for clarifying his position, but his Ministers will have to come up with some cash to reopen those mines. It is simply not feasible for, say, Scottish Coal to go back in and take on a huge financial risk without some Government underwriting. I would agree that there are some things that it is best for the Government to stay out of, but our major utilities are not one of those.

**Guy Opperman:** The hon. Gentleman seems to be indicating that without Government intervention there will be no further coal mining, but that cannot be right. For example, there are open-cast mines aplenty throughout Northumberland and my constituency, but all that mining is done without any Government support whatever.

**Thomas Docherty:** Just so that we are absolutely clear, we are talking about deep coal mining. That is where vast reserves lie. Without going into the techie details, the point is that quite a lot of the coal from open-cast mining is not suitable for burning in our power stations without doing serious work to it. *[Interruption.]* The hon. Gentleman can shake his head all he wants, but the reality is that in mining communities we are familiar with the different types of coal.

The Government have a vital role to play in providing homes and businesses with secure, safe electricity. I suspect that one of the great tensions to emerge in the coalition will focus not just on the vexed question of nuclear fission, but on the role of state intervention. I would be curious to discover to what extent the right hon. Member for Sheffield, Hallam (Mr Clegg)—the Deputy Prime Minister—bought into the idea of yanking £60 million away from Forgemasters, which seems to be a ludicrous and short-term decision.

**Mr Ellwood:** We hear almost daily about this money that was supposed to go to places such as Sheffield Forgemasters, but it did not exist. We are talking about election sweeteners, peddled by Labour just before the general election and designed to win seats. There was no money in the till and the previous Government knew it. Their promises could not be kept; they were just trying to win seats. So please let us stop peddling this myth.

**Thomas Docherty:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for making that intervention, because it allows me yet again to remind him that we are talking about a loan that the Government were providing. It was not a gift or a bung; it was a loan. It is astonishing to hear Government Members—*[Interruption.]*

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): Sheffield, Hallam is not even a Labour marginal.

**Thomas Docherty:** Indeed, Sheffield, Hallam is not a Labour marginal; however, given the cuts that this Government are introducing, I suspect that it will be by the next election.

**Damian Collins:** The hon. Gentleman said that the money was a loan, but there was only an offer of a loan—an offer that the previous Government did not have the money to honour. That is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) was making.

**Thomas Docherty:** Perhaps we will just have to say that I think that the hon. Gentleman is wrong on this one. The reality of the coalition is that there are lots of warm words, as we saw from the Minister's eloquent opening statement, but when it comes to the substance and the detail of how money will be levered in, they are doing things on a wing and a prayer, with their fingers crossed.

**Guy Opperman:** You make this point about Forgemasters, but why did you sell Westinghouse?

**Mr Deputy Speaker:** Order. I can assure hon. Members that I did not sell Westinghouse.

**Thomas Docherty:** Thank you, Mr Deputy Speaker.

**Barry Gardiner:** I did sell Westinghouse. I was the Minister responsible at the time, and I remember being told by officials that we would be lucky if we got £1.5 billion for it. I said that I did not believe them for a moment, and we got £5.4 billion for it in the end. The reason we did so was that we had to take the liability off the balance books and we had an opportunity at that moment to sell it because it had the first place on an order in China, which made it extremely valuable. The Government benefited, and the British public benefited much more than the officials ever believed we would.

**Thomas Docherty:** I am grateful for that intervention, as it sums up entirely the correct decision taken on the basis of getting good value for the taxpayer because of the amount of revenue raised.

That leads me to my next point—that there is a myth about how long it would take to build new nuclear power stations. It does not actually take 10 or 15 years to build nuclear power stations. Westinghouse has an excellent model on the shelf, which they can take off it. It would take only three to four years; the problem comes in the planning process. I gently suggest to the Minister that I hope he will ensure, as part of the energy drive, that carbon capture and nuclear plants are not slowed down by the planning system, so that we can get them up and running as quickly as we possibly can.

**Caroline Lucas:** I am sorry, but I cannot hear all this talk about nuclear power without feeling the urge to leap up—so I have leapt. Will the hon. Gentleman please list those nuclear power stations that have been built, first, on time, and secondly, to budget?

**Thomas Docherty:** I am grateful. I do not have that long left; I cannot list them all.

**Caroline Lucas:** It would not take long.

**Thomas Docherty:** I suspect that if the hon. Lady looked at the number of wind farms built on time and on budget she would find that that list would be about the same length as for nuclear power stations.

I am very clear, as a champion of both the nuclear and clean coal industries—I have been throughout my whole time in politics—that there is no source of electricity that does not have some challenges and liabilities around it. The ones on nuclear are well documented, and I accept that some Conservative Members have raised some genuine points about clean-coal technology and the importing of coal. The problems surrounding both onshore and offshore wind farms are also well documented, as are problems with tidal power, which does not always work, so there are challenges to be overcome.

That brings me back to the central point that the previous Government were absolutely correct to promote a balanced energy. They said that we needed an element of nuclear power, an element of renewables, an element of coal and, indeed, an element of gas. It is quite surprising that we have heard so little in this debate about the role of gas in our energy mix. Again, I gently suggest to Government Members that the 3,000 mile pipeline presents an issue that we might need to look at.

We have had a fantastic debate. I very much welcome the Ministers to their new posts and I look forward to their perhaps providing some reassurance to my constituents when they sum up.

5.58 pm

**David Morris** (Morecambe and Lunesdale) (Con): A lot has been said about renewables, about where we are going as a country with our energy policy and about how we are going to keep the lights on in 10 years' time. In my Morecambe and Lunesdale constituency, a paradox occurs. We have two nuclear power stations; one is due to be decommissioned very shortly; and we have a plethora of wind farm applications going through the Lune valley and all the way through the M6 corridor into the Cambrian region.

The nuclear power industry, it has to be said, gets a bad press. What is needed is education. I do not think anyone here could argue that a pellet the size of a 10p piece could power a town for, say, a month; yet we are trying to figure out how to keep the lights on in 10 years' time—and we all know that they are going to go out if we do not invest in nuclear power.

I really believe in nuclear power; I am 100% for it. When I was standing for election in Morecambe and Lunesdale, I said that as long as I am the Member of Parliament for the constituency there will be nuclear power there. It is the largest employer in my constituency, but it also accounts for 10% of the national grid.

We are due to have a new power station built in Heysham, if everything goes according to plan, and it should be noted that upgrades and new nuclear power stations are planned all through my region and up into Cumbria. Heysham is one of perhaps only two urban areas in the country that could possibly accept having a nuclear power station built in it.

Although we rightly want to promote wind power, I cannot understand why wind power has to be located in areas of outstanding natural beauty.

**Barry Gardiner:** Because they are windy.

**David Morris:** Exactly. It is because of the wind, but the wind comes in from the sea, so why do we not put battalions of wind farms out in the sea? That is common sense. We do not have to put them all across the hills, valleys and mountains of this great country; we can put them out at sea instead, where they will generate more energy. There is evidence to suggest that turbines erected out at sea are more efficient than those erected on land in other ways too, because, as has been said, it can take quite some time to secure planning permission for the construction of both nuclear and wind sources of energy on land. This is a very contentious subject.

We have to figure out how we are going to power this country in future. Yes, the coal mines did get closed down in the '80s, but in the town I am originally from, Leigh, the pits were closed down naturally, purely and simply because they had been over-mined. I still hear stories in my home town that Thatcher closed down the pits, however. She did not. If we all remember rightly, we will recall that there was a political argument going on between the unions and the Government of the day.

Members need to acknowledge that we are now in 2010, and in 10 years' time the lights will go out unless we start building nuclear power stations and battalions of wind farms out at sea.

**Caroline Lucas:** I am in danger of repeating myself a lot, but given that it will take at least 10 or 15 years to get nuclear power up and running, if it is really the

case—which I do not believe—that the lights will go off in 10 years, nuclear power simply will not help us. I find it ironic that this is supposed to be a debate about energy efficiency, yet the hon. Gentleman is spending his time talking about nuclear, wind and coal. Let us talk about energy efficiency. According to the previous Government's own figures, 40% of our existing energy could be saved using energy-efficiency measures alone.

**David Morris:** I thank the hon. Lady for her comments, and they are good comments, but we are talking about energy efficiency. Nuclear power is very efficient; it has a low carbon footprint.

One subject that has not been addressed is how we in this country use energy. I use card meters in my domestic home. When I bought my house, an old gentleman had lived in it beforehand, and he used card meters so I carried on using them. When my family was growing up, I was one of those dads who was always saying, "Switch the lights off." Using card meters started to make us change our habits and how we used energy in our home. The Government might want to consider that. Perhaps we could top up through the internet as we might with a T-Mobile phone—excuse me for unintentionally plugging a particular company. We might usefully consider how we obtain our energy.

**Thomas Docherty:** The hon. Gentleman has touched on an important point—education—so does he agree that our schools have a key role to play in teaching our children how vital energy efficiency is?

**David Morris:** I totally agree. What the public need to be educated in is how nuclear power can benefit this and other nations in solving their energy problems. I urge the House and the Minister to consider seriously where we will be going in 10 years' time. I think that nuclear power is the way forward. There is a place for wind farms and renewable energy, but two nuclear power stations in my constituency power more or less 10% of this national grid and if they are taken out of commission, the lights will go off.

6.5 pm

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): May I welcome you to your post, Mr Deputy Speaker, and the Ministers to theirs? I also congratulate all hon. Members who have made very eloquent and interesting maiden speeches today, particularly my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mrs Glindon), who raised pertinent issues about workers in the civil service. I am conscious of the fact that some Back Benchers on both sides of the House are still waiting to speak and that we are yet to hear the wind-ups, and as I am particularly interested in what the Minister is going to say, I shall keep my comments brief.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to participate in a debate on an issue as important as "Progress and prospects in energy efficiency". I am glad that we have heard a bit more detail today about the green deal—the detail provided in the Budget and the coalition agreement was sketchy. What we have heard about the green deal today has raised as many questions as answers. The Minister talked about energy-efficient products, including loft insulation and plugs. I wish to focus briefly on another very simple element of energy-efficient products, which was not discussed. The Energy Saving Trust

[Luciana Berger]

estimates that 23% of the heat energy lost from a house escapes through inefficient windows, so it is vital that efficient windows are included in measures under the green deal.

I know from dialogue that I have had with the Glass and Glazing Federation—the trade association that represents companies, including those in my constituency, who make, supply or fit glass and glass-related products—that the current economic downturn has been particularly damaging to the glass and window industry, and that at the current rate of installations the dates in the carbon emissions reduction target will not be met. My right hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock) highlighted the fact that glazing can cost about £10,000. That will not be met by the green deal at the limit stated by the Minister—that is if the green deal is to extend to energy-efficient glazing at all. Can he clarify whether the support for insulation that he outlined through the green deal and other projects will include that provided by energy-efficient windows? Will he consider a windows scrappage scheme? Estimates made by the Glass and Glazing Federation's energy savings calculator, which have been supported by the Energy Saving Trust, demonstrate that such a scheme could provide even greater benefits to energy conservation than those obtained from the excellent boiler scrappage scheme introduced under the Labour Government.

A number of references have been made to the number 10 during this debate. A number of Members on both sides of the House have signed the 10:10 pledge to reduce our emissions by 10% over the course of this year. We learnt today from the Committee on Climate Change that the UK's carbon emissions have been reduced by 10% in the past year. If energy-efficient windows were installed in all properties nationally, our emissions would reduce by a further 10%, saving nearly 4 million tonnes of carbon and decreasing our national domestic energy expenditure by 10%. I urge the Minister to consider energy-efficient windows in his plans.

6.9 pm

**Sarah Newton** (Truro and Falmouth) (Con): Thank you very much for letting me join this important debate, Mr Deputy Speaker. I wish to support what the hon. Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Thomas Docherty) said about the fact that a lot of today's debate has focused on energy generation, whereas in a debate on energy efficiency we should be focusing on energy consumed in the home, because that is a very large contributor to energy consumption in the UK and to our use of carbon fuels.

I also wish to associate myself with some of the comments made by my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood). I grew up in Cornwall, so I can remember the catastrophe of the Torrey Canyon and the oil spills that we saw off the coast of Cornwall, which in their day were as catastrophic as those we are seeing in the gulf of Mexico. That is, I think, a spur to us to reduce our dependence on oil and move swiftly to find more sustainable sources of energy.

I believe that the green deal will offer significant positive benefits to people living in my constituency. Fuel poverty in Cornwall is among the highest in the

country. That in part relates to the profile of our population: we have many people living in poverty, with average incomes some 25% lower than the national average, and the fastest-growing population of 80-year-olds. We are also a very rural area, with more than 63% of the population of households living in rural areas—that figure is only 19% for the rest of the country. As a result, people do not have access to mains gas, which is, of course, the cheapest form of energy. Many homes, especially in villages—as many as 80% of the homes in villages—have to depend on Calor gas or on fuel oil, which are the most expensive ways of heating a home and tip a lot of people into fuel poverty.

There are also a lot of old properties, bungalows and properties built before the war with solid walls, which are difficult and expensive to insulate, as well as a large number of detached properties compared with the rest of England. As hon. Members will know, flats are usually the most energy-efficient properties and we have low numbers of those in Cornwall.

I believe that the green deal will enable many people in my constituency to switch from expensive and carbon-intensive forms of energy to more low-carbon and cheaper alternatives, especially ground heat. Ground heat pumps are manufactured in my constituency and, using the CERT programme and working with social housing providers around the country, they have lifted many people out of fuel poverty. However, like some of my hon. Friends, I am slightly concerned. Although the initial amount of money available through the green deal—about £6,000—is a good start, I would appreciate it if, over time, Ministers considered increasing the amount of money that could be made available for the green deal to take into consideration the considerable costs of insulating solid wall properties and putting in ground source heat pumps.

**Zac Goldsmith** (Richmond Park) (Con): For a long time, energy efficiency has had Cinderella status in the energy debate, despite the fact that in terms of value for money it is second to none. I am hugely excited by the green deal and think it will transform the way in which we interact with energy in this country, but would my hon. Friend support moves to extend the green deal to the commercial sector, too? That sector is responsible for about a fifth of our emissions and it has been calculated—I have not done the maths myself—that if we were to raise the energy performance certificate standard for commercial buildings to level C, we would save about £5 billion a year. It seems to be a no-brainer.

**Sarah Newton**: I would be delighted to support my hon. Friend. It is important that schools, hospitals and commercial organisations can benefit from the green deal. There is a huge appetite for people to have renewable energy, but the capital costs can be prohibitive.

**Gregory Barker**: May I quickly assure both my hon. Friends that the commercial sector—particularly small and medium-sized enterprises, but the sector in general, too—will be included in the green deal?

**Sarah Newton**: That is extremely welcome news. That is marvellous, and—to return to my ground heat pump manufacturers—they will be able to provide ground heat for businesses, hospitals and schools, as they do at the moment.

I should be grateful if Ministers would consider one other matter in the context of renewable heat, and that is the incentive. The renewable heat incentive, as hon. Members will know, was designed to support the installation of a wide range of renewable heat technologies by compensating owners for the increased capital costs of such systems. I think it is an extremely bold and good idea, and Ministers will be receiving replies to the consultation process that was started by the last Government. Having listened to manufacturers in my constituency, I believe that although it is a good idea, some unfortunate anomalies have crept into the calculation of the tariff.

The Carbon Trust and ground heat pump manufacturers have highlighted an inconsistency in the tariff calculations for the RHI that is having the unintended consequence of effectively doubling the rate of return for air source heat pump installations. It has been well proven that ground source heat pumps are a far more efficient way of producing energy over time than air source pumps. If the tariff continues as it stands in the proposals, it will severely disadvantage the ground source pump industry and other renewable technologies; indeed, it might, sadly, eliminate both of those technologies just when we need to be encouraging businesses to supply and manufacture such products in this country. I would be very grateful if Ministers would urgently review the consultation process and look at the tariff for small air source heat pumps.

6.16 pm

**Chris Williamson** (Derby North) (Lab): May I start by congratulating all hon. Members who have made their maiden speeches today? Unfortunately, I was not in the Chamber to hear all of them, but I want, nevertheless, to congratulate them all because I know what a daunting prospect it is to make one's maiden speech in this Chamber.

In opening the debate, the Minister quoted the Prime Minister saying that he wants to make this Government "the greenest Government ever"; well, it needs to be—and so does every subsequent Government, because the scale of the challenge facing not just the UK but the whole world requires radical steps to be taken. Climate change is probably the single biggest challenge that we as a civilisation have ever faced. We should therefore try to achieve cross-party consensus on the radical measures that need to be taken. The Stern review, which the previous Government commissioned, talked about the possibility of 40% of domestic energy requirements being generated by micro-technologies, and this Government need to do everything they can to encourage and support making that a reality. If we can secure a huge increase in micro-energy technology, that will reduce the problems caused by carbon emissions and will diminish the need for nuclear power stations.

I do not agree with the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) about the nuclear debate, although I used to. Like George Monbiot, I have changed my view on the basis that is probably the lesser of two evils. However, that does not take away from the need for significant uplift in the amount of energy efficiency work that must be undertaken to existing residential accommodation and residential accommodation now being built, as well as to the commercial built environment, as the hon. Member for Richmond Park (Zac Goldsmith)

has pointed out. In cities the commercial built environment is responsible for the lion's share of carbon emissions, so it is important to address that issue in the new green deal that the Minister is talking about.

I said that it was important for this Government to be greener than the previous Government, but that is not to diminish the huge strides made by the Labour Administration. Let me make it clear, for the record, that they were the first Government in the world to pass a climate change Act and that their Warm Front initiative introduced energy efficiency measures to about 2 million homes. Their feed-in tariff was a very important initiative, and the massive expansion of offshore wind energy announced by the previous Prime Minister is also welcome.

My hon. Friend the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) referred to the boiler scrappage scheme. We were ahead of the game on the Kyoto commitments. Indeed, we led the world in securing them in the first place. We also led the world in trying to secure a deal at Copenhagen: that is another thing that we should be proud of, and we should applaud the former Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change, my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), for the role that he played in that.

My hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test also spoke about the need for district heating schemes and how they can be used. Compared with the rest of Europe, this country does not have a great track record in that regard, but I believe that district heating schemes have tremendous potential, especially when linked to initiatives on waste. The treatment plants being developed around the country offer a way of dealing with waste that is better than burying it in the ground, and they also give us an opportunity to generate energy at the same time.

**Ms Bagshawe:** Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this is an overlooked aspect of renewable energy, and would he welcome investment in innovative technology? For instance, the BioWayste plant in my Corby constituency takes 146,000 tonnes of food waste and, using anaerobic digestion, turns it into enough energy to supply half the needs of an entire food processing plant for a whole year.

**Chris Williamson:** I do not know the details of the specific scheme to which the hon. Lady refers, but her description makes it sound particularly laudable. Based on the information that she has just given to the House, it is certainly something that I would like to associate myself with. So yes, I agree with her on that.

When Bill Clinton launched the Clinton climate initiative, he said that tackling climate change provided an opportunity to save money, make money and create jobs. I wholeheartedly agree. The point has been made already in this afternoon's debate that there is an opportunity to create green jobs through investing in energy efficiency measures. We need to examine that angle, and the Government should consider how burgeoning new companies looking to enter the field can be encouraged and helped.

In my constituency, Rolls-Royce has been working on a fuel cell for some time. If the company can bring the project to fruition, it will play a significant role in providing environmentally friendly energy generation in this country. Again, the Government should look at ways to support that initiative.

[Chris Williamson]

Other hon. Members have mentioned the link between fuel poverty and energy efficiency. That is something that I, as a former welfare rights officer, am particularly concerned about: we have seen how the increase in fuel prices has impacted on fuel poverty in this country, so it is important to make more strenuous efforts to ensure that low-income households benefit from the green deal.

I am especially worried about low-income households in the private rented sector. Other hon. Members have mentioned them in the debate, and I think that the Minister said that the green deal would apply to that sector as well. We will be watching very closely to see how that develops, but it is clearly going to be an extremely important area.

When I was leader of Derby city council, I set a very challenging target—that Derby should become self-sufficient in clean green energy by 2025. I worked with local companies in the city to get them on board for that agenda, and I have to say that there was a good deal of support for it—both for generating environmentally friendly energy and for ensuring that commercial premises were more energy-efficient. To come back to the point that the hon. Member for Richmond Park made, it will be interesting to hear what the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, the hon. Member for Wealden (Charles Hendry), has to say about the commercial sector when he winds up, because if that sector is ignored it will be a significant omission.

The Government's stated aims on public spending, and the Budget that we debated last week and at the beginning this week, seem to militate against much of what the Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change, the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker), said this afternoon. Without Government investment in this important policy area, it will be difficult to deliver on the ambitions that he outlined. It is important for the Government to unlock the potential in local government, but the Chancellor, with massive swingeing cuts to local government finance—we had a debate on local government finance yesterday—will make it very difficult for the innovation locked away in local government to come out and flourish. That is another area that the Minister needs to look at carefully.

Not only are there to be cuts in local authority expenditure, but restrictions are being put on local authorities' ability to use, for example, prudential borrowing as a way of moving the agenda forward. Again, that is something that the Minister needs to look at. Perhaps he might talk to his colleagues in the Con-Dem coalition to see how that can be addressed.

If we can get it right, and address energy efficiency and tackle climate change, there will be significant implications for the size of the deficit. In the prospectus that the Chancellor outlined last week, he took a direction diametrically opposed to the one that he should have taken to tackle the deficit. His cuts package will create large-scale unemployment, with tens of thousands of public sector workers losing their jobs, and tens of thousands—possibly hundreds of thousands—of workers in the private sector losing their employment as well. Investment in green technology and energy efficiency can generate huge numbers of new jobs; that would

take people off the dole, generate income tax revenue for the Exchequer and help reduce the size of the deficit. That deficit will get bigger as a result of the Chancellor's Budget last week, and that in turn will result in further pressure to make even more swingeing cuts. We would then end up in a vicious circle.

I wish the Minister luck in his ambition for the new green deal. It is a good step in the right direction, but he needs to go a lot further. It is important for him to recognise the measures that were taken by the previous Administration and build on them, and to do what he can—although I accept that he has what is probably a fairly junior position in Government at the moment—to persuade the Chancellor of the error of his ways. I am sorry, but last week's Budget will make it very difficult for us to deliver on the ambitions that the Minister outlined earlier.

6.28 pm

**Caroline Lucas** (Brighton, Pavilion) (Green): I welcome the Minister's statement today, not least because I was getting a bit worried about the Government's commitment to this agenda. The Chancellor's Budget statement contained absolutely nothing about energy efficiency, and a mere 23 words on the proposal for a green investment bank. There was a little more detail in the Budget report on measures to bring forward a low-carbon economy, but that was still only six paragraphs out of a total of 121 pages. That gave us a bit of a sense of what the Government's priorities might be, and it shows that we still have a long way to go, in spite of the Minister's fine words.

Although the first of those paragraphs stated:

"Climate change is one of the most serious threats that the world faces",

I still do not see anything like the kind of urgency that we need if we are to avoid the worst of climate change. If I compare climate change to the kind of military threat with which we are more familiar, we need a response commensurate to the response that would be forthcoming if we were facing a military threat. We need that degree of single-mindedness and that level of resources.

The Committee on Climate Change reported today, and it is scathing about what it calls the "light-touch" regulation policies of the past decade. It made four recommendations that it says should be acted on within a year, including a new national programme for energy efficiency in buildings. The chief executive of the committee said:

"This is not going to happen from the bottom up. We need crunchy policies that provide strong incentives."

I am not sure that I know what crunchy policies are, but they are certainly not the late and voluntary measures that we have seen so far. We need urgent action now.

Let us take housing as an example. More than a quarter of the UK's CO<sub>2</sub> emissions come from the energy that we use in our homes. If all the 6.1 million homes with uninsulated cavity walls installed cavity wall insulation, we could save 3.9 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> a year, and £690 million on energy bills. If everyone with a gas, oil or LPG boiler upgraded to a condensing boiler, the UK would save 6.7 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> a year and £1.3 billion in energy bills. If all the 13 million homes with insufficient loft insulation topped up to 270 mm,

the UK could save nearly 3 million tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub> a year and £560 million in energy bills. Those three measures alone could reduce the UK's emissions from the household sector by nearly 10%, so we need to see faster action.

As others have said, it is the existing housing stock that is the real challenge. New build homes will be required to meet a defined zero carbon standard by 2016, but at least 85% of the homes that will be in use in 2050 have already been built. Worryingly, there is no set of standards for existing homes to meet in order to achieve an 80 per cent reduction in emissions.

The Government have given sketchy outlines of some of their intentions. We have heard a little more about the green deal proposals, and I am grateful to the Minister for that. But I am not convinced that a market mechanism alone will be enough to generate the level of take-up that we need to achieve large scale energy efficiency improvements for the housing stock. Current proposals focus all their attention on the up-front capital costs, relying on this market-led solution, but they risk ignoring other barriers that need to be addressed, such as lack of consumer awareness, and particularly the belief that measures could cost much more than they actually will.

We need to ask ourselves how realistic the proposals are, particularly at a time of economic difficulty, and whether all the people whom we need to target will be willing to opt in. Many households that could pay for energy efficiency measures may not do so as long as those actions remain discretionary, and economically disadvantaged and fuel-poor households will need significant extra support beyond CERT to be able to act.

If the Government want mass take-up of energy efficiency measures, legislation must introduce mandatory standards for domestic heating and insulation in the form of an energy efficiency rating. The legislation could stipulate, for example, that by 2020, where technically feasible, all dwellings should reach an energy efficiency standard no lower than an E rating, as measured on the energy performance certificate scale. That requirement could apply to all landlords, social and private. Failure to comply would mean that the property could not be let, for example. The requirement would also have to be introduced in the owner-occupied sector, where failure to comply would mean that the property was not fit for sale.

It is on such a scale that the Government need to think. If they backed a major programme of public and private investment in energy efficiency and renewables, we could all reap big rewards. I have been part of a group calling for just such a green new deal for quite a long time before the Government adopted the green deal as their own branding. A serious investment in building new energy systems, including energy efficiency, combined heat and power, and renewables, for millions of homes and other buildings would amount to a £50 billion-plus programme per year.

That is what we need—a ground-breaking programme based on Government investment to create hundreds of thousands of jobs, to stabilise the economy and to reduce emissions. Those are the kind of measures that we need—particularly when we have one foot still in a recession—not the savage public spending cuts announced by the Government, which are likely to trigger a double-dip recession.

Even if the Government were not as ambitious as that, there are other measures that they could consider to achieve mandatory minimum energy efficiency standards. Able-to-pay households could have the necessary work funded through a mechanism such as the proposed green investment bank, while for low-income households work could be funded through a system of 100% grants on top of CERT expenditure. Those grants might also be funded through the green investment bank and accessed through local authorities, but the Government would be responsible for repayment.

We have not yet even been told whether the Government will retain the previous Administration's target of insulating every home in the UK, where technically possible, with cavity wall and loft insulation by 2015. That target did not go far enough or fast enough, but it was at least a welcome acceptance of the principle of setting standards affecting the energy efficiency of privately owned or rented homes. I would be grateful if the Minister would clarify the situation when he replies. According to the National Insulation Association, we still need to insulate another 15 million lofts and 9 million cavity walls by 2015. Are the Government still committed to achieving that? The previous Government never did produce a plan to deliver that target, and I know that green councillors working on large-scale, free, area-based insulation programmes are still waiting with bated breath for such a plan.

Perhaps part of the finance for a mass street-by-street insulation programme could be obtained if the Government followed the example of the German Government, who have implemented a windfall profit tax on the production of nuclear electricity. In the UK the tax could be levied, for example, on British Energy. Currently, assuming carbon prices of at least €10 per tonne, EDF, which owns British Energy, is receiving around £350 million a year in windfall profits from nuclear electricity production that would still be generated without any carbon price at all. That money is not being used to reduce carbon emissions, but is simply being swallowed up by the company. If instead a windfall tax were levied, the revenue could be used to pay for a whole raft of energy efficiency measures.

There is also a case for levying a windfall tax on the fossil fuel utilities, while we wait for the reform of the emissions trading scheme to come into effect in 2013. As hon. Members will know, at the moment carbon permits are given away, not auctioned, and that means that the fossil fuel companies, too, are receiving windfall profits.

I also hope that the Government will give proper consideration to both a stamp duty rebate and some form of equivalent grant for homes that do not reach the stamp duty threshold, so that we take maximum advantage of the house-moving process for incentivising costly and disruptive whole house retrofits.

The decent homes standard for social housing comes to an end this year, and it has been successful in improving the energy efficiency of such homes. However, this Administration, as far as I know, is offering no successor to the decent homes standard, although one was proposed by the previous Government in order to provide the framework for social housing providers to make long-term investment in energy efficiency. That hardly sits well with the Government's green claims—nor does the announcement that the previous Government's welcome

[Caroline Lucas]

proposal of a register of landlords is to be scrapped. That register would have provided an opportunity to make landlords in the private rented sector adhere to minimum energy efficiency standards, as well as other standards, for tenants. That sector has the highest proportion of dangerously cold homes, and often houses particularly vulnerable families, but it is not being addressed by any policy measures.

The Government's proposed green deal also, as far as I know, splits the incentive—in other words the landlord pays for the measures but the tenant receives the benefit via their energy bills—and that, again, could be a significant barrier to wholesale improvement to homes in the private rented sector, which in England number 3.1 million, nearly 15% of the housing stock.

The best approach to the private rented sector would make minimum standards mandatory and toughen those over time to make it illegal to rent out a property below a certain energy efficiency rating, with very few exceptions. That could start with properties in energy performance certificate bands F and G, and then tighten over a clear timetable. Information on the energy performance of the property through the EPC needs to be of a much higher quality. It needs to be better enforced, and given a higher profile for both landlords and tenants. The Energy Saving Trust and local authorities should have access to the information on EPCs so that action can be better targeted and co-ordinated. Primary legislation may well be needed to get the full potential out of those measures. There should also be financial incentives to support and encourage investment to the standard required by the minimum standards, including an extended landlord's energy-saving allowance, and a reduction in VAT on refurbishment.

Any Government who were serious about energy efficiency would have used their first Budget to reduce VAT to 5% on building repairs and on improvement work to existing buildings immediately, because that measure would have made it much easier for home owners to make energy-efficient repairs and improvements to their properties. That is a win-win agenda. The Government have said that they want to be the greenest Government, and I have said that, unfortunately, that is not a very ambitious target. None the less, if they do want to meet it, they will have to do a lot better.

6.40 pm

**Emily Thornberry** (Islington South and Finsbury) (Lab): It is a great honour to close this debate for my party from the Dispatch Box, and this is the first time that I have done so. For many people the debate will be memorable not necessarily for my contribution, but for what will have flashed into their minds and been difficult to get rid of—that is, the picture of the Minister of State, the hon. Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker), hoovering his carpets wearing less than an apron. However, it is clear from the debate that, although there is broad agreement throughout the House about where we need to get to, there is much disagreement about how we get there.

Historically, energy efficiency has not been Britain's No. 1 priority, with its temperate climate and plentiful supplies of fuel, whether wood, coal, gas or oil. Therefore, for far too long we have put up with, and built too

many, draughty houses. As the hon. Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) said in his thoughtful contribution, we have to change the way in which we build houses. Times have changed and Britain has to change, too. Energy prices have increased massively, and now we have a choice: we can either invest in a low-carbon economy using renewable sources of energy, or wait for the gas to run out. Neither option is cheap, although the latter also comes at the price of creating man-made, irreversible climate change. In the UK, 13% of our greenhouse gas emissions are caused by the way in which we heat our homes, but the inevitable increasing cost of fuel bills has, and will continue to, put great strains on the incomes of the poorest households.

People fully understand the urgency of the matter, and in meetings in my constituency I have spoken to people in their 80s and to children as young as five about the importance of ensuring that we insulate our homes and address fuel poverty. I suspect that the passion that I have developed for the issue has come from listening and learning from the people whom I represent, and today we have heard a number of passionate and inspirational maiden speeches from people who clearly have a great love for their constituencies.

We heard from the hon. Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax), who, after congratulating Lord Jim Knight on his ennoblement, spoke of the great beauty of his constituency. He also told us of his six ancestors who have been Members. It seems that one of them spoke only once in 32 years, and we hope that the hon. Gentleman does not follow in that tradition.

The hon. Member for South Ribble (Lorraine Fullbrook) is the first woman to represent her area, and she paid tribute to her predecessor, David Borrow, and in particular his work in relation to HIV sufferers. We learned that South Ribble is the home of Chicago town pizzas, as well as Leyland and some large bird sanctuaries, and I have no doubt that she will be a very effective voice for South Ribble in Westminster.

We heard also from the hon. Member for Wells (Tessa Munt), who eschewed tradition and decided to be controversial by claiming that her constituency was the most beautiful in Britain. She also took on the National Grid and certainly seems to have a strong campaigning spirit and steel.

Talking of strong campaigning spirit and steel, I should note that the hon. Member for Corby (Ms Bagshawe) also made it clear that, although she is in favour of nuclear power and onshore wind, she is not in favour of them in her constituency. As my hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith) said, Government Front Benchers could consider putting some large solar panels in Corby instead.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) explained that, although he was a Unionist, he could in some circumstances feel comfortable talking about green politics. He described his beautiful constituency and reminded me of many visits that I and my family have taken to that extraordinary area. I was reminded, in particular, of Castle Ward, which also made me think of the coalition. Castle Ward is a very odd building, because one half is classic Georgian and the other Strawberry Hill gothic. It is up to Members to decide which bit represents which political party. Anyway, one particular marriage at Castle Ward was doomed,

and the woman went back to Scotland after only a few months, so perhaps there is a lesson to be learned there.

We heard also from Members who have a large amount of experience, and their contributions were profound and very important. My hon. Friend the Member for Llanelli spoke of the cuts in funding to the Welsh Assembly and the impact that they might have on the Welsh boiler scrappage scheme and the Warm Front scheme. My hon. Friend the Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Meg Munn) spoke about the feed-in tariff threshold and called for it to apply to 3 kW appliances.

We also heard from my hon. Friend the Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner), who spoke passionately about how climate change had become his political priority. He strongly urged the Government to reduce VAT on energy-efficiency measures. I understand that the number of interventions during the speech made by the hon. Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood) is a record. My hon. Friend the Member for Dunfermline and West Fife (Thomas Docherty) made a knowledgeable contribution about the power station in his constituency and the bid for carbon capture and storage. He asked the Minister to make a decision about when the competition was going to happen.

The hon. Member for Morecambe and Lunesdale (David Morris) was burnishing his pro-nuclear and anti-onshore-wind credentials; I suspect that he will make a friend of the hon. Member for Corby. My hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) made a plea for energy-efficient windows, while the hon. Member for Truro and Falmouth (Sarah Newton) promoted ground source heat pumps, which are made in her constituency. My hon. Friend the Member for Derby North (Chris Williamson) asked the Chancellor to think again, as we all do. Meanwhile, the hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) made a wide-ranging and well informed speech, calling particularly for mandatory minimum standards of insulation. Her contribution will be taken seriously beyond the House.

Much of what the previous Government did on energy efficiency has had broad support from this place, and I am proud of the progress that we made. It began particularly with the Climate Change Act 2008, which, ironically, will be seen as one of Labour's greatest achievements only if the coalition Government take seriously the attendant low-carbon transition plans and the carbon budget. Lord Turner, the Chair of the Committee on Climate Change, said on the "Today" programme this morning, "The last Government set out a series of policies. As long as we drive those through, we will make a difference." I was reassured to hear from one with as profound an understanding as my hon. Friend the Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) that the CCC's report recognises the Government's achievements.

It is important that we cut our household-sector emissions. That is an important part of the plan; we expect to cut them by 29%. In furtherance of that goal, we insulated 5 million homes and, building on that, went on to introduce the carbon emissions reduction target, or CERT. The Government's reconfirmation of the decision to extend CERT to December 2012 is greatly to be welcomed; I am grateful to have heard that from the Minister in his opening speech.

The next question is about the community energy saving programme, or CESP, which focused on household energy efficiency in poor areas and worked on a house-by-house, street-by-street basis. A precursor to the programme was established in the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for North Tyneside (Mrs Glindon), who also made a maiden speech today. It was called warm zone in her area and she rightly told us of the great benefits to those in fuel poverty in her constituency.

There is also the decent homes programme, which has made flats in housing estates in constituencies such as mine warm, decent and dry. I am proud that the standard assessment procedure, or SAP, ratings have increased in the private and social rented sectors since 1997, under the Labour Government; the social rented sector improved more and faster.

Another priority under Labour was to fight fuel poverty. The hon. Member for Tamworth (Christopher Pincher) asked why fuel poverty went up under a Labour Government. My hon. Friend the Member for Lewisham East (Heidi Alexander) explained that it was because of an unprecedented rise in fuel prices. Nevertheless, without Government measures, the number of fuel-poor households would have been 400,000 to 800,000 more in England in 2008.

What about Warm Front? That flagship policy of ours gave energy-efficiency grants to the most vulnerable households. We Labour Members are very concerned about the future of the policy and the priority that the coalition will give to those in fuel poverty as a whole. The Minister said in his opening remarks that his new policies are game changers and innovations. If they are, and if they work, we will support them. If the Government keep to our carbon reduction plans and time is not wasted, if their strategy is coherent and effective and if they meet the needs of the poor, they will have our support. However, if, as we fear, they are prepared to sacrifice all for the sake of short-term savings, ignoring the long-term need, they will have a fight on their hands.

We greatly welcome the extension of CERT, but does the coalition believe that that is the game changer that will really help the fuel-poor? How many in fuel poverty do the Government expect will be helped as a result of the extension of CERT? Will the Minister of State, hon. Member for Wealden (Charles Hendry), clarify whether the super-priority group of 15% is in addition to the 40% priority group or contained within it? In January, the Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government, the right hon. Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark), said that grant programmes were to be maintained. That is good news, perhaps, because Warm Front is a grant programme. Does this mean that the Government are thinking again about Warm Front? Will they ensure that it helps the fuel-poor, given that CERT alone may not be enough?

I have gabbled on—I appreciate that I have spoken very fast—and I am afraid that I have another three pages to go, but I promise to finish soon. It is odd that only those of us who are speaking from the Dispatch Box are limited as to the amount of time that we have. Ministers have an extremely difficult job, but if they act within the parameters that we have set out in helping the fuel poor and truly cutting carbon emissions, they will certainly have our support; otherwise, they will not.

6.50 pm

**The Minister of State, Department of Energy and Climate Change (Charles Hendry):** Let me begin by warmly welcoming the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury (Emily Thornberry) to the Dispatch Box. In the past, as a Parliamentary Private Secretary, she has been forced merely to chunter occasionally from the sidelines, and it is wonderful to hear her soothing, mellifluous tones. She probably did not expect that in her first speech from the Dispatch Box she would be talking about the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle (Gregory Barker), doing his hoovering in the buff—a thought that is as unpleasant as the activity is potentially dangerous. We congratulate her on her promotion and wish her well in her new role.

This excellent debate has shown the quality of Members in this House and their understanding of a wide range of energy-efficiency issues, which occasionally spread into other areas of energy policy. We have also heard some outstandingly good maiden speeches, and I congratulate all hon. Members who have made those contributions today. I endorse what the hon. Member for Islington South and Finsbury said in hoping that it will not be 32 years until my hon. Friend the Member for South Dorset (Richard Drax) speaks here again. He, too, talked about nudity; I thought that it might become a recurring theme, and was relieved that it did not. The House will welcome his commitment to being a free-thinking advocate of the interests of South Dorset, although the Whips blanched when he said that. We look forward to many future contributions from him.

The hon. Member for North Tyneside (Mrs Glindon) expressed concern about jobs in North Tyneside. We now have a real opportunity to develop new jobs in the marine and offshore wind sectors, and I want to work together with local authority representatives to try to make the strongest case for developing green jobs in this country. She talked about the mining industry; I want her to be in no doubt that this Government are determined to be a friend of the mining industry. I want to see a renaissance of mining in Britain, and I want British miners to deliver the coal for new clean-coal facilities so that we are less reliant in the future on imported coal.

The hon. Lady referred to energy efficiency in terms of work that she had done in her local council. It is vital that we involve local councils in this work—a point that was made very effectively by the hon. Member for Derby North (Chris Williamson). As he said, we have to unlock the potential that exists. We must capitalise and build on councils' expertise as social landlords if we are to ensure that we achieve maximum energy-efficiency potential across the housing stock.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Ribble (Lorraine Fullbrook) made an impassioned maiden speech in which she talked about companies in her constituency which can contribute towards reducing carbon emissions. She described the problems that she had experienced with Warm Front. Many of us raised similar issues during the last Parliament, and the Government, to their credit, addressed many of them. We now have to monitor carefully how Warm Front works and moves forward to ensure that it is delivering help in the most effective way.

The hon. Member for Strangford (Jim Shannon) made a thoughtful and measured speech. I hope to visit Northern Ireland soon to look at the marine current turbines project in Strangford lough. He made the telling point that targets must have a purpose. We must raise our ambitions, and targets are an important way to achieve that, but we must be certain that those targets are deliverable and achievable.

The hon. Member for Wells (Tessa Munt) raised a whole range of issues, particularly about National Grid's plans for new infrastructure across the Somerset levels. National Grid clearly has a legal obligation to show that it is considering the alternatives. The hon. Lady can truly expect that we will take into account her concerns. We know that in making these decisions we have to carry people with us, because those decisions must have public support if they are to be wholly endorsed.

The hon. Member for Brighton, Pavilion (Caroline Lucas) made, although it was not her maiden speech, what I believe was her first speech on her own subject. I hope that we will hear from her on a regular basis. I want her to harry the Government and chase us to do better. I want her constantly to say, "Let's raise our aspirations to do the best we can". We are most determined to be the greenest Government there has ever been, but I want to know that we will be truly challenged by people who always want to raise the bar higher. We have to be objective and realistic about what we can achieve, but we should be absolutely clear that we welcome such contributions, and we encourage the hon. Lady in that respect.

I have the greatest personal respect for the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford (Joan Ruddock), and I know her long-standing personal commitment to this subject. However, in the past we have seen a plethora of schemes, consultations, tests, experiments and pilot projects. The question should not be how many schemes were introduced but what they delivered.

When we look back over the past few years, of course we recognise things that have been done well, but fuel poverty doubled from its base of 2 million households in 2004 to 4 million in 2007, and it is probably at 5 million now. The energy efficiency of our homes is still among the worst in Europe. When there was an opportunity to welcome the green deal into the Energy Act 2010, the then Government voted it down. There was no Government leadership in saying, "We can show the way forward by requiring all Departments to reduce their carbon emissions by 10% in a year." Perhaps one of the most telling indicators of all is that in five years, we did not have a single debate on energy efficiency in the Government's name. Our concern is not the intent, good will and hopes that the right hon. Lady had, but whether the previous Government had the magnitude of ambition that the issue requires.

Now we are talking not about a few thousand homes being made energy-efficient but about 14 million homes across the country that are currently poorly insulated and need to be brought up to the right level. That is not tinkering, it is a fundamental rethink of the approach that we take. As the Minister of State, my hon. Friend the Member for Bexhill and Battle, said, that is a step-change in the Government's ambition.

The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) made an extremely thoughtful and measured speech. He talked about the lack of skills, a point that the hon.

Member for Brent North (Barry Gardiner) took up. I can confirm to the hon. Member for Cheltenham that our hon. Friends in the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills are considering whether colleges should be able to self-accredit and whether we can deliver the change that he mentioned.

The hon. Gentleman talked about the complex nature of the code for sustainable homes, and I agree with him that simplicity should be an important part of our approach. We want to drive that through, because if we are to carry people with us, they have to understand what is being asked of them. He talked also about smart metering, as did my hon. Friend the Member for Bournemouth East (Mr Ellwood). That will be critical not just to how we deliver energy efficiency but to how we deal with fuel poverty. We need to enable people to access the cheapest tariffs, and as in Northern Ireland, enable those on prepayment meters to have cheaper tariffs than others. The goal is not just smart metering but the prize of a smart grid, so that we can manage demand much more effectively and avoid the need to build new power stations by making optimum use of what we have.

I hope that the hon. Member for Sheffield, Heeley (Meg Munn) is satisfied by the offer that my ministerial colleague made to meet her to talk about her concerns in her constituency. We are very keen to understand the issue of thresholds and how we can take the most effective approach possible.

The hon. Member for Llanelli (Nia Griffith), the hon. Member for Southampton, Test (Dr Whitehead) and the former Minister, the right hon. Member for Lewisham, Deptford, spoke about how we could incentivise private landlords to improve their energy efficiency. We are absolutely determined to secure that through the green deal. There will be other policies on the matter as well, but we believe that the green deal provides an opportunity for good landlords to take the action necessary to improve the energy efficiency of their homes. It gets around the problem of their paying for an improvement from which they will personally get no benefit, because the funding mechanism addresses that. We hope that it

can make a real change to disincentivisation, but we recognise that if it does not, further regulations may be necessary.

My hon. Friend the Member for Corby (Ms Bagshawe) talked about the need for transparency and many other matters. We understand the concerns that she and others have, and we will consider them further.

I have been able to respond to many of the issues raised in the debate. The Government are driving forward a clear agenda for change, and I am pleased that we have the good will and support of the House in taking it forward. I again commend colleagues who have made their maiden speeches, and I reassure those whose points have not been responded to that we will write to them with a full response. This has been an outstanding debate on a key issue, and I am very pleased that we have had the chance to have it so early in the Parliament.

7pm

*Motion lapsed ( Standing Order No. 9(3) ).*

**Mr Wayne David** (Caerphilly) (Lab): On a point of order, Mr Deputy Speaker. This afternoon, in the Welsh Grand Committee, the Government suffered their first defeat of this Parliament. By 21 votes to seven, the proposition that the Committee had considered the matter of the Government's legislative programme and the Budget statement as they relate to Wales was rejected. In the light of that, will you use your good offices to ensure that another meeting of the Welsh Grand Committee takes place in order to consider these issues?

**Mr Deputy Speaker (Mr Lindsay Hoyle)**: That is not a point of order for me. The hon. Gentleman has now put the matter on the record, and we will leave it at that.

#### **BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**

*Motion made, and Question put forthwith ( Standing Order No. 15 ),*

That, at this day's sitting, proceedings on the Motion in the name of Sir George Young relating to Select Committees (Membership), may be proceeded with, though opposed, until any hour.—( *Stephen Crabb.* )

*Question agreed to.*

## Select Committees (Membership)

7.1 pm

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Heath):** I beg to move,

That the following amendments to Standing Order No. 152 (Select committees related to government departments) shall have effect for the remainder of the present Parliament:—

In the table in paragraph (2), in the final column (Maximum members)

(1) leave out '11' and insert '12', in respect of:—

(a) the Defence Committee,

(b) the Justice Committee and

(c) the Welsh Affairs Committee;

(2) leave out '11' and insert '13' in respect of the Treasury Committee; and

(3) leave out '13' and insert '14' in respect of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee.

The House will recall that the Government brought forward proposals on 15 June to increase the membership of the Defence, Justice and Treasury Committees from 11 to 16 members and of the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee from 13 to 14 members. These proposals were offered in good faith, with the intention of securing proper representation for smaller parties on certain Select Committees. However, they were resisted by the elected Select Committee Chairs, who tabled amendments to remove the increases to 16 and to provide, as an alternative, a power for the Committee of Selection to increase the size of no more than three Committees by no more than two members.

The proposal was also strongly resisted during the debate on the business of the House motion by the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Mr Llwyd) on the ground that it did not provide for Plaid Cymru to be represented on the Welsh Affairs Committee. The hon. Member for Perth and North Perthshire (Pete Wishart) also expressed reservations about the proposed motion.

We therefore undertook not to move the original motion, but to consult further and come back with new proposals. The membership of departmental Select Committees, including the party composition of the Committees, is for the Committee of Selection to propose and for the House as a whole to approve. The purpose of these changes in the maximum membership is to give the Committee greater latitude to accommodate smaller parties on the Committees concerned while still broadly reflecting the composition of the House.

The Government accept the view, expressed by the Wright Committee and the Liaison Committee, that smaller Committees are generally preferable. However, the Wright Committee also acknowledged the desirability of ensuring that smaller parties were properly represented. There is a clear tension between these two objectives, and I hope that the House can agree that these proposals represent a fair compromise between the two.

I especially wish to express my thanks to my right hon. Friend the Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasury for making efforts to secure a swift and satisfactory conclusion to negotiations.

In order to reflect our commitment to the Wright reforms, we propose that the changes should be limited to the current Parliament. No doubt the issue will need

to be revisited anyway in the next Parliament, depending on the composition of the House. I hope that the House will be able to agree to the motion this evening so that the Committee of Selection can nominate members and the Committees can get on with their work.

7.4 pm

**Ms Rosie Winterton (Doncaster Central) (Lab):** I thank the Deputy Leader of the House for tabling this motion proposing changes to the maximum number of members of Select Committees. As I think that this is the first time that we have faced each other at the Dispatch Box, I also take this opportunity to congratulate the hon. Gentleman on his appointment as Deputy Leader of the House.

The report on rebuilding the House identified the importance of the inclusion of the minor parties and independents on Select Committees and we are grateful for the work that has been done through the usual channels to address that issue. It is now right for the House to consider the motion so that the minor parties and independents can be accommodated on those Committees, thereby ensuring their participation.

7.5 pm

**Sir Alan Beith (Berwick-upon-Tweed) (LD):** It is a pity that we have to have this motion, because it departs so markedly from the Wright Committee recommendation that, in the interests of working effectively and not making too many claims on the pool of available Members, Committees should have nine or, at most, 11 members. The elected Chairs of Committees have a strong view that we should not be departing from the Wright recommendations. Of course, when we saw the motion to increase Committee membership to 16, we thought it hard to imagine a more dramatic departure from what Wright recommended.

There has been a continuous process of modification which later led to the proposal that a series of Committees should have two extra members. That was then further modified to a motion in which only one Committee had two extra members and a number had one extra member. That was further modified on Monday night when I asked the Leader of the House to include the provision that it would apply only for this Parliament, which has been claimed as a success by my hon. Friend the Deputy Leader of the House. I genuinely welcome the willingness of the Leader of the House, his deputy and the Patronage Secretary to try to resolve this matter. However, the view of Committee Chairs is that this matter could have been resolved within existing allocations had parties been prepared to make adjustments to meet the needs of minority parties.

In fact, the Conservative party has done that, because the penultimate stage of the discussions involved an additional Conservative Member to match the fact that there was an additional Opposition Member represented by the addition of a minority party Member. Committee Chairs are generally in favour of minority party Members being on Select Committees, and I look forward to having the hon. Member for Dwyfor Meirionnydd (Mr Llwyd) on my Committee, as I understand he intends to be. He will be a very good Member to have on the Justice Committee. However, had the Labour party been prepared to give up one or two places on Committees, we might not be where we are now. None

the less, I am glad that my hon. Friend the Member the Deputy Leader of the House has reasserted the importance of the Wright recommendation, and I hope that we will eventually return to the principle that we keep Committees reasonably small, with members fully involved in their work.

7.7 pm

**Mr Heath:** I am grateful to the right hon. Member for Doncaster Central (Ms Winterton) and my right hon. Friend the Member for Berwick-upon-Tweed (Sir Alan Beith) for their comments. I am pleased that we are able to apply a good dollop of common sense to what was required in order to ensure that all parties can play their proper parts in the workings of this House. I commend this motion to the House.

*Question put and agreed to.*

## BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

*Ordered,*

That, at the sitting Monday 5 July, notwithstanding Standing Order No. 20 (Time for taking private business) the Private Business set down by the Chairman of Ways and Means may be entered upon at any hour, and may then be proceeded with, though opposed, for three hours, after which the Speaker shall interrupt the business.—(*Mr Vara.*)

*Ordered,*

That, at the sitting on Wednesday 14 July, notwithstanding the provisions of Standing Order No. 16 (Proceedings under an Act or an European Union documents), the Speaker shall put the Questions necessary to dispose of proceedings on the Motion in the name of Secretary Theresa May relating to Police Grant Report not later three hours after the commencement of proceedings on the Motion; proceedings may continue, though opposed, after the moment of interruption; and Standing Order No. 41A (Deferred divisions) shall not apply.—(*Mr Vara.*)

## PETITION

### Dunstable Northern Bypass

7.8 pm

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): It gives me pleasure to present a petition calling for a Dunstable Northern bypass. The petition was organised by Dunstable town council and others.

The petition reads:

The Petition of Dunstable Town Council in the constituency of South West Bedfordshire,

Declares that the town of Dunstable suffers serious traffic congestion; further declares that a link road between the A5 and M1 would relieve this congestion; and notes that HM Treasury approved this link on 9 December 2009.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to commence without delay the A5-M1 link as approved by HM Treasury on 9 December 2009.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.

[P000840]

## A5 to M1 Link

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

7.9 pm

**Andrew Selous** (South West Bedfordshire) (Con): I am grateful to Mr Speaker for giving me the chance to raise with the Minister responsible for roads the vital need for the A5 to M1 link. When I made my maiden speech, on 2 July 2001, I stressed the urgent need for a bypass for Dunstable, Houghton Regis and the surrounding villages. I also stressed its importance to Leighton Buzzard as a business location. The need for a bypass in Dunstable is not new; indeed, the first mention of congestion in the town that I have been told about is in a 1924 newspaper article that talked about the traffic bottleneck in Dunstable. My predecessor, Sir David Madel, who was the Member for South West Bedfordshire for 31 years, from 1970 to 2001, also campaigned for a bypass for Dunstable throughout his time in Parliament.

Not long after my election, I presented another petition to the House, signed by 25,000 of my constituents—more than elected me in 2001—calling for the urgent need for a bypass to be addressed. I was therefore delighted when, in July 2003, the then Secretary of State for Transport—now the shadow Chancellor, the right hon. Member for Edinburgh South West (Mr Darling)—announced to the House that he was

“endorsing recommendations for improvements to some trunk roads of regional importance,”

one of which was

“a northern bypass for Dunstable”.—[*Official Report*, 9 July 2003; Vol. 408, c. 1177.]

I asked him when the Dunstable northern bypass would be built. In reply, he said:

“In the past five years, there have been long and detailed studies, but the time has now come when we need to get on and implement them, precisely to remove some of the inconvenience and congestion and to deliver the improved safety about which he is concerned.”—[*Official Report*, 9 July 2003; Vol. 408, c. 1195.]

I was therefore hugely disappointed when, at the end of the Parliament after which the then Secretary of State announced that the Dunstable northern bypass would be built, not a shovel had hit the ground.

It is a huge source of concern to me how long it takes for a new road to be built in this country. I understand that other European countries are able to build roads much more quickly. I understand that there is a much shorter delay between the announcement of a road being built and its completion in many of our competing neighbouring countries. One consequence of delay is that the cost escalates hugely, making even more demands on the public purse. The cost of the A5 to M1 link has virtually tripled since the first estimates back in 2003. I have spoken in the past of the near-Zimbabwean levels of inflation on major roads contracts. I understand that the Department insists on open book accounting, yet I cannot help believing that there must be cheaper ways for such roads to be built. I suggest that we need to take an urgent look at how genuine the competition is between road builders, to ensure that the Department and the taxpayer get real value for money in building new roads.

Sometimes I am tempted to think that the area that I represent has become, if not the land that time forgot, then the land that successive Governments have forgotten

[Andrew Selous]

to build the necessary infrastructure in. In the north of Bedfordshire, the county town of Bedford seems to have all the bypasses that it needs. I had not even heard of the village of Ridgmont, to the north of my constituency, until I was told that it was to receive its own much needed bypass. As I will demonstrate shortly, the need for a bypass to the north of Dunstable is overwhelming for the residents of Dunstable, Houghton Regis and the surrounding villages, but a bypass is also essential for Leighton Buzzard.

**Nadine Dorries** (Mid Bedfordshire) (Con): My hon. Friend mentioned the village of Ridgmont. The bypass there has been gratefully received. Ridgmont is a village, and there are other villages in my constituency that will benefit hugely from the A5 to M1 link. Those villages will suffer from a lack of connectivity if the road to which he has referred is not built. Does he agree that it is imperative that the road should be built, not just for his constituency, but for the whole of Bedfordshire?

**Andrew Selous:** I am grateful for my hon. Friend's support. The road will also benefit major towns such as Aylesbury, in providing fast direct access to the national motorway network.

I do not want Ministers or officials at the Department for Transport to think for one moment that the Luton-Dunstable busway will provide the answers to the problems of congestion, retail decline and lack of business growth in Dunstable and Houghton Regis. It will not. The only hope to secure economic regeneration to provide much needed jobs for my constituents and to provide much needed local housing is for the A5 to M1 link to be built urgently.

The need for the A5 to M1 link can be demonstrated by many examples of life in Dunstable. Dunstable high street has 56 empty shops in it because of the length of time it takes for shoppers to get into and out of the town centre. Some reductions in business rates have been granted as a result, which obviously means a loss of revenue to the Exchequer. During recent times of economic growth, every other area of Bedfordshire increased its level of employment between 2001 and 2008, but in South Bedfordshire there was a loss of 1,850 jobs—overwhelmingly due to congestion. Those figures are taken from the annual business inquiry data provided by the Central Bedfordshire council.

Major employers have closed down and left the area over the years and have not been replaced by sufficient numbers of new employers to provide the jobs that my constituents need today. Many of my constituents are forced to travel out of the area to find work, thus making congestion even worse.

Congestion is bad both for travellers going north-south on the A5 through Dunstable as well as for travellers heading east-west on the A505 through Dunstable. One story from a local shopkeeper illustrates this well. A customer was travelling east on the A505 along West street, trying to get to a shop in the Quadrant shopping centre in the middle of Dunstable. He was stuck in traffic as so often happens; he rang the shop keeper who left his shop, crossed the middle of Dunstable, gave him the goods as he was stuck in traffic in his car. That customer then turned round in the road, and drove out

of Dunstable never to come and shop in the town again. How can the shopkeepers of the town I am proud to represent make a living when they are faced with an infrastructure deficit as bad as that?

The economic benefits of building this road have been estimated by both the Highways Agency and the East of England to be very significant. Central Bedfordshire council, with its private sector developers, also intends to build the Woodside industrial estate connection road from the new junction 11A, which will not require Department for Transport funds.

**Kelvin Hopkins** (Luton North) (Lab): I am most grateful to the hon. Gentleman for giving way, and I support everything he says. Does he accept that what he is suggesting will also bring enormous benefits to the town of Luton, especially when the bypass right across north Luton is built?

**Andrew Selous:** The hon. Gentleman is absolutely right, and I am grateful for the support from him and from Luton borough council on this matter.

This road will greatly ease congestion in Dunstable and lead to much lower pollution levels and a better quality of life for those who live and work in the town centre. Dunstable and Houghton Regis will once again become towns that people can easily get in and out of to do business, shop, see their friends and socialise. This will greatly help all the shops in the town, as well as attracting many new employers to the area and persuading existing employers to expand their operations locally.

The improvement in air quality in the town centre should be significant and GPs from my own practice in central Dunstable tell me that levels of asthma among children living near the heavily congested A5, which runs through the centre of Dunstable as the town's high street, are much higher than for children who live further away.

It has been estimated by the Highways Agency that the total economic benefits are in the region of £684 million, against the cost of £135 million. The Highways Agency says that there will be £263 million-worth of economic benefits for business users and £302 million-worth of benefits for consumers, while a study commissioned by the East of England and carried out by the consultants W. S. Atkins said there would also be a further £190 million of wider economic benefit. All those figures are at 2002 prices, following the Department for Transport's guidance to enable common comparisons to be made. It is also estimated that the road will bring 5,750 extra jobs to be created through the release of new employment land, and I understand that a proposed rail freight depot at Sundon, creating a further 1,100 to 1,800 jobs, is also not likely to happen unless the A5 to M1 link is built.

I am very conscious that a string of figures can seem very dry and technical, but the fact is that this new road has the potential to change the lives of my constituents for the better. Let us think of the mother in Dunstable who told me recently that her 18-year-old son had knocked on the door of every employer in the town to be told there was no job for him locally. I believe that this road will make a difference for that young man, as well as for very many others.

The reason why the private sector developer is prepared to put in such significant private funding is that the road will enable 5,150 dwellings, which are essential to

meet local affordable housing need, to be built. The A5 to M1 link will also enable other new housing developments to be built, thus greatly addressing housing need.

Concern has been expressed locally about the decision to suspend the public inquiry, at which I was due to give evidence this Friday in strong support of this much needed road. I understand why the Government have had to suspend public inquiries to ensure that the funding is available for those inquiries that do proceed. I am greatly heartened, however, by the fact that there is the offer of very substantial funding to pay for junction 11A and the Woodside industrial estate connection road from a local private sector developer. That offer is an example of exactly the type of public-private sector partnership for which both the Prime Minister and the Chancellor of the Exchequer have called. The offer will make the economic benefits I have described even greater as the cost to the public purse is significantly cut. I know that Department for Transport officials will tomorrow meet officers from Central Bedfordshire council and representatives of the private sector developer to discuss how this vital road can be taken forward.

I look forward to hearing what my hon. Friend the Minister has to say in reply. My constituents are reasonable people and understand that this Government have to be responsible with our public finances. My constituents have been patient and long-suffering over many years as the infrastructure that they have needed for their towns and villages to flourish has been denied them. They understand the need for the Government's current spending review, but they also need to know that things will get better for them and that this road, which the previous Government agreed to build on 9 July 2003, will be built, and will be built soon. I will listen with hope and expectation to what my hon. Friend, who I know to be a conscientious and hard-working Minister, has to say.

7.21 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Transport (Mike Penning):** It is a great privilege to be responding as the roads Minister this evening in my first Adjournment debate. I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire (Andrew Selous), who is my constituency neighbour, on securing the debate, and on the double whammy of having also presented a petition on the same subject tonight. I have been a Member of Parliament for five years, but I have not witnessed that before, and I suspect many colleagues might see it as a way forward. May I also congratulate other Members who have been campaigning hard on this issue, especially the two Members who are present this evening: my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Bedfordshire (Nadine Dorries) and the hon. Member for Luton North (Kelvin Hopkins)?

This scheme is currently under formal statutory process, so it would not be appropriate for me to discuss it in greater detail than I have done in correspondence with my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire. I will do my best within the restrictions, but I must not risk prejudicing the public inquiry process, if and when it starts.

As my hon. Friend said, the A5-M1 link road scheme has been part of the roads programme since 2003. It has been promoted to address traffic congestion on the A505 and the A5 in the centre of Dunstable, an area

that I know well myself—I have been stuck in the traffic there. This is also part of the core trunk road network linking London and the south midlands, and it is a key road corridor for long and medium-distance traffic travelling south from Milton Keynes through Dunstable to the M1, forming part of the historic London to Holyhead trunk road. The A505 to the A5 and the A416 are also affected by this scheme.

As a result of being part of these key transport links, which facilitate the movement of large volumes of traffic, parts of the A5 have become heavily congested, particularly Dunstable high street. I am also conscious that Luton has been affected as well. Interestingly, and probably unsurprisingly, the A5 has a high accident rate. That might be a result of the congestion and of drivers speeding away from that. This morning the accident rates were produced by constituency for the first time, so Members can see the figures for roads in their area. I look forward to hearing their ideas as to how we might overcome traffic problems and improve road safety throughout the road network.

The Highways Agency proposes a new 2.79 mile-long two-lane dual carriageway from the A5 to a new junction 11A on the M1 north of Luton. By offering an alternative link to the motorway, the proposed A5-M1 link road would act as a northern bypass for Dunstable.

In September 2005, the Highways Agency appointed a contractor under the early contractor involvement initiative to take the A5-M1 link through the statutory process and construction phases. Also during 2005, the Highways Agency held a public consultation, and the preferred northern route was announced on 23 February 2007. The scheme was subsequently developed, leading to the publication of draft orders on 9 December 2009. That is where my restriction lies; I must not prejudice the public inquiry because of those draft orders. Under the previous allocation criteria for Highways Agency road schemes, the A5-M1 link was classified as a route of regional importance. Funding decisions on all schemes remain within the remit of the Secretary of State for Transport, irrespective of whether private funding is coming in. If public funding is involved, the decisions are part and parcel of his remit.

I am very personally aware, and not just because of the excellent lobbying that has been done by hon. Members representing constituencies in this part of the world, that the A5-M1 road link is considered a priority. If I were the MP for South West Bedfordshire or for Mid Bedfordshire, I would be sitting on those seats and I would be having this debate tonight, because that is exactly what a constituency MP should be doing. I was also very conscious of the fact that my hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire was aware of the problems and restrictions that I face at the moment.

The scheme proposes to construct a new junction 11A, which would allow a connection with the proposed northern bypass and a connection that joins the A5-M1 link at the eastern end. I wish to deal with some of my hon. Friend's concerns at this point. I pay tribute to the enthusiasm of not only my hon. Friend and his colleagues on both sides of the House, but the local authorities in Bedfordshire, and to the importance that they attach to the scheme. I recognise that my hon. Friend has been a long-standing and vocal supporter of the scheme; I believe that this is the fourth Adjournment debate that he has had—

**Andrew Selous:** Hopefully the last.

**Mike Penning:** It may well be the last.

My hon. Friend has recently asked a number of questions of the Secretary of State, and I have tried to answer them in as much detail and with as much explanation as possible. I am sure that more will follow in the next few weeks, as is right and proper.

I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond to concerns following the Government's announcement on 10 June. I am sure that all hon. Members will feel that it was personal to them when the roads programme was suspended and all public inquiries stopped. The rationale behind the move was nothing personal in respect of any particular scheme. The decision had to be made on the basis of whether I could guarantee, and the Secretary of State could guarantee, the funding for a programme, subject to the spending review that will not be with us until October. I could not put forward public money for public inquiries without knowing whether the funding would be in place in the future for a road programme. Where we are using taxpayers' money, it is important that we are diligent as to how it should be spent.

I know that that decision was a great disappointment, not only to my hon. Friend, but to the many people around the country who are involved in the many schemes and are lobbying me extensively every time that they bump into me. That is right and proper, but the supporters of schemes must understand how hard it is in this difficult financial situation that the previous Government have left us in. We have to be very diligent in determining how money is spent and we must not spend money in advance of its being allocated.

The reasons for postponing the public inquiry and not reinstating it even when there was an offer of partial funding from the private sector for this is that the programme would still have also contained much public funding. As I said, it would not be proper for us to go ahead with the public inquiry, irrespective of whether funding was coming from sources other than central funding, without knowing that we had the money to go forward. This part of the programme is only part of the project on the M1, and it is important that we have this scheme together when it goes before the public inquiry, should that happen.

As a general policy, we have therefore decided that forthcoming public inquiries throughout the country will be postponed for the time being. Our aim is to provide an indication of the way forward for all schemes once the spending review has been completed. Postponing the public inquiry into the A5-M1 link is entirely consistent with that programme around the country and we have taken a similar position with all other schemes.

The consequences of the delay are significant. I am conscious of that fact and I know that there is disappointment about this scheme and other schemes. Should the Secretary of State decide that the scheme should go ahead, it will not be possible to construct the A5-M1 link scheme in accordance with the timetable originally planned. In particular, it will be no longer possible to optimise construction with the works currently under way on the M1 between junctions 10 and 13, as previously intended.

The delay in the A5-M1 link will mean that there will be an increase in the cost of the scheme. We know that. It is not something that we wanted to happen, but it had to be that way otherwise we might have gone ahead with a programme for which we did not necessarily have the funding. I fully recognise how unfortunate and difficult it is for people who have been waiting so long for the scheme to go ahead, but with the funding uncertainties, it remains difficult—impossible, really—for us to go ahead with the public inquiry.

The Highways Agency will review the programme with the aim of minimising the time and cost consequences should the Secretary of State go ahead with the programme. Central Bedfordshire's offer of funding, as I said earlier, was very welcome. My hon. Friend the Member for South West Bedfordshire has touched on something here that we can take forward with other programmes as regards how we engage the local community much more and how programmes can be seen to bring better bang for our buck, as it were, when so much public money is being spent.

I am also pleased that, as my hon. Friend knows, tomorrow there will be a meeting of my officials with the developers and others so that we can see what is on the table and what programmes are available. I keep having to put in the word "should", because that is the way that it has to be, but should the programme go forward we will know better very early on how it can be taken forward.

The funding proposals described in the letter from my hon. Friend to the Secretary of State are of interest and I have asked my officials not only to have the initial discussions in the meeting tomorrow but to try to flesh out how they could be taken forward. But—I have to come back to this—it does not provide a sufficient basis to reinstate the public inquiry ahead of the spending review. I hope that my hon. Friend understands that.

The overall project would cost in excess of £150 million, approximately half of which would be for the new junction 11A on the M1. Therefore, even if developer funding were available to fund the cost of junction 11A in full, it would still be necessary for the Secretary of State to commit significant balances to the remainder of the scheme in order for the scheme to go forward. That is something that the Secretary of State is not prepared to do. I know that that has caused a lot of disappointment, but it is consistent with the way in which we have looked at all the projects around the country.

I should also add that if we were to reinstate the public inquiry now, it would not be able to start until the autumn due to the statutory time scales required. The delays would be back in place. That would mean that the construction programme would still be delayed beyond the previously planned start date. Nevertheless, there is scope for developer funding to improve the affordability of the scheme and to develop projects around the scheme and therefore its prospects within the spending review. I therefore consider it to be of the utmost importance that the scope of any funding support, with the whole programme available, should be developed as early as possible.

The way forward is for the benefits provided by the scheme to be considered carefully as part of the spending review. If the scheme remains a priority after the spending review and it can be delivered within the funding available

to the Department along with, possibly, funding from local authorities and the developer, the Highways Agency will develop a revised programme to take the statutory process forward—particularly the public inquiry—in liaison with regional stakeholders.

In conclusion, I am grateful to my hon. Friend for raising these issues here today as well as in correspondence with me, privately, behind the Speaker's Chair and at any other opportunity. I think that is right and proper and, as I said earlier, I would have done exactly the same if I were in his position because that is what a constituency MP does. He is not alone in his campaign: my hon. Friend the Member for Mid Bedfordshire and the hon. Member for Luton North, who are present, have also made their points. We have tried to be as fair as possible throughout the process. Having come to the Department only seven weeks ago, I have been very conscious of the need to make decisions early on, and the Secretary of State has been very conscious that we

should be as consistent, open and public as possible throughout our decision making.

I hope that I have reassured my hon. Friend that the Department is aware of the importance of the A5-M1 link road scheme, and I hope also that he will appreciate the necessity of the Government not committing funds ahead of the comprehensive spending review. I look forward to having further discussions about this with him and other colleagues and officials—indeed, I will speak to officials tomorrow. I hope that by having this debate on the Floor of the House we have aired this issue, which is very important to his constituents and others, and I hope also that we will have an opportunity to look at the scheme properly when the spending review is finished.

*Question put and agreed to.*

7.36 pm

*House adjourned.*



# Westminster Hall

*Wednesday 30 June 2010*

[MR MIKE WEIR *in the Chair*]

## Free School Meals

*Motion made, and Question proposed, That the sitting be now adjourned.—(Brooks Newmark.)*

9.30 am

**Mrs Sharon Hodgson** (Washington and Sunderland West) (Lab): I am pleased to have secured this debate on free school meals because it allows me to highlight a shameful decision by the coalition Government. Despite the current financial situation facing our country, an extremely strong case can be made for the provision of universal free school meals. The fact that the Government are choosing to limit and cut that provision instead of widening it seems to be a step in the wrong direction, not just because of the provision's health and educational benefits to pupils, but because of its the financial benefits for the least well off in society.

My involvement and that of my hon. Friends in the Chamber started in 2006, not long after I was elected to the House. My hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods) and I, with around a dozen other hon. Members, went on a fact-finding visit to Sweden, primarily to find out more about the Swedish health and education systems, and particularly free schools. While in Sweden, my attention was captured not by free schools, but the country's school meals policy. Free school meals have been available there to all children for several years. The take-up is approximately 85%, and we were amazed to see children not only tucking into a healthy, nutritious meal, but serving themselves from a buffet and working together to help to clear away plates and wipe the tables. Those children were seven.

Pupils and teachers eat together as a class on a rota system so that there are no huge crowds at lunch time, which is an important part of the day for continued learning and socialising, not only with one other, but with the teacher. The system provides an opportunity for teachers to have time to themselves—they spend 40 minutes in the staff room when the children go out to play—and the children do not load up on sugary snacks and then sit down to afternoon study while metaphorically swinging from the lampshades. It was interesting that although my hon. Friend and I returned from Sweden excited and convinced of the benefits of universal free school meals, the new Secretary of State for Education returned from his visit to Sweden considerably more excited about free schools.

Since 2005, there has been a sea change in our attitude to the healthiness of school meals, thanks partly to the high-profile campaign by Jamie Oliver. The changes since then have been crucial. The food provided to children who choose school meals is, more often than not, fresh, nutritious and locally sourced. That is a far cry from the profit-driven mentality that previously dominated school meal provision and led to children eating such monstrosities as turkey twizzlers. That was

only the first part of the necessary change, and when we had made school food healthy, it was our duty to ensure that as many children as possible ate it.

**Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that eligibility is a key issue? Newham is fourth highest on deprivation indices for child poverty. Around 46.9% of our children live below the poverty line, but only 29% are entitled to free school meals.

**Mrs Hodgson:** Exactly. I shall come to that, and it is why I call for universal free school meals.

Last week, an Ofsted report found that although the quality of school meals had increased, the take-up of free school meals by those entitled to them remained low because of stigma, complexity and some families' constant movement in and out of entitlement. I received free school meals from the day I started school until the day I left, so I can speak about the stigma from personal experience. Even today, a significant stigma is attached to receiving free school meals, and expanding access to all is the fairest way of eradicating that stigma.

One in five children who are eligible for free school meals do not receive them. In addition, a swathe of forgotten children is not entitled to them, although they definitely live in poverty. A healthy packed lunch might be too expensive for their parent or parents, who might be in a low paid, full-time job and rushing about doing their best to look after their children. Universal free school meals are undoubtedly the best way to address all those problems, but they would do more than that; they would ensure that all children had a healthy meal during the school day. Some parents may be able to shop at Waitrose or Marks and Spencer, but it does not follow that their child's lunch box is healthy. A ready meal from Marks and Spencer may cost more than a ready meal from Asda or Tesco, but it is still a ready meal, and we should not assume that all children go home to healthy food just because they have an upmarket postcode.

That is why my colleagues and I have campaigned so strongly on the matter for the past four years. We have lobbied incessantly. We lobbied the Child Poverty Action Group to take up the cause, and I am delighted to see my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) in the Chamber today and look forward to hearing her valuable contribution to the debate. Believe it or not, the issue was not always popular. There were objections even in my own party to rolling out free school meals regardless of household income. However, it remains the fairest way to ensure that all children below the poverty line, however that is measured, receive a healthy meal during the school day.

I chased Cabinet Ministers through the voting Lobby to try to convince them of our crusade to such an extent that they pre-empted me before I had even said a word by telling me that the matter was still being considered, and eventually to tell me that it was with my right hon. Friend the Member for Doncaster North (Edward Miliband), who was writing our manifesto. I need not say what happened next, as I am sure that hon. Members can imagine, but I became his shadow and was always ready to extol the virtues of universal free school meals.

The first big success for our campaign came at the Labour party conference in 2008 when my right hon. Friends the Members for Normanton, Pontefract and

[Mrs Hodgson]

Castleford (Yvette Cooper) and for Kingston upon Hull West and Hessle (Alan Johnson) announced the introduction of three pilots for free school meals, all to be local authority match funded. Two pilots were for universal free school meals; Durham and Newham bid for them and were lucky enough to secure them. My hon. Friends the Members for City of Durham and for West Ham (Lyn Brown) played a great part in that. The further pilot involved raising the threshold to the agreed poverty line to ensure that more children in poverty qualified for free school meals, and that went to Wolverhampton.

Those pilots have been under way for nearly a year. They have been hugely successful, especially those involving universal free school meals in Newham and Durham, where take-up is 75% and more than 80% respectively. That means that the majority of primary school pupils in those boroughs receive a hot, healthy, nutritious meal instead of the sugary, additive-laced snacks that some children are given in their packed lunches.

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): Has not the research also shown that extending entitlement universally leads to not only increases across the board—that is obvious—but increases among those who would have been entitled anyway, as demonstrated in the 2006 Hull experiment?

**Mrs Hodgson:** My hon. Friend is right, and I will come on to the Hull experiment.

The quality of packed lunches is usually dependent on cost, but do not take my word for that, Mr Weir. Research by Professor Derek Colquhoun of the university of Hull showed that it is not always possible for families to access, let alone afford, fresh food for their children. The alternative of paying for school meals may cost almost £20 a week for a family with two children—money which those still living below the poverty line do not have.

I look forward to hearing more about the success of the Durham and Newham pilots from my hon. Friends the Members for City of Durham and for West Ham. Unfortunately, due to the recession, universal free school meals did not make it into our manifesto, but our party gave a commitment in the 2009 pre-Budget report to extend the universal free school meals pilots to at least one in every region, and permanently to raise the access threshold everywhere else to £16,190 to enable a further 500,000 children to have a free, hot and healthy lunch every day. That approach would also lift a further 50,000 children out of poverty, which was welcome news as far as my colleagues and I were concerned. Such a measure would also be an important first step on the way to universal entitlement, and I welcome it as still affordable, even during a recession.

**Rachel Reeves** (Leeds West) (Lab): Does my hon. Friend agree that it is even more important to extend that entitlement during the recession? In my constituency, the average income is £16,000 a year, which means that the average family is living in poverty. However, if someone works and earns £16,000 a year, their children are not entitled to free school meals. It is harder for those families to go back to work because they lose the

entitlement, which for many is equivalent to about £600 a year. If the coalition Government want to get more people back to work—although the forecast from the Office for Budget Responsibility showed that their Budget will put 100,000 more people on the dole—one important measure would be to extend the entitlement to free school meals so that parents who go back to work can claim it for their children.

**Mrs Hodgson:** My hon. Friend raises an issue that I was coming to—I fear that she makes the point better than I would have done. A lot of hon. Members in the coalition Government are not getting that point, but hopefully the contributions that my hon. Friends and I make today will put paid to that.

Confusingly, although the new Government committed themselves to meeting the child poverty targets set by the previous Government, the Secretary of State for Education announced on 9 June that the coalition Government would not be going ahead with the additional pilot schemes, or the extension of schemes to include more low-income families. That is devastating news for the families concerned. The extension would have eased the transition into work for many parents—my hon. Friend has just spoken about that—and supported the Government's wider drive to improve educational and health outcomes among the least well off in our society. It seems that the Education Secretary wants to follow in the footsteps of a former Conservative Education Secretary, who became well known—indeed infamous—overnight with the tag of “milk snatcher”. Today's Education Secretary shall for ever more be known as the “meal snatcher”.

Entitlement to free school meals usually ends when a family moves off benefits and into low-paid employment. That gives rise to an extra cost of around £300 a child per year, just when families are trying to make themselves better off through work. Furthermore, 60% of children in poverty have at least one parent in work, so the majority of children who live in poverty today do not benefit from free school meals. That is a shocking statistic, but it is true.

The decision announced by the Government is spectacularly short-sighted and I urge the Minister to reconsider it as a matter of urgency, particularly considering that the coalition's stated aim is to decrease the number of people on benefits and increase the number of people in work. That is a laudable goal, but it will never be reached with such poorly thought out policy decisions.

A measure that would have raised 50,000 children above the poverty line has been scrapped, thereby exposing the Government's claims to promote fairness as nothing but empty rhetoric. How can increasing the number of children living in poverty in 2010 help the Government to meet their 2020 target for eradicating child poverty, especially after a Budget that, as the Institute for Fiscal Studies shows, disproportionately affects the very poorest? I was even more disturbed to see a leaked memo suggesting that money that would have been directed to the poorest families for free school meals is now being redirected to help the middle classes to parachute their children out of mainstream schools and into free schools. That is a particularly galling example of money being directed away from the disadvantaged towards the comfortably off, and away from a scheme that would have lifted children out of poverty to one that will do nothing of

the sort but will pander to middle-class parents who still bemoan the loss of grammar schools in leafy London boroughs.

Following this debate, and with the successful campaign that is being led by my right hon. Friend the Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls), the Government will choose to reinstate the changes to free school meal provision that were announced by the previous Labour Administration. That would be welcome news, but I would like the Government to go even further and seriously consider the case for universal free school meals. It is all too easy to dismiss the argument by saying, “We haven’t got the money to do it”. Tough spending decisions should be a matter of prioritising, not slashing budgets for ideological reasons.

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): I congratulate the hon. Lady on securing this debate and her cogent argument for universal free school meals. Does she agree that an additional spin-off effect would be that if each child was able to access a free, nutritious and healthy meal, it would help in the battle against childhood obesity? Tackling that was a target of the previous Government, and hopefully it is shared by the present Government.

**Mrs Hodgson:** That well-made point is another that I was about to come to. I am sure that hon. Members from all parties agree that the education and health of our children is of utmost importance. That more than justifies the—admittedly considerable—spending commitment that such a policy would entail. It is estimated that obesity costs the NHS £3.5 billion a year and the figure is set to rise, so this is a cost worth paying to save money in the long run.

Even at a time when the deficit needs to be cut, we cannot forget the social implications of the decisions that are made by the Government—by a coalition Government no less. They are a broad church that goes from left-leaning Liberal Democrats to right-leaning Thatcherite Conservatives through all colours in between. One would think that a coalition with the right hon. Member for Twickenham (Vince Cable) at its heart would produce fiscally sound social policies, and that the last thing that it would do would be to increase child poverty. Alas, I fear not. One only has to look north towards Hull to see that the Liberal Democrats have form on such matters.

In 2004, the Labour council in Hull introduced universal free school meals. It had to get a dispensation from the then Labour Government to do so as that took place prior to the passage the Education and Inspections Act 2006 which, by changing “shall” to “may” in a line of legislation, made it possible for universal free school meals to be introduced by any local authority anywhere in England.

That first pilot scheme was a huge success. Those successes were chronicled by a number of academic papers, the most notable of which is the work I mentioned earlier by Professor Derek Colquhoun from the university of Hull. If I started to go into detail about how positive that evaluation was, there would be no time for anyone else to speak in the debate. I will therefore not do so, but I strongly suggest to the Minister that he looks it up—it is a very good read.

What happened next? Sadly for the children of Hull, Labour lost control of the council after three short years to the Liberal Democrats, who promptly and savagely, and without remorse, scrapped the free school meals initiative. Once again, there was a charge for access to the lovely hot and healthy school meals to which the city’s children had become accustomed. That was greeted with outrage from local parents, who had not realised that that was what the Liberal Democrats would do. Does not this all sound strangely familiar? Lo and behold, here we are again. What happens as soon as they are in government? The Liberal Democrats, aided and abetted by their Tory masters, are at it again. Time and again, they are literally taking food out of the mouths of society’s poorest children.

**Kate Green:** Will my hon. Friend give way?

**Mrs Hodgson:** I am just about to finish.

I notice that no Liberal Democrat Member is present in the Chamber to try to defend their part in this atrocity. I hope that the Liberal Democrats are proud of themselves and of the fact that such policies are what they seem to have come into politics for—they do it time and time again. I hope that their ministerial salaries and cars are worth it, and that all the hard-working people up and down the country who voted Liberal Democrat are happy with the decisions that their elected representatives are taking on their behalf. In future, the mantra will not be, “Vote Lib Dem, get Tory”; it will be, “Vote Lib Dem, increase child poverty”. I look forward to hearing the Minister’s explanations.

9.49 am

**Roberta Blackman-Woods** (City of Durham) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) on securing this very important debate. I, too, shall start with our visit to Sweden, because that was a turning point in our realisation that universal free school meals could be delivered and that a society would consider that the norm for how children are treated at school. My hon. Friend is right that we came back very excited about the possibility of mounting a campaign. It is pleasing to see in the debate today that the organisations and agencies that are firmly focused on alleviating child poverty, such as Barnardo’s, the Child Poverty Action Group and Save the Children, have thrown their weight behind the campaign to secure universal free school meals and to protect what we have achieved so far. It is worth reiterating the substantial progress made in the last Parliament.

We had three pilots, two focusing on universal free school meals for primary school children in Durham and in Newham, including the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown). Significantly, we had the promise of a further roll-out to cover at least one local authority in each region, and we had free school meal entitlement elsewhere being extended to primary school children of working parents in receipt of working tax credit with a household income below £16,190. That was to roll out throughout 2010 and 2011.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West said, the extension of free school meals would have lifted 50,000 children out of poverty, but critically it would have increased incentives to work.

[*Roberta Blackman-Woods*]

Without the extension, families moving off benefits into work would be hit by costs of about £210 per year per primary school-age child, so the new Government's decision sits very uneasily with their policies, about which they tell us frequently, to move people off benefits into work. Barnardo's and the other agencies make that point strongly. The Government need to consider how to make work pay and ensure that it does, but they also need to go further by examining how we reduce education and health inequalities. Almost all health professionals have criticised the Government's decision on free school meals, saying that it is an enormous setback to the reduction of education and health inequalities.

My hon. Friend and I may have been spearheading the campaign in the past three or four years, but I must pay tribute to Save the Children, because it first made the argument for free school meals in 1933. It is dreadful that almost a century later, we have not achieved that goal. Save the Children points to the fact that the UN convention on the rights of the child, which every country in the world has now signed, states that Governments are under a duty to

"provide material assistance and support programmes, particularly with regard to nutrition".

That convention applies to this Government as well to those elsewhere. Save the Children also points out that 60% of children living in poverty have at least one parent in work, so most of them do not benefit from a free school meals entitlement that is linked to out-of-work benefits. Therefore, we need an answer from the Government about why they have taken this decision when they are trying to move people off benefits.

**Lyn Brown:** Before coming to this place, I did quite a lot of work involving focus groups with women about going into work, being out of work and so on. One of the shocking things that I found was that women had accessed the labour market because they had been told that they would be able to afford to do that and find money on top to enable them to make a better life for their families, but in reality they were in much more debt than they had ever been in before in their lives, because the hidden costs, such as the loss of free school meals, were not taken into account when their benefits were calculated and the figures done. Does my hon. Friend agree that the £690 to £1,000 that a family can save through free school meals can be pivotal to whether a low-income family are able to stay in the labour market?

**Roberta Blackman-Woods:** My hon. Friend makes a powerful point and shows how critical it is to have policies such as free school meals in place when trying to move people off benefits and into work.

The coalition promised to prioritise fairness when implementing cuts and to meet the 2020 target of eradicating child poverty, but deeds speak louder than words and it is appalling that one of the first acts of the coalition Government has been to attack the poorest in our society by cancelling the extension of the free schools meals programme. Furthermore, that will not help to close the attainment gap in schools. The previous Government went some way towards improving standards in school across the board and improving attainment

levels, but sadly an attainment gap still exists. The position is that 26.6% of the poorest children passed five good GCSEs compared with 54.2% of better-off children in 2008-09, and that is pretty much the case across the board.

If we want to reduce the attainment gap, we must ensure that all children at school are given an equal chance, and results from the pilots in Durham show that free school meals are contributing enormously to reducing attainment gaps. That is because they help children from low-income backgrounds, who may not have good nutrition, to concentrate more in the classroom. In my constituency, every school has free school meals, and I have visited many of those schools in the past few months. There is not one head teacher or one teacher who is not tremendously supportive of the programme. They say that, even at this early stage, it is making a real difference to concentration levels and children's ability to perform successfully.

The real argument for universality is how it applies across the board. No stigma is attached to free school meals in that case, and many of my local schools have 100% take-up, but the greatest advocates for the programme are the children themselves. When my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana R. Johnson) visited Durham with me to look at the programme, we talked to many of the children, and we found that it was the children in the school who were the advocates and ambassadors for the programme. Of course they had the odd grumble, but generally speaking, at the age of seven, eight and nine, they recognised the value of the programme. They talked about how it was encouraging them to eat healthily and to develop social skills. They liked being able to sit down with their friends and teachers and have their lunch. They said that they were pleased because they no longer had to bring packed lunches, and there was no longer segregation in the school between those having school meals and those having packed lunches.

**Rachel Reeves:** My hon. Friend talks eloquently about the difference that free school meals have made in her constituency. Does she agree that as well as free school meals, which are important, breakfast clubs in schools are making a huge difference? However, certainly in my constituency, schools rely on support from the local education authority and the Department for Education to be able to continue those breakfast clubs. Does she share my fear that we are starting to descend a slippery slope and that the support for breakfast clubs, which also help children's concentration and break down some of the barriers that she talked about, is likely to be at risk in future?

**Roberta Blackman-Woods:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point; indeed, we were discussing it on the Floor of the House yesterday, when it was noted that the cuts being made to area-based local authority grants are already affecting the extended schools budget, which many local authorities use to support breakfast and after-school clubs.

I honestly wish that the Secretary of State for Education or one of his Ministers had come to my constituency before announcing their policy, because it is impossible to witness the free school meals system in practice, to see how successful it is and then to cut it.

The GMB produced a helpful progress report on free school meals in February, which demonstrated that the free school meals service in Durham was employing 140 additional staff and that food was being sourced locally. Furthermore, it was much more cost-effective to deliver free school meals as a universal, rather than means-tested, service. The system ticked all the boxes because it also helped to educate children and their parents about how to eat properly.

In this time of scarce financial resources, the Government should surely be looking at policies that tick a whole range of boxes and which are cost-effective. Powerful arguments can be made that free school meals are a good investment for the future and that they help to reduce long-term health and education inequalities.

**Lyn Brown:** In Newham, our children were starting to eat different foods from those that they had eaten previously. Mothers were telling me that their children no longer demanded the chicken nuggets that we heard about earlier, but wanted to eat healthier foods that were cooked from scratch with mum and dad in the kitchen at the weekend. Families' purchasing power was changing because they were eating more cheaply, and the nutritional value of the food that they were eating was changing, too. Regardless of whether we want them to, children dictate what a family eats.

**Roberta Blackman-Woods:** My hon. Friend makes an excellent point, which I hope the Minister will consider.

I want to finish by asking the Minister a number of questions. How will the Government help parents into work without considering the need for free school meals and other such programmes? What will they do to improve health inequalities among children if they do not use free school meals to alter the behaviour of children and families? Why on earth have a Government who said that they were committed to fairness and alleviating child poverty started by attacking families on low incomes? Importantly, how do the Government propose to close the attainment gap and reduce inequality without considering nutrition in schools?

10.3 am

**Kate Green** (Stretford and Urmston) (Lab): It is an absolute pleasure to speak in the debate, and I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) on securing it. She and my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods) have been long-standing collaborators of mine on this subject. I was very pleased to work with them on it when I was the chief executive of the Child Poverty Action Group, and I am delighted that we will continue to work together on it in the House. I guess that I should declare that I remain a member of the CPAG, and I am a strong supporter of its work and what it stands for. I am pleased that, following my departure, the CPAG remains as committed as ever to the cause of free school meals, as part of its wider "2 skint 4 school" campaign.

I very much welcomed the announcements that the previous Labour Government made over a number of years to improve the quality of, and eligibility for, free school meals. One of the most important years in the development of policy was 2005, with the establishment

of the School Food Trust, which heightened awareness of the importance of this issue on a number of policy fronts. We should pay tribute to the trust for also playing an important role in driving up nutritional standards, which is something that every Member will want to applaud.

Of course, the Labour Government's policies were important in other ways. Investment in our school infrastructure enabled a number of schools significantly to improve catering facilities, which could increasingly be brought back in-house. I was recently delighted to have the opportunity to visit the wonderful new kitchen at Acre Hall primary school in my constituency. To my great delight, Theresa, the school cook, has offered me the chance to join her and cook lunch for the children. I am very much looking forward to doing that in the next few weeks, when I expect that I will learn a great deal about how to peel carrots in bulk.

Perhaps the Labour Government's most important initiative was the extension of eligibility for free school meals. With my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West, I strongly welcomed the direction of policy travel that that represented. I am deeply concerned that the announcement that the Secretary of State for Education made the other day represents a reversal of that direction of policy travel, which is something that we must all be very anxious about.

I was particularly interested when the Secretary of State explained that the pilots would not be further extended because the evidence of a link between the provision of free school meals and educational attainment remained unproven. It is certainly important that educational attainment is one of the gains of extending the right to free school meals, and the evidence does in fact suggest that there are improvements in cognitive ability, concentration and learning behaviour. Early on in the Hull experiment—researchers confirmed this later—teachers reported a calmer learning environment, with children more engaged, including in the often difficult classroom period in the early afternoon. It is therefore wrong to suggest that the educational gains are unproven. Moreover, it is wrong to judge the provision of universal free school meals on educational attainment grounds alone, important though those of course are.

We must also be aware of the health gains, because standards of nutrition in school meals have risen significantly since 2005. Hon. Members should contrast that with the packed lunches that many low-income parents are still forced to provide to their children, only 1% of which meet the standard of today's school meals.

We have also heard about the importance of the socialising and behavioural gains that we see in our schools when more children eat lunch together. Children learn to converse and to look out for one another, and they learn good courtesy and table manners. Importantly, children who are having lunch in school are not hanging around the chip shop at the end of the road—something that is particularly significant in secondary schools.

It is also important to consider school lunch in the context of the broader curriculum, as my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham said. There is the opportunity to link lunch to education about diet, nutrition and cooking. Many schools have used the extension of school meal programmes to bring more parents into schools, so that they and their children learn to enjoy cooking healthy meals together.

[Kate Green]

There are important sustainability gains in extending the reach of free school meals and in the opportunity that that creates for cooking locally, on-site, with less transport of ingredients. It also offers schools the opportunity to source from local producers, which boosts the local economy. The extension of free school meals is an important job-creation opportunity. Working in school kitchens is a particularly desirable form of employment for many parents, especially mothers. The flexibility of the work—the fact that it takes place in term time and obviously coincides with the times when the children are in school—makes it a good source of additional local jobs.

It is highly regrettable that those additional gains were not mentioned by the Secretary of State when he said that the gains on educational attainment grounds were unproven. Even if that had been true—in my view the evidence shows that it is not—it is highly regrettable that the much broader social and environmental gains were not considered, too. Most importantly, I guess, for many of the families whom I have talked to, are the economic and financial consequences for family budgets of extending eligibility for free school meals.

School meals represent good value, and many hon. Members present in the Chamber will believe that a hot lunch at £1.90 or £2 a head is good value; and that is right. Still, however, for many low-income working parents, who may perhaps be raising two or three children, that £1.90, £2 or £2.20 added up over the week can be unaffordable. Larger families are a group already at higher risk of child poverty. Undoubtedly, for some of those families, the cost of providing lunch for their children is a component of that greater risk. It is a matter of regret that we are not taking the opportunity to deal with that.

As my hon. Friends have said, one of the most significant concerns for us is the position of low-income working families. I very much regret the decision not to roll out the provision of free school meals to more children in such families. Even the pilots under the previous Government were, I confess, limited and did not go far enough in my view in relation to provision for secondary school kids. Almost no secondary school child in this country in a low-income working family has been able to get a free school meal. The recent announcement by the Secretary of State means that we have lost substantial potential gains to do with creating work incentives and ending child poverty—as has been mentioned, the measures would have lifted a further 50,000 children out of poverty; there would have been wider social and economic gains, too.

The opportunities and options for extension are quite numerous. Many MPs have long argued that, as a first step, free school meals should be extended to all families on working tax credit. That would make a significant difference. We could also consider families in receipt of housing benefit and council tax benefit. As the Minister knows, those are in-work benefits, too. We have significant reasons for supporting the Government's own back-to-work and work incentivisation agenda, with extending the entitlement to free school meals.

I alluded to take-up in an intervention earlier. The wider the eligibility, the greater the take-up across the board, including among those children who would be

entitled to free school meals even on the most limited eligibility criteria used some years ago. I think I am right in saying that the rate nearly doubled in Hull among such children—those who would have been entitled anyway. That significant increase in take-up shows the absolute power of universal provision; some of us find that we are making that argument repeatedly in different contexts. We can understand why take-up increases when eligibility is widened; my hon. Friends have alluded to the reasons. There is less stigma: if their friends are having lunches, children will go along, too, and have lunch with their mates. Administrative simplicity is another factor. It is as true in this context as in any other that means-testing brings complexity and shuts out people who should be entitled. Of course, schools—hard-pressed to meet budgets—will be very pleased about anything that reduces administrative costs.

I want to explore the extension of free school meals into the wider educational environment, which is another thing mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham when she talked about extended schools. Many schools have in recent years extended their support to families by providing longer hours, with out-of-school breakfast clubs and after-school events. It is of great concern to me that pressures on funding resulting from the Budget and other cuts being announced will put those extended school activities at considerable risk.

The Minister has long been a strong proponent of the benefits of out-of-school and extended school activities. I remember hearing him say early on that schools in his constituency would want to take advantage of such moves and would be unwise not to. We will not necessarily lose extended school activities completely, but I am concerned that the poorest children may not be able to afford to participate: the children who could benefit most from those activities will be exactly those who will be shut out. We need some guarantees about funding for extended and out-of-school provision, and that must include providing for the children taking part to eat together—healthy snacks, breakfast or supper—where that is part of the plan.

Breakfast clubs have a particular significance in that context. They play an important role for many low-income families, and hon. Members should welcome several aspects of those clubs. They have attracted considerable support in many areas—in the private sector as well as the voluntary sector. In my constituency, a major employer is Kellogg's, which has put millions of pounds of support into helping school breakfast clubs. It is incredibly committed to their future and extremely anxious about what the Government intend for them. It has highlighted to me its concerns about some of the language used by my right hon. Friend the Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field), who suggested that breakfast clubs might not be desirable for a number of kids. I am sure that it would be good for children to have healthy breakfasts at home, wherever possible, but for all sorts of reasons at all sorts of times that is not possible for every parent. We must be able to build on provision that has proved a considerable success in many schools and that has given some of our most deprived kids a strong start to the school day. I hope that we shall receive assurances from Ministers in the next few weeks about extended school activities—funding for them and enabling the poorest children to participate in them more broadly—and about the role that free school meals will play in offering that.

I think that everyone understands the financial pressures and the fact that we can expect public spending cuts. However, the pain of those cuts, as my hon. Friends have repeatedly told the Government, must not be borne by the poorest; but I very much fear that that will be the exact consequence of not extending the provision.

I am concerned, too, that we are seeing a massive policy step backwards; although the direction of travel in recent years has been at times hesitant or a little stop-go, it has none the less been broadly progressive and positive. Having seen such progress, it is a matter of huge regret to find things suddenly being put in reverse.

My concluding plea is for Ministers to consider again their plans for the provision of free school meals, and to do so with fully open minds. I want their minds to be open in the context of child poverty; I want their minds to be open in the context of improving working centres; and I want their minds to be open in the context of children's health—and, of course, their learning and educational attainment. Unfortunately, the Conservative-Lib Dem Government has a bit of a track record in not having an open mind.

Several hon. Members have spoken of the fate of the programme in Hull. One of the most shameful aspects of the Lib Dem attempt to stop that programme early was that they did not wait for a proper evaluation to be made; only after the campaigning efforts of parents and others were they forced to finish the programme, so that a proper research basis could be established for the success that it had enjoyed. The governing parties have form for not evaluating programmes properly, and I know that the Minister will not want to be associated with that.

I hope that the Minister will offer some reassurance—for a start, to the many working families who are anxious about the many financial pressures that they already face. In that context, extending free school meals to more of those low-income working families would be a step towards the long-term provision of universal free school meals. That would be widely welcomed, and I hope that the Government will consider doing so.

10.22 am

**Lyn Brown** (West Ham) (Lab): I thank you, Mr Weir, for giving me the opportunity to speak for the first time under your chairmanship.

I shall speak only for a short time, as I am most interested to hear what my hon. Friend the Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana R. Johnson) has to say, as the free school meals pilot in the area that she represents was stopped by the Liberal Democrat-controlled council. I also want to hear what the Minister has to say. It is only a failure of the imagination that stops the Government understanding the importance of free school meals, both for their nutritional and social value to the children and for their economic value to hard-pressed working families that struggle from day to day to make ends meet.

I represent one of the poorest parts of the country. Newham has the fourth highest level of child poverty in the country: 30,525 under-16s live in families with less than 60% of national median household income before housing costs. Despite that, only 29% of children in Newham are eligible for free school meals under the current system. In Newham, 46.9% of children are

living below the poverty line. We are talking about the working poor—families that go out to work but do not earn enough money to make ends meet. Their children suffer as a result, and it is their future that we are talking about today. They have the same right to fulfil their potential as every child in this country, and the free school meals programme was a tiny way of making that possibility a reality for some.

This is about families struggling to keep their heads above water. We might not understand what £600 or £1,000 a year means to a working family because it is less than some of us would spend on a weekend away. For the families that I represent, however, it can make the difference between surviving and not surviving. That is the likely damage of taking away the universal free school meals programme. Prior to the pilot, more than one in six children living in poverty in my constituency was not entitled to free school meals. I find that shocking, and I hope that the Minister agrees.

To my working families, the universal free school meals programme represented savings of between £690 and £1,000 a year. Families who are not working or who work less than 16 hours a week and have an income of £16,000, however, would be eligible for free school meals. I do not want to take that from them, but the current system offers no incentive to work and presents a barrier to people who have taken the first steps into work.

Research carried out by the London borough of Newham shows that if, prior to the pilot, eligibility had been extended to all who claimed benefit, of any kind, an extra 2,094 households would have been eligible. Each of those households would have saved on average £614 per year—9% of the group's typical weekly pay. As a direct result of the pilot, figures from March show that 75% of pupils in Newham are now taking up free school meals. In 16 schools, the uptake is now more than 80%, and in some it is as high as 90% or more. I hope that we one day reach the 100% level mentioned by my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods). It has to be good news.

As my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) said eloquently in her excellent contribution, only 1% of the packed lunches that children take to school—not only in Newham, but throughout the country—meet the nutritional standards set for school meals. As a result, those children who are not eligible or who do not claim free school meals, and whose parents are unable to afford nutritionally balanced packed lunches, are eating less nutritionally valuable food than their peers. That has an impact on their health and ability to concentrate.

The impact of a healthy meal on behaviour and concentration, and therefore on academic performance, has been discussed this morning. There is a high level of consensus about the fact that to thrive at school, children need to be well nourished throughout the school day—through breakfast clubs, which were mentioned earlier, as well as free school meals. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston stated, the recent study by the School Food Trust found that eating healthy school lunches in modern dining rooms can improve pupils' concentration by almost 20%. That has to be good news for the children and their educational achievement. However, in so many ways it is also good news for us all—in productivity at work, in the sort of

[Lyn Brown]

work that people can get as a result of their education and, as was alluded to earlier, in many other social aspects of life. The impact is on not just the few, but the whole of society.

On take-up, in Newham it was obvious that a key factor in children deciding to take up the offer of free school meals was whether their best mates did so. I know that things have moved on and are a lot better than when I was at school, but it can be extraordinarily humiliating for a child to have to claim free school meals. It is stigmatising for families to have to go through that sort of inspection. I remember a woman at my surgery being in floods of tears because she had recently become ineligible for free school meals; she had ratcheted up a bill that was far beyond her reach to be paid as a lump sum. She was being humiliated almost daily, being harassed by members of staff attempting to get her to pay for school meals that had not been taken. Obviously, with the change in eligibility rules, such a situation will no longer arise. However, she told me that she could no longer afford to work, because she could not take the hit on free school meals as well as having to pay all the other costs associated with going to work.

**Robert Ffello** (Stoke-on-Trent South) (Lab): I have been listening intently to my hon. Friend's extremely good speech. Does she agree, however, that sometimes school staff, lunchtime supervisors and canteen staff risk their own careers by regularly giving food to children who they know are not getting meals? In other words, we also see a positive side from staff.

**Lyn Brown:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The story that I related stuck in my head because it was so different from the other stories that I normally receive from parents. Bills such as the one I mentioned are often torn up and put in a waste basket and do not become an issue. Even the small amounts of money charged by breakfast clubs across the country are often not taken from families who are known to be struggling.

Stigma, combined with the complexity of administering a free school meal system to the poorest members of our society, is discouraging take-up, which explains why there was only a 50% take-up from those who were eligible in Newham before the pilot. Let me pay tribute to Sir Robin Wales, the leader of Newham council, who, despite the threats of massive budget cuts by this Government, recognises the importance of free school meals to the children of Newham and will use his ever decreasing budget to extend the pilot. I pay tribute to him because he truly understands the impact of free school meals on the children that he and I represent. He and his council will do all that they can to ensure that the widest section of our children will be eligible for free school meals, because the impact on opportunities at school and on a healthier life in the future is so significant.

10.32 am

**Diana R. Johnson** (Kingston upon Hull North) (Lab): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship again, Mr Weir. I welcome the Minister to his new role. He was an assiduous shadow spokesman for children, and I wish him well in the months and years ahead.

I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) on securing this debate and on her excellent contribution. She set out very well the reasons why there is such support for free school meals and for the pilots to be extended. I also congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods) on her campaign work. They have both campaigned year in, year out for the pilots to be set up and ensured that there was the evidence base to persuade the Government that they needed to make the universal free school meal offer to children in this country. They should be congratulated on their persistence.

I should like to pay tribute to the other speakers in the debate. With her background in the Child Poverty Action Group, my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) gave us a very informed contribution and a straightforward approach to the matter. Free school meals deal not only with educational attainment but with the issues around reducing child poverty.

My hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) set out very clearly the practical effect of the pilot on her constituents. She correctly paid tribute to Sir Robin Wales, the mayor of Newham, who has a personal commitment to ensuring that the pilot, which has been running in the constituency since last September, continues at the end of the two-year period if at all possible. The contributions made by my hon. Friends the Members for Stoke-on-Trent South (Robert Ffello) and for Leeds West (Rachel Reeves) also showed a commitment to the children in their constituencies and to getting free school meals.

Let me start by saying why I feel so passionately about the subject. As the MP for Kingston upon Hull North, I saw the effects of the "Eat Well Do Well" scheme that was in place for three years. It gave all primary and special school pupils the right to free healthy school meals. We are talking about not just lunches, but a healthy breakfast club, fruit at break time and healthy snacks for children doing sport after school. Over the three years that we were lucky enough to have such a scheme, we saw the effects on both the learning and the long-term health of those children who, unfortunately, do not always achieve as much as they should at school. In the long term, the health inequalities in my city need to be addressed by early intervention schemes such as free healthy school meals. As other hon. Members have pointed out, that scheme was abandoned by an incoming Liberal Democrat council. As my hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston said, it did not even wait for the results of an evaluation before it made its informed decision. It just decided to scrap the scheme. The pilots that the last Government set up are a useful tool for incoming Ministers to assess what has happened and to make some informed decisions about the future direction of free healthy school meals.

The last Labour Government understood that good nutrition and a healthy diet were very important to young children. If we get such things right early on, we will reap the benefits by having people who will not get sick at a young age, who cannot work, who are on benefit and who do not achieve as much as they should educationally. There are all sorts of health and educational benefits to be gained if we invest early on. As the hon.

Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell) said, 1.5 million children in the United Kingdom are overweight or obese at the moment. If we do not grapple with that issue, we will see an explosion in medical conditions such as type 2 diabetes, heart disease and cancer. We all have a vested interest in doing what we can as early as possible to ensure that children have the best possible start.

We have talked generally about free school meals. My hon. Friends have addressed the stigma, the fact that children who are entitled to free school meals do not always take them up and the cost, especially for families on low incomes. The school census in 2009 showed that of the 16% of nursery and primary school pupils who were eligible for free school meals, only 13.6% took them up. In secondary school, 13.4% of pupils were eligible for free school meals, but only 10.3% took them up, so that is a real issue that needs to be addressed.

The previous Labour Government recognised the need to improve nutrition in schools for all pupils. For the years 2005 to 2011, they invested £650 million to help support the cost of healthy school lunches, to build or refurbish kitchens in schools and to improve dining facilities. Where pupils eat their lunch is an issue. They are put off school meals if the environment is not very nice. Moreover, investing in catering staff and lunchtime supervisors is important. I was very fortunate to attend a meeting of lunchtime supervisors that my hon. Friend the Member for Stoke-on-Trent South organised in his constituency. As he said, those supervisors play a valuable role in looking after pupils, who, through no fault of their own, cannot have school lunches—either because of cost or because their parents have not bothered to apply for the free school meals. Those supervisors have such an important role to play, and I am very proud that we wanted to work with those catering staff, to ensure that their role was recognised and that they received all the training that they required.

**Robert Ffello:** It was indeed a pleasure to have my hon. Friend come in her ministerial capacity to Gladstone primary school in my constituency to meet lunchtime supervisors and staff from across my constituency. Does she recall some of the comments made by those staff about situations in which children were passing out in the playground because they had not eaten, in some cases for a couple of days? Situations such as that are horrific. We are in the 21st century, not in Victorian times, and yet we sometimes have to wonder what time we are in. Does she recall those conversations with staff?

**Diana R. Johnson:** Absolutely. Those conversations made me even more committed to the idea of looking at the evidence about free school meals, ensuring that we have a proper evaluation of the pilots that are running in the city of Durham, Newham and Wolverhampton and making a strong case for free school meals, so that those situations do not recur. That leads me very nicely on to the free school meal pilots, which we have heard quite a lot about in this debate, especially from my hon. Friend the Member for City of Durham.

I was very fortunate, as the Minister responsible for those pilots, to visit all three of the pilot areas and to speak to the children, teachers, parents and the governors of the schools involved, to see what the effect of those

pilots was within the school environment. The effect was very positive, and I very much look forward to seeing the evaluation of those pilots, which will be carried out by the National Centre for Social Research. The Minister is a very fair and open-minded gentleman. I know that he will look at that evaluation, and I very much hope that he will see the benefits to children in those pilot areas and that he will want to increase the availability of free school meals to children around the country.

I want to consider the Wolverhampton pilot in particular today. As other Members have said, that pilot was set up to look at the eligibility criteria and to extend them, so that parents who were receiving working tax credit and who had an annual income of up to £16,190 would become eligible for their children to have free school meals.

I also want to pick up on comments made by the right hon. Member for Yeovil (Mr Laws), who was a shadow Secretary of State for the Lib Dems when we had the Department of Children, Schools and Families. He said at that time that 500,000 children living in poverty are not entitled to free school meals. He also said:

“It is outrageous that half of our poorest children are missing out on free school meals. For the most disadvantaged children, a school dinner can be the only hot meal they get... The Tories caused this problem in the 1980s when they changed the rules to deny free school meals to half a million children living in families who were working but on low incomes. The Government must now look at restoring the entitlement to free school meals to this group—including to families on working tax credits.”

It is very interesting that the right hon. Gentleman said that.

I looked through the coalition agreement to see what the coalition is saying about school food and school meals. I was very disappointed that, in section 26 of the coalition agreement, there was no mention at all of school food and school meals, despite the right hon. Member for Yeovil making it very clear what he wanted to happen. I also looked under the public health section of the coalition agreement—section 25—where it sets out that

“The Government believes that we need action to promote public health, and encourage behaviour change to help people live healthier lives.”

What better way is there to do that than by introducing free school meals? Unfortunately, however, there is no mention of free school meals in the coalition agreement.

**George Freeman (Mid Norfolk) (Con):** Will the hon. Lady confirm that, in fact, the Government are not proposing to scrap the pilot, nor indeed—contrary to some impressions given in some places—to scrap free meals? The pilot will continue, but we are not extending it. It turns out that the promise to extend the pilot was an unfunded promise by the former Government. Having inherited bankrupt public finances, it would be irresponsible to continue to do something for which there is no money.

**Diana R. Johnson:** I take issue with the hon. Gentleman, because I think that the promise to extend the pilot was a funded promise. At the end of last year, the pre-Budget report set out very clearly that, because of the success of the pilots in Durham, Newham and Wolverhampton, it

[Diana R. Johnson]

was absolutely right and proper to extend the pilots, so that there would be one in every region of the country. We would therefore have gained further evidence on which to make a very informed decision at the end of the two-year pilot about whether free school meals really work for our children and help to achieve the last Government's goal of eradicating child poverty by 2020.

It is very unfortunate that the new coalition Government have said that they are committed to the goal of eradicating child poverty by 2020, yet a number of policy announcements that they have made in the past few weeks seem to fly in the face of that commitment. For instance, tax credits have been cut, child benefit frozen, free swimming for children and the child trust fund abandoned, and the extension of the free school meals pilots is now being abandoned. [Interruption.] I must finish.

On increasing the eligibility for working families tax credit, which was a very sensible approach that would fit in very well with the coalition Government's attempt to get people into work, it was very short-sighted indeed to abandon that policy, as many hon. Members have said today. My hon. Friend the Member for Bishop Auckland (Helen Goodman), who was a Minister in the previous Government, made it very clear not only that that policy would get 50,000 children out of poverty at a stroke, but that it was the most cost-effective way of doing so. The Department for Work and Pensions had worked through various models and that approach was seen to be the best.

I am very much looking forward to what the Minister has to say about why the coalition Government have taken the step of abandoning that policy so early on and why they have not allowed the extension to the pilots that was announced in the pre-Budget report in December 2009 to go ahead, so that we could build up the evidence base. I have heard lots from coalition Ministers about how they want to make decisions based on evidence, so it is very unfortunate that the opportunity to acquire that evidence has just been recklessly abandoned.

10.46 am

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Education (Tim Loughton):** I begin by congratulating the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West (Mrs Hodgson) on securing this important debate. She is a passionate advocate for children and young people. She served on the Children, Schools and Families Committee for more than two years, and I know that she shares the ambitions of everyone in the coalition, and indeed of everyone across the House, to obtain a better future for all children in this country. She and I have sparred in Westminster Hall on a number of subjects, ranging from the repatriation of the Lindisfarne Gospels, which I think we discussed some time ago, to many issues affecting children. I also thank the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North (Diana R. Johnson), the former Minister, for her kind words. I think that this is the first time that we have experienced this juxtaposition in a debate since the election.

We have had a good-quality debate today, with very powerful and well-informed contributions from the hon. Members for City of Durham (Roberta Blackman-Woods),

for Stretford and Urmston (Kate Green) and for West Ham (Lyn Brown). We have also heard some interesting references to Sweden. Everybody who travels east to Scandinavia seems to come back with different interpretations of what is good there and what could be transferred to this country. Of course, there has also been mention of turkey twizzlers on more than one occasion; such a reference is inevitable when one talks about food and young people.

I agree that free school meals have an important role to play in addressing poverty and inequality, and I do not think that anyone is disputing the importance of their role. Like the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West, who opened the debate, the coalition Government are committed to closing the attainment gaps that exist in our society, not least in education, which is so important to ensuring that every child gets the best start to their life.

However, before we discuss in detail why free school meals and healthy eating in schools are so important, I just want to address head-on a particular issue that has been raised about free school meals. The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West referred to a "leaked memo"—there seem to be lots of leaked memos at the moment. It has been suggested that the budget for free school meals will be diverted to the new free schools that we are looking to introduce. At this stage, it might be helpful to remind hon. Members of the very strong and positive commitment that was made in the House by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State for Education in direct response to that point. He said:

"Under no circumstances will I take for the free schools programme money intended to extend free school meals to poor children. That money will go towards raising attainment among the poorest children."—[Official Report, 21 June 2010; Vol. 512, c. 27.]

I shall clarify further what the Secretary of State said.

**Lyn Brown:** I would like some clarification of what that actually means. The Secretary of State says that he will not take money from free school meals to put into free schools because he wants to put it into raising attainment for poorer children. Does that mean that the free school meals budget is under threat because it will be used to pay for a different scheme, idea or notion?

**Tim Loughton:** No, and I will come to that. It means exactly what the Secretary of State said. Money for free schools will not come from any of the budgets around free school meals. The money that will now not be used for the extension of free school meals, which was never budgeted for, will be used for other methods of improving educational attainment within our schools and closing the gap which, as the hon. Lady agrees, is essential.

**Rachel Reeves:** Will the Minister give way?

**Tim Loughton:** I will give way once more, but if I give way an awful lot, no one will get to hear the answers that many Members wanted.

**Rachel Reeves:** We need more clarity. The previous Labour Government said that the extension of the free school meals pilots next year would cost £85 million and the new Government say that it will cost £125 million. The gap is only £40 million. If the £85 million is there, what will it be spent on? I think that that is the point that my hon. Friend the Member for West Ham (Lyn Brown) was making. Will that money be used for something

else? Will it be used to pay down the deficit? For what, precisely, will the money earmarked for the scheme—money that the Minister has said is available—be used?

**Tim Loughton:** If the hon. Lady is patient, she will hear more detail.

Over three years, the extension of the scheme would have cost £295 million, for which the previous Government did not budget. That is a simple fact. It was immoral of the previous Government to lead people to believe that they could extend the free school meal programme without making any provision for funding it. Furthermore, in this debate, hon. Members have not just been talking about extending the free school meal entitlement; they have been talking as though the last Government wanted a universal free school meal entitlement. That was never a manifesto commitment. If hon. Members are now talking about a universal free school meal programme, where will that money come from? Which programmes would they cut? They cannot have it both ways.

To return to the points that many hon. Members want addressed, I will clarify exactly what the Secretary of State for Education said. He has reallocated £50 million in direct funding from the harnessing technology grant to create a standards and diversity fund, thus reinventing a fund set up by the previous Government in 2006, but stopped in 2009, that was intended to create diversity of provision in the school system. The fund will now provide capital funding for free schools until 31 March 2011. Funding for free schools beyond that will be a top priority for the Department in the forthcoming spending review. I would like to make it clear that the new free schools will be funded on a basis comparable with other state-funded schools and that, as is the case now, money will follow the pupil within the funding system.

To return to the issue of free school meals, we are of course extremely disappointed that we cannot proceed with the previous Government's proposal to extend the free school meals pilots. It would be good for more children to have access to free school meals. I agree with hon. Members that there is no doubt that free school meals help families and children in need across the country. However, the previous Government underfunded the programme to the tune of £295 million over the next three years, and we are not prepared to cut front-line budgets to support an as yet unproved scheme. We have therefore taken the difficult decision, from this September, not to extend free school meals to maintained nursery and key stage 1 pupils from working families on low incomes. We have also decided not to provide funding from central Government for the further five local pilots mentioned.

Let me be clear: we are absolutely not taking free school meals away from anyone who is eligible. The hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West said that my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State would become known as the meal snatcher. No child currently eligible for free school meals will lose that entitlement. Nothing is being taken away. However, the extension that the Labour Government promised but failed to fund will now no longer take place.

**Kate Green:** Does not the Minister accept that that in itself is a significant blow to many low-income families who expected that, from this September, their stretched family budgets would have been helped by the extension of the pilots, which will now not take place? Does he not regret that?

**Tim Loughton:** That was a false expectation given by the previous Government. The biggest disappointment is that those people have been misled about something that was never funded. We are not taking free school meals away from anyone who is eligible, nor are we changing the rules for determining eligibility. All those who currently qualify for free school meals will continue to receive them.

We have taken what we believe to be the most important decision: schools should use their budgets this year to focus on our priority of improving attainment, which is key to improving the life chances of all children. Not extending free school meals or continuing with additional pilots will free up £160 million this year—if the hon. Lady who asked the question will put down her BlackBerry and listen to my answer—and we can use that money more effectively and directly to improve attainment in our schools.

Although we will not be extending free school meals, we are still interested to know whether there is a case for expanding the scheme. That is why we are committed to continuing the ongoing pilots in Newham, Durham and Wolverhampton that started in September 2009. I have been to Newham, and I will certainly repeat hon. Members' praise of its mayor, Sir Robin Wales, not only for what he has done with free school meals but for the free musical instrument programme, which is particularly interesting and something that we want to consider further. The pilots will be carefully evaluated so that we can learn the lessons from them in order better to assess the case for increasing eligibility in the future.

Although we cannot extend eligibility, we would like to see a rise in take-up. At present, many eligible pupils—we estimate nearly 600,000 children, or a quarter of those entitled—do not take up their free school meals. That situation must change. Is it an issue of stigmatisation, as hon. Members have suggested? I am interested in the imaginative use of technology. For example, at Roseberry college, which is in the constituency of the hon. Member for City of Durham, a new cashless payment system removes any potential stigma and has increased the take-up by eligible pupils from less than half to more than 90%. That interesting example could be replicated throughout the country. I hope that all would agree that our schools should do everything they can to ensure that eligible pupils take up their entitlement.

Good free school meals are important not just to tackling poverty, but to ensuring the health of our children. They often represent the only nutritious meal in some children's day. That is why it is vital that schools continue to serve healthy food and ensure that their pupils eat well, which extends beyond the quality of the meals. Ofsted findings and surveys by the School Food Trust, which was mentioned by the hon. Member for Stretford and Urmston, show that it is not nutritional changes that put children off school lunch, but poor dining facilities and organisation. If there is nowhere to sit, if the queues are long, if the dining rooms are unattractive or if there is not enough time, children will not eat properly.

School meals also have an important social element. The lunch hour should be a proper part of the day—we view that as a priority. It should include time to eat a good meal, to exercise and to socialise. We know that children do not perform as well in the afternoon without a good break, and we agree that school meals can have

[Tim Loughton]

social benefits. I am pleased to report that some progress is being made. An Ofsted report last week found that good progress has generally been made towards meeting the standards for school food. That is good news, especially for children benefiting from free school meals.

Despite being unable to extend free school meals, we as a Government are absolutely committed to fighting poverty and raising the life chances of the most vulnerable in our society. Section 14 of the coalition document, which the hon. Member for Kingston upon Hull North did not mention, confirms the Government's commitment to ending child poverty by 2020. Although the previous Government can be commended for the introduction of the Child Poverty Act 2010, which both coalition parties supported, we are disappointed by the latest figures showing that 2.8 million children in this country were still in poverty in 2008-09. The previous Government spent a substantial sum on tax and benefits in an attempt to raise people above the 60% poverty threshold, yet the evidence shows that that simply did not work. We believe that the best way to tackle child poverty is to address the root causes: entrenched worklessness, economic dependency, family breakdown, educational failure, addiction and debt.

**Tom Blenkinsop** (Middlesbrough South and East Cleveland) (Lab): Will the Minister give way?

**Tim Loughton:** I am almost out of time, so I will not.

Those are only some of the drivers of poverty. Our approach must be able to tackle each of them. We will do so by taking a multi-faceted approach that recognises the different factors that trap people in poverty. Only by doing so can we effectively and sustainably improve outcomes for children. That was why the Prime Minister announced an independent review of poverty in the UK, led by the right hon. Member for Birkenhead (Mr Field), whom his hon. Friend the Member for Stretford and Urmston mentioned in not particularly glowing terms. The review will consider what the Government can do to improve the lives of the least advantaged people in our society. We will be working closely with other Departments to ensure that we tackle the issue head-on. At the heart of the programme is a commitment to spending more on the education of the poorest.

That is why we are introducing the pupil premium. It was one of the first things promised by this Government and it will tackle head-on the problems of the most disadvantaged pupils by helping them get the education they desperately need. The pupil premium is supported by the Conservatives and was championed loudest by the Liberal Democrats. By giving resources to school leaders and teachers—the people who matter most in extending opportunity—we can ensure that our most disadvantaged pupils have better life chances than ever before.

I reiterate my thanks to the hon. Member for Washington and Sunderland West for securing the debate. We as a Government are committed to ensuring that pupils can eat good, healthy food.

## Parliamentary Allowances and Short Money

11 am

**Mr Nigel Dodds** (Belfast North) (DUP): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Weir. I want to focus attention on something that I believe represent one of the greatest errors of the previous Government: the special treatment that has been given to abstentionist Members of Parliament that enables them to claim Westminster allowances and the Short money that is supposed to be used for the purposes of parliamentary activities.

There is only one elected party in the House that refuses to take its seats, so that policy is not driven by a need to address a general problem. The problem is one single party seeking and getting preferential treatment. There is now a special status of MP, and the principle that the same is expected of and awarded to all Members of the House equally has been abandoned. A number of us have been absolutely consistent on the issue. We opposed the original decision to grant these allowances, we supported the attempts by the then Conservative Opposition to overturn them, and we believe that now is an opportune moment—in a new Parliament, with new politics and with the public concern that rightly exists about the wastefulness of public expenditure, value for money and so on—to turn our attention once again to the issue, particularly given the promises made by senior members of the Conservative party in the run-up to the election.

The issue arose in 1997 and in 2001, with the respective Speakers of the House at those times ruling that Sinn Fein should not be granted allowances. On 14 May 1997, the then Speaker, Betty Boothroyd, said:

“those who choose not to take their seats should not have access to the many benefits and facilities that are now available in the House without also taking up their responsibilities as Members.”—*[Official Report, 14 May 1997; Vol. 294, c. 35.]*

Sinn Fein challenged that ruling in the courts. Indeed, it took the case to the European Court of Human Rights, no less, and was unsuccessful both in the domestic courts and in Europe, which demonstrated that the decision was perfectly just and correct. Given the courts' dismissal of the various legal challenges, it is spurious to defend the present situation by saying that it recognises of the rights of a section of the electorate.

In 2001, the then Labour Government presented a motion to reverse the decision of the Speaker, although that motion did not apply to Short money. It is now worth reminding those who sit on the Government Benches what they said while they were in opposition. I exclude from that the Liberal Democrats, including the Deputy Leader of the House, who will respond to the debate, because I understand that they abstained or did not take a particular position one way or another throughout the discussion of the issue.

I hope that Conservative Members who are now in government will clearly spell out the opposition to the position that was evinced during the Conservatives' days in opposition. One Conservative spokesman—Quentin Davies, the then shadow Secretary of State—denounced the proposal when it was first introduced, saying that it involved

“more unreciprocated concessions to Sinn Fein-IRA”

and

“treating the rules of the House of Commons as the currency for such concessions.”

The argument that Sinn Fein received comparable allowances in the Northern Ireland Assembly was advanced as a justification, but the then shadow Secretary of State said rightly:

“There is in fact no comparison at all between the position in Stormont and that in the House, because Sinn Fein-IRA have agreed to take their seats in the Assembly at Stormont and in the Executive there.”—[*Official Report*, 18 December 2001; Vol. 377, c. 160-162.]

When an equivalent to Short money was provided to Sinn Fein, such opposition in principle was restated by the right hon. Member for Maidenhead (Mrs May)—now Home Secretary—when she said:

“The issue before us is not about the Northern Ireland peace process or about the resumption of the Assembly; it is about the role of Members of parliament, what it means to sit in the House and the nature of the job of being an elected representative of this place. It is primarily on that basis that we oppose the action that the Government are seeking to take and will be voting against the motions.”—[*Official Report*, 8 February 2006; Vol. 442, c. 912.]

**Mr Gregory Campbell** (East Londonderry) (DUP): Is not the patent absurdity of this that all of us, as Members of the House, receive expenditure for staying in London when we attend Parliament, yet there are MPs who do not attend Parliament but still obtain the expenses and the allowances?

**Mr Dodds:** My hon. Friend raises a very important point. Indeed, in the immediate aftermath of the coverage of the expenses scandal, it was revealed that Sinn Fein Members were claiming nearly £500,000 in accommodation costs for being in London primarily on parliamentary duties although they do not even attend the House. I can describe the situation no more eloquently than the current Secretary of State who, in light of that particular point, said in the *Daily Mail* on 8 April 2009:

“It is completely unacceptable for Sinn Fein representatives, who won't even sit in Parliament, to claim hundreds of thousands at the taxpayers' expense.”

**Dr William McCrea** (South Antrim) (DUP): We have just faced an emergency Budget in which there were no concessions for pensioners, disabled people or families living in poverty. Why should this Government allow a situation in which continual concessions are made to a party that does not come to this House?

**Mr Dodds:** My hon. Friend makes a very good point on behalf of the many thousands of people in Northern Ireland—and indeed right across the United Kingdom—who find it incomprehensible that public money should be spent in this way. That view is shared by the Secretary of State, who said on 8 April 2009 in *The Guardian*:

“it is inconceivable that incoming Conservative MPs would vote to continue paying millions of pounds of public money to elected members who do not take their seats.”

We look forward to the Secretary of State, other members of the Government and Government Back Benchers fulfilling their clear, unambiguous promise and commitment to ensuring that millions of pounds of public money are not wasted, as at present, through a two-tier system for Members of Parliament.

I simply offer to Conservative Members the arguments set out in their own words and, as I said earlier, I gently remind the Liberal Democrats that they chose not to take any position on the issue and granted their Members a free vote. I have no doubt that if the matter were put to the House, there would be a clear majority in favour of removing these allowances, which should never have been granted in the first place.

An argument that has been advanced—it was cited at the time—is that the granting of allowances and so on is a step towards normalisation and that that is necessary to encourage Sinn Fein towards full democratisation and participation in the political process. Indeed, it was felt by some that such a policy would encourage Sinn Fein Members to come to Parliament—effectively killing abstentionism with kindness. That could be one interpretation of the Prime Minister's recent comments in the House, which I will come on to in a moment.

The granting of allowances to Sinn Fein in 2001 has demonstrated the poverty of that particular argument, however. Following the decision, John Reid, the then Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, predicted that Sinn Fein would end its policy of abstention. The Sinn Fein leader, Gerry Adams, has made it absolutely clear that

“There will never, ever be Sinn Fein MPs sitting in the British Houses of Parliament.”

Martin McGuinness has added for good measure that even if the Commons Oath were removed, Sinn Fein Members would still refuse to take their seats. Let no one in this House be under any illusion that bending over backwards, granting allowances, changing and bending the rules, creating a two-tier system of Members of Parliament and interfering with the Oath of Allegiance that Members take will have the slightest impact on Sinn Fein Members taking their seats here in the House of Commons.

Beyond the past debates on the decision, there is also a wider issue of confidence in politics, which I have raised on a number of occasions in this Parliament. That issue was examined by the Kelly review, but the subsequent report made it clear that the decision lay in the political arena by stating:

“The decision to give Sinn Fein Members the right to claim for the full range of expenses without taking up their seats in Parliament was a political one, taken in the light of the particular circumstances of Northern Ireland.”

That is an interesting comment. I would have thought that such a decision should be taken in the interests of the whole House, not in the interests of the political process in Northern Ireland. The report continued to say:

“Removing it would also be a political decision.”

When I raised the matter recently in business questions, along with the hon. Member for Beckenham (Bob Stewart) and others, the Leader of the House replied that it would now be a matter for the Independent Parliamentary Standards Authority. IPSA has stated:

“The Oaths Act 1978 established the position that MPs who do not take the oath may not receive a salary; a Government motion passed through the House of Commons in 2001 established the position that MPs who do not take the oath may claim expenses related to their Parliamentary business. IPSA regards itself as obliged to follow these motions and intends to do so unless the House decides otherwise.”

[Mr Dodds]

It is therefore clear that IPSA will administer whatever system is put in place by the House, but it remains for the House to decide whether abstentionist Members are entitled to allowances and Short money. Even the administration of Short money is still a matter for the House authorities, rather than IPSA.

**David Simpson** (Upper Bann) (DUP): Is my right hon. Friend aware that while other Members had to pay back money following the review of allowances, one Sinn Fein Member who claimed £18,000 last year for travelling to London, despite having come to London only once, has not had to pay back one penny?

**Mr Dodds:** My hon. Friend is right to highlight that matter, which was previously raised by my hon. Friend the Member for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell). In the public mind, that beggars belief, and people cannot understand why some Members receive allowances to carry out parliamentary duties in London when they do not attend the House in London. I read in the news today that a Sinn Fein spokesperson has again attempting to justify that by saying:

“We negotiated the right to have offices and costs and expenses so that we can properly and thoroughly represent those who vote for us.”

Well, the fact is that Sinn Fein Members do not properly and thoroughly represent those who vote for them, or those who do not vote for them, because they do not come here. One of the main roles of an MP is to be in the House, taking part in its activities and debates. If Members do not do that, they should not be entitled to the rights, privileges, costs, offices and allowances that come with being an MP.

My hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim (Dr McCrea) mentioned the question of money. When everything is taken into account—from Short money to allowances—it is clear that Sinn Fein Members will claim between £3 million and £4 million over the course of this Parliament unless something is done about it. That is absolutely unacceptable.

The situation with Short money is even more untenable. The motion on Short money that was passed on 8 February 2006 created a special and distinctive scheme specifically for Sinn Fein—for Opposition parties

“represented by Members who have chosen not to take their seats”.

The resolution states that the money is to provide for

“expenses wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred for the employment of staff and related support to Members designated as that party’s spokesman in relation to the party’s representative business.”

For the rest of us in the House, whether Labour Members, Liberal Democrats, those representing smaller Northern Ireland parties or Members of any other party, all the funds granted as Short money must be used to support parliamentary business only. We have no equivalent extension for “representative business”. That term is so wide that it is meaningless; the money can be used for virtually any activity one cares to think of. I am sure that there are Members in the House who would love to be provided with public money under such terms so

that they would not have to account for whether it is spent on activities that fall within the category of parliamentary business.

We now know the scrutiny that is rightly given to the expenditure of such moneys, and yet we have a resolution passed by the House, which was introduced by the Labour Government, that allows for a fund that gives Sinn Fein hundreds of thousands of pounds over the course of a Parliament to carry out all sorts of activities, while other parties that might have won far more votes cannot access public money for the same activities. That points once again to the absurdity of the current arrangements.

By way of conclusion, I will refer to the Prime Minister’s recent response to my hon. Friend the Member for South Antrim during Prime Minister’s questions:

“There is not a case for Sinn Fein Members not to take their seats. I think that at the moment we let them off the hook, so I would like to re-examine the argument and see if we can find a new way of doing this.”—[*Official Report*, 23 June 2010; Vol. 512, c. 291.]

There will be an enormous backlash not only among Members, but among the wider public, if we go down the route—I hope that the Prime Minister is not suggesting this—of once again setting aside the proper rules and procedures of the House to try to accommodate Sinn Fein. As I have already illustrated in my remarks, that will be to no avail anyway, because Sinn Fein Members will pocket that as a concession and claim their expenses and allowances having once again diminishing the British status of Members of Parliament from Northern Ireland, but they will not in turn take their seats.

I appeal to the Government to deliver on the promises they made in the run-up to the election and for the Secretary of State or the Leader of the House to come forward with a motion to implement what I believe is a sensible proposal: to make all Members in this House truly equal. There is nothing to stop Sinn Fein Members coming to this House and receiving allowances and Short money, but they should be required to do what the rest of us do by representing their constituents properly in this House.

11.17 am

**The Parliamentary Secretary, Office of the Leader of the House of Commons (Mr David Heath):** I congratulate the right hon. Member for Belfast North (Mr Dodds) on securing the debate and on the way that he introduced it. We are fully aware of the strong views held on all sides of the argument, but he has expressed his view on behalf of his party extremely well. I am also pleased that he has the support of his colleagues who intervened—the hon. Members for East Londonderry (Mr Campbell), for South Antrim (Dr McCrea) and for Upper Bann (David Simpson). The matter of allowances for elected Members who do not take their seats has always been controversial. I hope that the right hon. Gentleman will forgive me if I cover the same history that he mentioned in his remarks, but it is crucial to our understanding of where we are in relation to allowances.

The matter was first raised by Sinn Fein in 1997 with the then Speaker, now Baroness Boothroyd, who clearly and explicitly upheld the long-standing convention that Members who did not take their seats should not have access to the House’s facilities on the grounds that the House does not permit what she described as “associate

membership.” That decision was subsequently upheld by her successor as Speaker, now Lord Martin of Springburn, following the 2001 election.

In December 2001, the House debated and agreed a motion to permit elected Members who had not taken their seats to have access to the House’s facilities, including allowances, to support them in their representative work on behalf of their constituents. On 8 February 2006, a similar decision was taken on representative money, to which the right hon. Gentleman referred and which is analogous to Short money. That resolution provides for the payment of

“expenses wholly, exclusively and necessarily incurred for the employment of staff and related support”

to parties represented by elected Members who choose not to take their seats, and by statutory requirement, political parties whose Members do not take their seats are not eligible to receive policy development grants. As the right hon. Gentleman has pointed out, Members who do not take their seats cannot have parliamentary duties; none the less, they are the elected representatives of their constituents and have representative duties in which the provision of allowances is intended to support them, on the basis that the House previously agreed.

As we are all aware, there has been a much wider debate on allowances over the past year. The Committee on Standards in Public Life recognised when it reported in November that the decisions on allowances for elected Members who did not take their seats were political, as the right hon. Gentleman pointed out. The previous Government promoted the arrangements specifically—it would appear—to support the political process in Northern Ireland and to encourage Sinn Fein to play a greater role in mainstream politics.

The right hon. Gentleman brought up the position adopted by parties in previous debates and before the general election. There are Members who have always opposed the decisions on the grounds that all MPs elected to serve at Westminster should carry out their full duties in representing their constituents, and that includes participating in the business of the House. They have always seen this as primarily a House of Commons issue and agreed with Speaker Boothroyd at the time on “associate membership” of the House. He also said that some Members have always taken the view that the matter should be subject to a free vote—that is, it is for individual Members rather than the parties.

Since the decisions were taken, circumstances in Northern Ireland have changed considerably. We have a new devolutionary settlement, which is at the heart of the peace process. Northern Ireland is now firmly set on the political path, with Sinn Fein Members playing a full role in the Assembly. Though dissident republicans continue to try to undermine those who are committed to the political process, there is no question—I hope and pray—of a return to the troubled decades of violence. As a result, it is time for us to look again at the issue. It is clear that there are real and strongly felt issues of principle under discussion.

The Belfast agreement is clear: Northern Ireland is, and will remain, part of the United Kingdom until or unless a majority of the people of Northern Ireland vote otherwise. Sinn Fein has accepted the consent principle set out in the agreement, and there is therefore

no good reason why its Members should not take their seats at Westminster. Whatever arguments were made in 2001 and 2006, they were made in a different political context. Northern Ireland has moved on. The principle for the future must be that all elected Members should take their seats and play as full a role as possible as Members of the House.

**Jim Shannon** (Strangford) (DUP): The Deputy Leader of the House clearly indicated that there would be a change. I am reminded of a book that I studied at school—“Animal Farm”. It said:

“All animals are equal, but some are more equal than others.”

It is time that all the animals on the farm were equal, and Sinn Fein has to be equal to the rest of us. If we are accountable to a process as democrats, Sinn Fein is equally subject to it. Reassurance from the Deputy Leader of the House is good news, but can he give us a time scale on how this will work?

**Mr Heath:** I am grateful to the hon. Gentleman for his comments. I cannot set out a clear timetable, but if he listens to what I have to say in my later comments, I hope that he will be reassured that the Government take the matter very seriously.

My right hon. Friend the Prime Minister already made his position clear, although not, I suspect, as clear as the right hon. Member for Belfast North would wish. In answering the question from the hon. Member for South Antrim on Wednesday on allowances, he stated:

“My views about this issue are on the record, and they have not changed. I would like to see if we can make the argument. There is not a case for Sinn Fein Members not to take their seats. I think that at the moment we let them off the hook, so I would like to re-examine the argument and see if we can find a new way of doing this.”—[*Official Report*, 23 June 2010; Vol. 512, c. 291.]

In addition to the changes in Northern Ireland, there have also been shifts in the parliamentary landscape that will need to be considered. The creation of IPSA was an essential step in cleaning up politics by bringing to an end the discredited system of self-regulation. Allowances, as my right hon. Friend the Leader of the House said, are, of course, now a matter for IPSA, not for the House. However, the right hon. Member for Belfast North is correct in what he said about IPSA’s approach; I understand that it intends to observe the status quo by continuing to pay allowances, but not salaries, to Members who do not take their seats. Last Wednesday, IPSA set out its position as follows:

“a Government motion passed through the House of Commons in 2001 established the position that MPs who do not take the oath may claim expenses related to their Parliamentary business. IPSA regards itself as obliged to follow these motions and intends to do so unless the House decides otherwise.”

A question was raised on how IPSA interprets those decisions in terms of the criteria applied to individual expenses claims. I assume and hope that IPSA will apply exactly the same criteria to a claim from a Sinn Fein Member as it would to any other Member of the House.

**Kate Hoey** (Vauxhall) (Lab): I want to ensure that the Deputy Leader of the House is aware that it is not only Members from Northern Ireland who feel strongly about this; many Labour Members voted against the original decisions. I welcome the move that he appears to be

[Kate Hoey]

making, but we need to do this quickly, because it is just not fair. The new coalition Government were elected on one thing more than any other—fairness.

**Mr Heath:** I know that there were views across the House that were at variance with the previous Government's position when the decisions were taken.

Representative money is a matter for the House. Any change to the current position requires a decision of the House and a debate at which Members can again put forward their views.

I have listened carefully to the right hon. Gentleman's arguments, and to those of his hon. Friends and others. I will ensure that the arguments raised are drawn to the attention of my right hon. Friends the Leader of the House, the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and the Prime Minister. The Government will listen to all sides of the debate, but we are mindful of the very strong views that have been expressed in the debate today and the real issues of principle at play in relation to financial assistance for those MPs who do not take their seats.

Over the coming months Ministers will be talking to all Northern Ireland parties to address how to take the issue forward in light of the views and clear issues of principle we discussed today. The right hon. Gentleman has my assurance of that. I congratulate him on securing the debate and on expressing his views clearly and precisely. I will ensure that they are communicated to my right hon. Friends who will deal with the matter in the future.

11.29 am

*Sitting suspended.*

## Regional Spatial Strategies

[MR JOE BENTON *in the Chair*]

2.30 pm

**Mark Lancaster** (Milton Keynes North) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship for the first time in this Parliament, Mr Benton. This is a timely and important debate, as we can see by the number of hon. Members who wish to participate. I am sure that they will be pleased to hear that I intend to be brief, simply so that I give others the opportunity to speak. All I ask in turn is that they might be equally brief to ensure that we give the Minister ample opportunity to reply, because this is definitely one of those debates in which the answers are even more important than the questions.

The expansion of Milton Keynes has always been a key issue in my constituency. I remember as long ago as 2003 sitting in the kitchen of one of my local councillors, David Hopkins, and discussing how best to tackle the then Government's dictatorial approach to expansion. It was at that meeting that the slogan "I before E"—or infrastructure before expansion—was born. That phrase is now used by many others, including even the Prime Minister.

The slogan is good because it says two things. The first, which is obvious, is that we need infrastructure before expansion. Secondly, it says that we in Milton Keynes are not opposed to expansion per se. All too often the Opposition have liked to portray some in the House as nimbys as a justification for their centralist housing strategies, but the people of Milton Keynes certainly are not nimbys. However, I believe strongly that if any development is to be sustainable, it must have the support of local people.

The success of the I before E campaign has been such that the principle is now accepted by all political parties, but issues around expansion continue to be a major concern for Milton Keynes council and for people in the city and rural areas. Since 2004, when the then Deputy Prime Minister, John Prescott, stated that the south-east must build 1 million more homes, of which the Milton Keynes share would be an extra 70,000—in effect, the move would have enlarged Milton Keynes to a size equivalent to Bristol—there have been concerns that the decision was made without any cast-iron guarantee of an improvement to key infrastructure. Since then, various quangos with ever-changing names have had control over when, where and how Milton Keynes should expand, often against the advice of experts and, more importantly, against the wishes of local people, whose views have been ignored.

**Lorely Burt** (Solihull) (LD): I congratulate the hon. Gentleman on securing the debate and understand exactly where he is coming from. Central Government diktat originally provided for a town the size of Lichfield right in the middle of our green belt, but we managed to get it down to half as much, as we ourselves had assessed was needed. We welcome the change of Government and of strategy, but there are still issues. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that some areas do need a regional strategy and that it is important that we do not throw the baby out with the bathwater? For example, we need to think about regional provision for Gypsies. I hope that when the Minister gives his comments—

**Mr Joe Benton (in the Chair):** Order. The hon. Lady's intervention is becoming slightly lengthy.

**Lorely Burt:** I am sorry, Mr Benton. I beg your pardon.

**Mark Lancaster:** I am grateful for the hon. Lady's intervention. She makes a powerful point, and we shall indeed find out what the Minister has to say.

In my constituency, local people were occasionally consulted. However, all too often, it was clear that the decisions had already been made and that lip service was being paid to local people through sham public consultations. Indeed, two years ago, I came to this Chamber to try to convince the then Minister, the hon. Member for Hartlepool (Mr Wright), that his Department's decision to impose 4,500 extra homes in rural north Buckinghamshire completely out of the blue was a mistake. It went against not only local residents' wishes, but the advice received from Milton Keynes Partnership and the Department's own advisers, all of whom felt that the decision was not in the interest of the city or its rural residents.

Thankfully, the right hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Hazel Blears), the then Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, listened to reason and the decision was eventually overturned. I was grateful to her for reversing it, but we should not have had to go through that process in the first place. Common sense was finally seen, but that was a clear example of how the previous Government, with their Whitehall-decreed targets and unelected quangos, tried to run roughshod over the desires of local people. That is why I am so pleased that the new coalition Government have listened, and I hope that the days of top-down targets are limited.

Despite that minor victory in this Chamber two years ago, we have still seen house-building targets that were too large for local economic needs. As I said, there is no blanket opposition in Milton Keynes to the expansion of the city, but there is a feeling that it must be done at a sustainable pace and following the I before E philosophy. For example, 1,300 new homes were completed in Milton Keynes in 2009-10, but only 600 jobs were created. The current requirement is that 1.5 jobs are created per new home built.

It was therefore with great relief that on 27 May I received a letter from the new Secretary of State outlining his plans to abolish regional spatial strategies. I am pleased to say that it is not only me who welcomes the move; it is broadly supported by Milton Keynes council and local residents. Of course, there is a minority who view any change as a threat, and I called for the debate precisely so that the Minister would have an opportunity to put meat on the bones of the Secretary of State's announcement, and to allow local authorities up and down the land to begin to plan ahead as a result of the Government's decision.

In effect, the abolition of the regional spatial strategy makes Milton Keynes council the policy maker for planning in central Milton Keynes, while Milton Keynes Partnership remains in charge of development on the eastern and western flanks of the city. However, the reality is that because the principal expansion areas are under the control of Milton Keynes Partnership, it is the Homes and Communities Agency, through Milton

Keynes Partnership, that has dictated the amount, direction and speed of growth in Milton Keynes, not the democratically elected local council.

My first question to the Minister is: how will that relationship change? Will there be only one planning authority for Milton Keynes in the future, and will it be the council? To that end, does he intend to revoke the statutory instrument that gives Milton Keynes Partnership its development powers, and what future role does he anticipate for the partnership?

Secondly, will the scrapping of the regional spatial strategies be achieved through existing regulations or via a forthcoming Bill? Thirdly, will the Government put in place an interim mechanism that will allow local planning authorities to resist or defer planning applications for development above a certain size during the transitional period so that they are able to take stock and revisit their sustainable growth requirements?

Fourthly, and in line with that, will the Minister consider implementing a framework that ensures that the building and land assets of the Homes and Communities Agency and Milton Keynes Partnership are managed in line with the policy set by Milton Keynes council? Fifthly, how will the Government ensure that local councils take another look at their current housing plans and modify them if that is in the best interests of local people? On the flip side of the coin, how will the incentives and rewards to local authorities for building more homes and promoting greater economic growth be implemented?

Sixthly, will the Minister explain the funding mechanism for the future infrastructure projects that will be necessary for future residential properties? At present, Milton Keynes has a local tariff that is based on a per-property financial contribution to infrastructure, but that accounts for only a relatively small percentage of the amount that is required. Where will the remaining funding come from?

Finally, Milton Keynes lies on the border of three counties—Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire—and three regions: the south-east, east midlands and eastern regions. Can the Minister outline what mechanism will be available to ensure that the various stakeholders from those authorities can and will work together to come up with a consensus position that would benefit everyone in the cross-regional area?

I welcome the Secretary of State's decision to abolish regional spatial strategies and commend him for the leadership that he has shown in this matter. The Minister will, however, appreciate that the decision actually raises several important questions, some of which I have tried to outline this afternoon. I know that I speak for local authorities up and down the country when I say that the sooner we have answers, the sooner local authorities will be able to move forward in implementing local wishes.

2.39 pm

**Mr Philip Hollobone (Kettering) (Con):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster) on his excellent speech and on his wisdom in choosing today's topic for debate. May I congratulate the Minister on abolishing regional spatial

[Mr Philip Hollobone]

strategies so quickly? I hope that the mechanism that formalises the abolition will be introduced as quickly as possible.

Kettering is a wonderful constituency, but it has the misfortune to lie within the Milton Keynes and south midlands sub-regional spatial strategy area. The previous Government put in place arrangements to increase the number of dwellings in the borough of Kettering by one third—from 36,000 to 49,000—by 2021. However, such a rate of growth is not supported by local people and will place a huge strain on our local infrastructure.

Below the regional spatial strategy, a core spatial strategy was constructed for the area of north Northamptonshire—Kettering, Wellingborough, east Northamptonshire and Corby—and below that was the local development framework for each of the boroughs and districts. All those arrangements were complicated, although they were eventually understandable.

The local development framework and the core spatial strategy for the borough of Kettering are already signed off, approved and in place. What can local people do about the strategies and frameworks that have already been signed off? I strongly suspect that my constituents would like the housing numbers in the documents that I have mentioned to be revisited. Yes, we understand that the housing numbers beyond 2021 that were pencilled in as part of the regional spatial strategy have now gone, and that local people and local authorities can decide what numbers are appropriate, but local people want to know what can be done about the existing strategies and frameworks that are in place up to 2021.

My personal solution is for the 13,100 extra houses that are planned for the borough of Kettering by 2021 to be made the target for 2031. The implied rate of housing growth in the borough of Kettering over that 31-year period since the beginning of the strategy in 2001 would then be some 400 new dwellings per year, which would be close to the traditional projections for housing growth. Local people can cope with such a rate of growth, and the infrastructure has largely matched it. If we can arrive at that sensible solution, I know that my constituents will be happy, and I hope that the Minister will address my specific points, which are of huge concern to my constituents.

2.43 pm

**Chris Skidmore** (Kingswood) (Con): I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster) for initiating this debate.

The abolition of regional spatial strategies by the new coalition Government is extremely welcome and cannot come soon enough. Returning powers on where to build housing to local communities and democratically elected local councillors, rather than unelected quangos and Whitehall bureaucrats, is the right thing to do. For too long, local people have felt trampled on by central Government decision making and have felt that decisions have been done to them and imposed on them, rather than being made with their consent. For too long, local people have felt that their voice has gone unheard. It is time to change this.

In my constituency of Kingswood, there is an urgent case for the abolition of the regional spatial strategy as soon as possible. As a direct result of the previous

Government's south-west regional spatial strategy, green belt land in my constituency is coming under threat from development through speculative applications in Oldland Common, Mangotsfield and Longwell Green. Two applications—to build on green belt land on Barry road, Oldland Common, and on Cossham street, Mangotsfield—have already been fought off at a local planning level, and I am about to launch a campaign against a new application to build on green belt land at Williams Close, Longwell Green, which has only just been submitted.

For me and my constituents in Kingswood, it has been a familiar pattern: thousands of letters have been written and thousands of signatures against these applications have been collected. I have been working alongside the fantastic Save Our Green Spaces groups in Oldland Common, Warmley and Mangotsfield, whose tireless commitment to saving their local green belt has been humbling. I am proud to represent such constituents, whose sense of pride, dedication and duty towards protecting their local community for future generations is startling. The Save Our Green Spaces group will be writing to the Minister, requesting a meeting to discuss the forthcoming legislation and, if at all possible, I should like to facilitate that request.

We have won every battle so far, but while the RSS remains unrevoked by statute, we have yet to win the war. Developers are still keen to chance their luck and build on green belt land, which is why the RSS must be abolished as soon as possible. The link between scrapping the RSS and preserving our green belt is clear. To this end, I tabled early-day motion 168, which I am delighted to say has been signed by many hon. Members.

**Martin Horwood** (Cheltenham) (LD): My constituency is also in the south-west. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that we face a unique problem? Our regional spatial strategy was never implemented, but was still a so-called emerging RSS, so although it does not need to be abolished it is clearly not emerging any more. There is a risk from a policy vacuum in the south-west, which developers are looking to exploit. We welcome Government measures on the regional spatial strategies, but the policy vacuum needs to be dealt with pretty urgently.

**Chris Skidmore:** The hon. Gentleman is correct. We are currently in limbo in the south-west. Later in my speech, I should like to mention another matter, which is creating a problem at this stage, regarding the RSS and other planning legislation that has yet to be tackled.

First and foremost, I want to be clear that my constituents are not nimby. Local people recognise the need for extra housing, and more affordable housing, for the future. I am sure that hon. Members agree with that. In fact, there has been cross-party agreement in South Gloucestershire council on our being able to build 21,500 houses over the next 15 years and at the same time protect and preserve the Kingswood green belt. It is only due to the imposition of 32,800 homes in the local area under the south-west RSS that the green belt has come under threat from being bulldozed.

I should like to mention to the Minister an important issue that needs to be dealt with when legislation comes to pass through the House. Currently, there is an instruction to planning inspectors in paragraph 71 of planning policy statement 3 to “consider favourably” applications

for housing where the local authority cannot show a five-year supply of housing land. That requirement is counter-intuitive in the current challenging housing market and in the context of the Secretary of State's recent announcement on the abolishment of regional spatial strategies.

Under the PPS3 framework, local councils are being challenged by developers to make good the housing shortfall by approving applications for housing, often in unsustainable locations such as the green belt, on the grounds that the council cannot demonstrate a five-year land supply. However, even though many developers are now experiencing low market demand and have therefore reduced housing delivery, that is not stopping the sector claiming that the land supply in south Gloucestershire has significantly worsened, with that claim being used to justify granting permission for additional housing sites on the green belt at planning appeal. In my constituency, permission has already been granted for 2,700 houses in the Emersons Green East development, yet due to developers' slow progress in planning and building those homes, the development is yet to begin. Now, using the argument of the five-year land bank and housing supply, which is still dictated by the soon-to-be abolished RSS, developers are casting their eyes over the green belt to cherry-pick the best sites. This unsustainable situation fundamentally conflicts with the new Government's approach to planning for housing provision and on protecting the green belt.

**Annette Brooke** (Mid Dorset and North Poole) (LD): I agree that there is quite a challenge at the moment in respect of what is to happen. A district council in my constituency is obviously drawing up plans for its development framework busily behind closed doors and is, almost certainly, reducing the impact on the green belt but not protecting it fully. Does the hon. Gentleman agree that this time around we should start at parish council level, not even at district council level, building it up from there?

**Chris Skidmore**: It is so interesting that the hon. Lady makes that point, because under the coalition agreement we will be handing more powers to parish councils, certainly for local referendums, with about 80% of parishes being able to decide where to build. There will be areas of land in a parish that the local community wants to decide on. There are certainly village communities that want to ensure that local residents whose families have lived in an area for generations are able to carry on living in a village. That is important.

My point about PPS3, particularly paragraph 71, is that it fails appropriately to balance the impact on communities—for example, village communities—and disproportionately favours housing delivery above genuine sustainability considerations. It is also contrary to the Secretary of State's statement that decisions on housing supply should rest with local planning authorities. The requirement to provide a five-year land supply was based on the previous Government's policy to deliver housing supply through a target-driven framework, of which paragraph 71 represented a key mechanism. The new Secretary of State has made it clear that that approach is no longer Government policy, and I hope that he will consider removing paragraph 71, along with the supporting national guidance on identifying sufficient specific sites to deliver housing for at least five years.

To replace the five-year land supply target, I suggest that the Government formally endorse the approach set out in the west of England multi-area agreement, which covers my area, to enable local authorities to agree with the Government annually, so that we have sequential development and more appropriate housing delivery forecasts that realistically reflect expected delivery. The Secretary of State should also consider carefully current national indicator 159 on the supply of ready-to-develop housing sites, which I suggest should be removed. The current NI 159 definition places great emphasis on the regional spatial strategy as the basis against which local authorities' housing delivery is to be assessed. That requires immediate attention in legislation because it is now clearly not in accordance with Government policy.

These issues need further consideration when the legislation comes to the House, but above all I thank the new Government for their decision to abolish the regional spatial strategy. It is a welcome decision for the people of Kingswood. It places us on the right track to restore powers to local communities, to trust local people to make decisions over their own lives, and above all to preserve and protect our treasured green belt for generations to come.

**Mr Joe Benton (in the Chair)**: I call Martin Horwood.

**Martin Horwood**: I assumed that as I was not here at the beginning of the debate, I would not be called, so I think I should give way to my colleagues who are keen to make their points.

2.52 pm

**Greg Mulholland** (Leeds North West) (LD): I thank you, Mr Benton, and my hon. Friend. I congratulate the hon. Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster) on raising this important matter.

Adel in my constituency is one of the many communities throughout the country that were overjoyed when the coalition Government announced that it would scrap regional spatial strategies and restore power over such matters to local councils and communities. The announcement in the Queen's Speech of the decentralisation and localism Bill resonated hugely, unlike some of those previously announced.

Yorkshire and Humber regional spatial strategy's H1 policy is headed "Provision and distribution of housing", and has determined a target leading to annual average net additions to the dwelling stock between 2004 and 2026 of 4,300. The hon. Member for Winchester (Mr Brine) has commented on the five-year supply, and in Leeds city council area that leads to 21,500 housing plots as part of its forward planning.

A development off Holt avenue in Adel has been vigorously opposed by Leeds city council and local residents. The Adel Association led a wonderful campaign showing the importance of what is an historic site. Adel has been a settlement since Saxon times, and is next to Adel's historic St John the Baptist church, which dates from 1150. It is one of the finest examples of Norman architecture in the country. David Wilson Homes has ploughed on with its attempt to obtain planning permission and, having had it refused by Leeds city council, has gone to the Planning Inspectorate. The simple reality is that the unrealistically high targets for housing demanded

[Greg Mulholland]

in Leeds have provided until now, and will do so until regional spatial strategies are abolished, a legal loophole for developers to exploit. In communities throughout the country, we are seeing developers deliberately making a beeline for greenfield plots when they should focus on brownfield plots instead.

The irony in Leeds is that the city centre has hundreds of empty flats, which are ideal for first-time buyers, but developers try to build on important greenfield against the wishes of local residents. The frustration of the council's planning department and local residents has turned to a feeling of empowerment now that that unnecessary and over-centralised target will go. I warmly welcome the Minister to his job. The planning appeal by David Wilson Homes has, thankfully, been postponed pending the announcement. Will the Minister tell us the timing, and will he say whether this will be given as a reason for this or any other development being forced through? Clearly, it was the intention of David Wilson Homes to use the five-year rule and the regional spatial strategy to demand the right to go ahead, even against such opposition.

That is my only question for the Minister. I know that other hon. Members want to speak. The news is great and is warmly welcomed in Adel, as well as throughout the country.

2.56 pm

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown** (The Cotswolds) (Con): It is a pleasure to serve under your chairmanship, Mr Benton. I pay tribute to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster) for securing this important and timely debate on regional spatial strategies. The relevant provisions in the Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004 that established regional spatial strategies were repealed and replaced, from 1 April 2010, by new provisions set out in part 5 of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009. The strategies are therefore now known as regional strategies, so perhaps from now on we should refer not to RSSs but to RSs.

When I was going around the towns and villages in my constituency during the recent general election campaign, I was surprised by how often the housing problem was raised, so the crucial development on housing numbers and the planning system is important. In 2008, the ratio of house prices to earnings in the Cotswolds was 18.8, which was the third highest in the south-west. The practical effect of that is most first-time buyers who want to stay in the area where they were brought up find it simply impossible to get on the housing ladder. It is vital that we have appropriate legislation on planning and house building.

The invidious effect of Labour's planning system can be seen in the heart of villages and towns in the Cotswolds and throughout the UK: pubs, shops and post offices become unviable and are forced to close; local industries cannot find workers; and schools have fewer and fewer people enrolling. By dictating that all major developments are built on principal urban settlements, the RS deprives smaller villages of the flexibility to allow a small number of appropriately built and designed, affordable private sector houses to keep village communities alive.

Beyond considering only the issues in parts of the country such as the Cotswolds, I would like to highlight the wider failings of RSs. Estimates have suggested that an average of 252,000 new households a year are expected to be formed between now and 2031, which is a total of 27.8 million. In the previous Government's 2007 housing Green Paper, they set out to develop 240,000 homes a year by 2016, but I do not believe that their RSSs or policies would ever have delivered anything like those numbers, even if they were sustainable. A check of the figures for permanent dwellings completed in England between 1997 and 2008 shows that the number was 2.3 million, or 192,000 a year. That figure compares badly with the 209,000 achieved by the previous Conservative Administration. I have also come across a staggering figure for public sector housing—[*Interruption.*] Perhaps the Opposition spokesman, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey), will listen to this. In each year of the Labour Government, they built half as many dwellings as the last Conservative Administration.

Let me make it clear that the RS approach was flawed and has failed. The new Government's commitment to repealing that approach is to be welcomed, and their localism agenda has the potential to make the changes that are needed, particularly in parts of the country such as the Cotswolds. I hope that the Minister will listen carefully to a quote from the Campaign to Protect Rural England:

"We hope that the new Government will not, however, abandon strategic planning altogether, as we believe it is essential in order to co-ordinate development, infrastructure, service delivery, landscape management and conservation of the natural, historic and cultural environment, and address cross boundary issues—"

that subject has been raised by a number of colleagues in this debate—

"that might arise from several different planning strategies."

Some of the themes of larger area planning also need to be borne in mind.

I understand that it is envisaged that housing targets in the RSs will be abolished and replaced by local development frameworks, which in most cases will probably return to option 1 figures. In the south-east, for example, the RS figure was approximately 30 million, although the option 1 figure would return that to 20 million. My own council, Cotswold district council, has already returned to a target of option 1 in its housing numbers.

As stated in "The Coalition: our programme for Government", the coalition promises to provide

"incentives for local authorities to deliver sustainable development, including for new homes and businesses".

That is terrifically welcome, but the danger with that approach is that the Government might find that insufficient houses are built in the pressurised areas of the east, south-east and south-west. I have a long memory about the subject, and I say to the Minister that even the previous Conservative Administration found that they had to take increasingly centralised powers to deal with local opposition to house building.

There is a need to establish in the local development framework some form of land bank where houses are likely to be permitted over the next 10 or 15 years. That is in line with the CPRE statement, and it is a sensible provision so that infrastructure can be targeted towards those areas of growth. Across England last year, there

were approximately 651,000 empty homes, and incentives need to be provided to get those houses back into occupation because having such a number of empty houses in our country is a huge waste of resources.

Some points need deeper discussion, but I will deal with them as quickly as I can. We need clarification of the current situation, following the letter from the Secretary of State to council leaders on 27 May. Recently, two substantial planning applications were determined in the Cotswolds. They each sought to build around 300 homes in Moreton-in-Marsh. That is a relatively small market town of around 1,500 houses, so 600 houses would be a huge increase. When the district council made its decision, one application was permitted and one was refused. However, the letter of 27 May from the Secretary of State was cited by the planning authority in its refusal. The important sentence in that letter was:

“However, I expect Local Planning Authorities and the Planning Inspectorate to have regard to this letter as a material planning consideration in any decisions they are currently taking.”

What can be described only as a window of ambiguity has now opened with regard to the prospect of appeals, both in this instance and for other councils across the country. There is particular concern for rural councils such as Cotswold, where a major appeal can cost the equivalent of a 1% council tax rise. That is in an environment in which all councils are urged to set a minimal—if any—rise in council tax, so it is difficult to budget for the costs of major appeals.

The major grounds for appeal from the developers whose application was refused will be that Cotswold did not have sufficient land supply in its RS. If that application goes to appeal, it is unclear whether the Planning Inspectorate will have been told to disregard the figures in the RS, following the letter from the Secretary of State.

Let me highlight the confusion by outlining what has happened since the general election. On 20 May, the Government published “The Coalition: our programme for Government” which stated:

“We will rapidly abolish Regional Spatial Strategies and return decision-making powers on housing and planning to local councils, including giving councils new powers to stop ‘garden grabbing’”.

On 27 May, the Secretary of State wrote his letter, and on 28 May the inspector in the key Leeds city council case adjourned the hearing. On 2 June, Taylor Wimpey, the applicants responding, resisted the adjournment, and on 4 June, the applicants in the Grimes Dyke and Boston Spa inquiries responded by resisting the reopening of the inquiry, pointing out that it was open to either the inspector or the Secretary of State to invite written representations. One can therefore begin to see the confusion that is arising.

On 9 June, planning policy statement 3 was amended and republished. The advice on assessing housing land surveys, which is based on the RS requirements, has not been amended, which is something to which my hon. Friend the Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) alluded. On 10 June, advice from the Planning Inspectorate stated:

“The proposed abolition of RS is a Government commitment that Inspectors and other decision-makers should take into account as a material consideration.”

My hon. Friend the Minister has stated:

“The Planning Inspectorate’s note does not supersede the Secretary of State’s letter of 27 May”.—[*Official Report*, 21 June 2010; Vol. 512, c. 26W.]

As he is no doubt aware, the suggestion that the abolition of the RS is a material consideration in determining appeals is being challenged by a number of weighty legal opinions contending that the letter would not stand up in court as it assumes that the RS will be abolished, although the matter has not yet been determined by Parliament.

Whether or not such views are correct, it should not allow the paralysis of the planning system. The Minister will also be aware that it is highly unlikely that section 79(6) of the Local Democracy, Economic Development and Construction Act 2009 would allow the Secretary of State to abolish the RSs wholesale.

With no timeline in place for the proposed decentralisation and localism Bill that the Government intend to introduce, there is concern that councils throughout the country will face a number of hugely costly legal challenges by judicial review and appeals to defend. Therefore, the difficulty for decision makers is what legitimate weight they should accord the Secretary of State’s letter.

Peter Village QC, a planning silk, is of the view that:

“It is well-established Government policy that the weight to be given to any such emerging policy or guidance will depend upon the stage which it has reached in the relevant process for its introduction...Accordingly, it is difficult to conceive how an intention to change the law in the future can itself be a lawful material consideration to the determination of a planning application now under the existing law without having the unlawful effect of seeking to give effect to a change in the law absent the necessary change of the primary legislation.”

I also want to raise the issue of whether the Environmental Assessment of Plans and Programmes Regulations 2004 will require a strategic environmental assessment to be carried out before a RS is abolished. If that is the case, it will delay the introduction of provisions in the proposed decentralisation and localism Bill. As my hon. Friend the Minister is aware, RSs could be subject to that requirement. Will he clarify how a new policy would work in accordance with those regulations? I hope that he will acknowledge that these concerns exist among developers and local planning authorities throughout the country, and I hope that he will be able to close that window of ambiguity. It would be extremely helpful to know whether, in the near future, the Secretary of State plans to make any written or oral statements to Parliament so that the confusion can be cleared up.

**Several hon. Members rose—**

**Mr Joe Benton (in the Chair):** Order. Before I call the next speaker, let me say that I hope to commence the winding-up speeches at about 3.40 pm. I hope that hon. Members will bear that in mind so that we can get everybody in.

3.8 pm

**Harriett Baldwin (West Worcestershire) (Con):** Let me reassure hon. Members that I will be brief. Many of my colleagues have already raised points that are similar to mine and I want to allow as much time as possible for the Minister to respond. Let me add my thanks to my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North

[*Harriett Baldwin*]

(Mark Lancaster) for securing a debate on a topic that was of great significance to people in the constituency of West Worcestershire during the general election.

I also thank the Government for moving so quickly to send letters to councils explaining that they can take the intention to abolish regional spatial strategies into account as a material consideration, as that has certainly greatly relieved local communities.

Let me explain a couple of the specific issues that have arisen in West Worcestershire so that the Minister can perhaps use the debate to give some guidance to my local councils—Malvern Hills district council and Wychavon district council. During the regional spatial strategy planning process, Worcester, which is represented by my hon. Friend the Member for Worcester (Mr Walker), was designated a regional growth point, and the three south Worcestershire councils were allocated 25,500 homes to find room for.

The county town of Worcester is bordered on the one side by the M5 and on the other by the River Severn, so there is no room inside the city boundaries for it to expand as a growth point. The south Worcestershire joint core strategy was therefore obliged to look at Malvern Hills district council territory to find room for the 25,500 homes. The council would thus be given more than 10,000 homes under the regional spatial strategy. That caused great resistance in communities where only 1,500 people are on the waiting list for housing.

Let me describe the impact on the village of Lower Broadheath, which is the birthplace of the great composer Elgar. The village is about four miles west of Worcester, but it is, importantly, on the other side of that significant geographical barrier, the River Severn. The village, which was designated Worcester West, has only about 800 homes, but it would be obliged to have between 3,500 and 4,000 more built on the green fields that separate it from Worcester.

I have some specific questions for the Minister. First, what guidance can he give Malvern Hills district council? Bloor homes has applied for outline planning permission to build the 4,000 homes in west Worcester, which is causing severe blight and concern. Planning permission was applied for at the beginning of the year, before the proposed abolition of the regional spatial strategy, and the council is looking for guidance on whether that proposed abolition is a material consideration and on what the next stage of the plans is. Secondly, will the abolition of the regional spatial strategy automatically abolish the characterisation of Worcester as a new growth point? Will the Minister clarify exactly how we will go forward on that?

On behalf of my constituents, I thank the Government for taking things forward this far, but I agree with many of my fellow speakers that it would be helpful to have swift further clarification of the other matters that we have raised.

3.13 pm

**Duncan Hames** (Chippenham) (LD): I am particularly grateful to you, Mr Benton, for giving me my first opportunity to speak in Westminster Hall.

Residents of my constituency will welcome the end of the regional housing targets in the regional spatial strategies. That is especially true of those seeking to protect Birds Marsh woods and land along Chippenham's floodplains from development. The Minister met residents when he visited my constituency just a few months ago, and I am sorry that I did not get the chance to meet him, although the circumstances were such that that would perhaps not have been welcomed by all.

Wiltshire councillors were keen to blame the development proposals on the regional spatial strategy. Others promised that they will be stopped if the new Government abolish the strategy. Only time will tell if that promise is as true as that made by the parties that have come together to form the coalition Government to abolish the regional spatial strategies.

In place of such development proposals, I hope that we will see opportunities to provide housing—particularly affordable housing—partly through a renewed commitment to bring empty homes into use. There are also exciting proposals to secure small affordable housing schemes in our villages, as has happened very successfully in Broughton Gifford, just down the road from me. Such schemes will be essential for small communities to sustain themselves and to ensure the viability of village schools.

Wiltshire council is keen to receive advice from the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government on whether planning inspectors will now disregard the regional spatial strategies, although, as my hon. Friend the Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) said, that for the south-west has the status only of an emerging strategy. Not only the council has asked me about the issue; local conservation campaigners fear that if Wiltshire council does not adopt a core strategy, its draft core strategy, which sought to conform to the regional spatial strategy, may impose regional housing targets by the back door while a local policy vacuum remains.

I clearly opposed the regional housing targets, and I wrote to the right hon. Member for Salford and Eccles (Hazel Blears), the then Secretary of State, as part of the consultation on the regional spatial strategy to make that opposition clear in the case of Chippenham. However, I also looked closely enough at the region's draft RSS before her Department's intervention to see that there were some welcome policies to promote the energy efficiency and resource sustainability of the proposed buildings. My final request to the Minister, therefore, is that he and his colleagues facilitate the availability of such best practice, so that local councils can adopt it, should they so choose.

The debate over the regional spatial strategies has been a case of representative democracy in action. The democratic process has effectively communicated the strong feelings of our constituents and delivered a response from their new Government. In supporting the coalition agreement, Government Members have started to do their bit, and I am sure that the Minister is determined to complete the job in government. However, it is imperative that, between his officials, councils, planning inspectors and skilful developers, our constituents' wishes are not overridden as a result of any hiatus or vacuum in terms of the policy applicable. I would very much welcome the Minister's comments on such concerns.

3.17 pm

**Iain Stewart** (Milton Keynes South) (Con): I, too, am delighted to make my first contribution in Westminster Hall. I congratulate my parliamentary neighbour, my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster), on securing this important debate. I strongly endorse all the points that he made, although I will not go through them all in the interests of time. However, his point about the Government's interim measure, which other hon. Members have raised, is particularly important. I strongly welcome the letter that the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government sent to councils, but there is some doubt about its legal status. I had a conversation with officials in Milton Keynes council, who say that there is legal doubt about the suggestion that the Secretary of State's letter announcing the abolition of regional spatial strategies will be treated as a material consideration at appeal in the courts. In the interim, that is a significant matter, and I would be grateful for the Minister's clarification.

My constituency contains two areas where planning submissions are under way. The concern is that those submissions will be rushed through and imposed before the full change in the law takes place. One of those areas of development is in the south-east of Milton Keynes, around Woburn Sands and the Brickhills. There is great concern locally that a semi-rural area will suddenly be infilled with hundreds or thousands of new houses.

The second area, Salden Chase, is south-west of Milton Keynes, and it will be in the strange situation of being physically part of Milton Keynes—there will be a seamless divide between the town's existing settlements and the new estate—while also being in the neighbouring local authority of Aylesbury Vale. That has met massive local opposition, not only because it would be a huge imposition of housing on the fringes of Milton Keynes, but because the new residents would look to Milton Keynes for services—a hospital and schools, for example—and because there would be a significant impact on the transport infrastructure; yet all the revenue from council tax would accrue to Aylesbury Vale. Milton Keynes would bear most of the cost and receive little of the benefit. I should appreciate some guidance from the Minister about how he envisages cross-border developments being considered once the RSS is abolished.

There is time to pause and think again in Milton Keynes. There are already permissions for some 20,000 new houses and the existing local plan continues to 2011. The argument that suddenly abolishing the RSS will mean that all house building will grind to a halt is false. It is important to pause and think through the future. Hon. Members may not be aware that Milton Keynes has pretty much reached the size planned for it when it was designated a new city in the late 1960s. We have pretty much reached the population of 250,000 that it was designed to have. The existing developments will take us to that level. The question is how we grow from there. I think that there should be a local debate about that, rather than anything being imposed, top-down, from central Government. There is a disconnect in politics. People often feel that developments that will have a significant impact on their quality of life are imposed on them, without their having any say. We need to reinvigorate local democracy by giving people a say not just about the quantity of new development, but in the shaping of the style of developments.

We have talked primarily about housing numbers this afternoon, but I should like more detail about what we intend to do to give people the power to shape the design of communities. Will we, for example, scrap density targets and allow local decisions to be made about how many car parking places there should be and about the style of houses? We have been good at building one and two-bedroom flats in Milton Keynes recently, but there has been a dearth of family-sized accommodation with proper-sized gardens and spaces for children to play in. I want more open source planning—the buzzword—in the shaping of new estates. It is not just the number of houses that is important, but the type of housing.

**Mr Stewart Jackson** (Peterborough) (Con): My hon. Friend is making a strong case. Does he think, as I do, that it might be appropriate for Ministers to give guidance in regulations about allowing local authorities to develop, with housing associations, many more intermediate schemes—not just rental, but do-it-yourself shared ownership and shared equity, when the time comes—so that the 125% subsidy for social housing will not just be about a bog-standard approach but will relate to a variety and plurality of housing tenures?

**Iain Stewart:** My hon. Friend makes an important point. One of the arguments that is often made for the central imposition of new housing is a reduction, somehow, in the cost, thus making housing more affordable. That is a laudable aim, but it should not be at the expense of local areas, completely transforming them and imposing settlements that are not welcomed by the existing residents. I am very much in favour of a more flexible system of shared ownership than the present one, to allow a greater mix of the equity that people can hold; that should also be transferable, so that they could take it with them on moving, as they move up the ladder and the needs of their family change.

Milton Keynes is at a crossroads and we want the power to shape our own future to be in our hands. That would go a long way towards reinvigorating local democracy. I hope that different parties will put forward different visions of how Milton Keynes could grow, but the critical point is that it should be our decision. We welcome the idea of the power being in our hands.

3.25 pm

**Mr Steve Brine** (Winchester) (Con): I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster) on securing the debate.

It is not often in local campaigning that the term “regional spatial strategy” produces any great interest, let alone excitement, but in Winchester the mention of it gets people very excited one way or the other. In the lead up to the general election that was because people knew very well the stance taken by what I hoped would be, and turned out to be, the incoming Government.

Winchester city council put together a good local development framework, engaged in lots of local consultation to do so and produced a core strategy with a step change option for the district. However, that was done in the straitjacket of the south-east plan and the relevant numbers. Local people felt that it was a bit like being told “You can buy a car—any car you like, as long as it's a Ford.” With good grace and the best of intentions,

[Mr Steve Brine]

they took part in the consultation. Many thousands of them attended or wrote to take part in the local development framework consultation, and they felt somewhat cheated by the document when it came out. They had had their say; but in the end, 12,500 houses were still imposed on them. That created great ill-feeling, and people were very excited; the abolition of the RS, as my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) says we must call it, is incredibly welcome in my constituency.

My hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) said that the Government's stated emerging policy was a welcome pause for thought, and it is indeed that in Winchester. The Pickles letter, as it has become known, was the talk of the town at a meeting of the city council planning development control committee that I spoke at a couple of weeks ago. That meeting was held in connection with non-determination of an application by CALA Homes to put 2,000 homes on a greenfield site known as Barton Farm just north of Winchester that is mentioned in the south-east plan. Every speaker mentioned the Pickles letter. The officer recommendation was taken on the basis of that letter; perhaps that suggests how it is being viewed in town halls. As the local MP, I wrapped up the debate, and I am pleased that councillors upheld the officers' recommendation and threw out the application. The problem now is that a planning inquiry is set for early September, to consider CALA's application. There is massive public opposition to the building of 2,000 houses on the site. The Save Barton Farm group, which deserves every credit, has worked tirelessly for years and fought many battles only to be told that it must go back and fight them all again.

I thought that my speech would be brief—it has been—but I should like to ask the Minister some questions. Will the Planning Inspectorate show the deference to the Pickles doctrine that Winchester's PDCC obviously did? The timetable for the legislation is critical, going by what hon. Members have said, and I should welcome the Minister's view about that. What is his advice to the new leader of Winchester city council, who wrote to me recently about the local development framework, explaining that although it is, as I said, a good document, with many good things on affordable housing and sustainability policy, the council cannot progress until it knows whether it has been released from what it considers to be a planning limbo? Will LDFs continue, and if so, in what form? Will the numbers that may be considered as part of the LDF still be based on submissions made by county councils to the original south-east plan discussions?

3.29 pm

**Chris White** (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): This is also my first contribution to a Westminster Hall debate. I thank my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster) for the opportunity to debate regional spatial strategies and for bringing an issue that is so high on the local agenda to a high place on the Westminster agenda. I, too, shall be brief.

Although I am sure that my hon. Friend will join me in welcoming the abolition of the RSS, we are all aware that that is not the end of the matter. Given the progress that had been made towards the implementation of the

RSS, some people believe that the proposals generated for it should be put into practice, given the absence of anything else. I hope that my hon. Friend the Minister will make it clear today that such thinking is mistaken and that, as my hon. Friend the Member for Chippenham (Duncan Hames) said, we see representative democracy in action.

I have had the pleasure of making representations to the Minister responsible—the Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark)—and I have received a personal assurance that the RSS is dead and buried and that councils will be given new guidance shortly on how to proceed. The Government and the people have been extremely clear in wanting a bottom-up approach to housing development. The proposals made by the RSS do not hold any legitimacy for most residents in my constituency of Warwick and Leamington, and I am sure that that is the case for residents in many other constituencies across the country. It is therefore vital that councils across the country offload the dead-weight of the previous planning framework and move towards swift consultation with local people, creating a new, more open and more democratic process of deciding on housing development. That is the only way that we will secure the type of housing that people want and welcome in their communities.

3.31 pm

**Martin Horwood** (Cheltenham) (LD): I am extremely grateful to you, Mr Benton, and to colleagues for allowing me a few minutes to speak. I am enormously proud to support a Government who are abolishing the regional spatial strategies. It brings me great pride even to say those words after six years of battling against these things, so I congratulate the Minister. I also congratulate, in the case of Cheltenham, the Leckhampton Green land action group, the Save The Countryside campaign, particularly Kit Brauholtz, Alice Ross, Helen Wells, Gerry Potter and Councillors Klara Sudbury, Steve Jordan and John Webster, and thousands of others throughout Cheltenham, Gloucestershire and the whole south-west, who succeeded in sufficiently bogging down the emerging south-west regional spatial strategy to the point at which it never emerged at all.

This policy of the last Labour Government may once have been well intentioned in an attempt to control the spiralling rise in house prices, but it ended up being undemocratic and profoundly unsustainable, because it delivered targets that were based not even on an absolute number of houses for local people, but on thousands of houses per year being delivered apparently in perpetuity. Presumably, when we reached the end of these strategies in 2026, we would have had further ones that would have had to maintain that rate of supply. The credit crunch in a sense constrained irresponsible lending and helped to deflate house price inflation, but there are a few issues that I hope the Minister will have time to address.

Rightly, colleagues have pointed out the risk of the Planning Inspectorate undermining some Ministers' intentions. In fact, there is one judgment relating to—I hesitate to try to pronounce this—Bata field in East Tilbury, delivered in a letter in the name of the Secretary of State on 21 June, that also seems to undermine Ministers' intentions, although it is in the name of the

Secretary of State, because it cites the unacceptability of development on the green belt, except in exceptional circumstances, and then it gives the exceptional circumstances as the demonstrable shortfall in affordable housing completions and the quality of the design. Those do not sound very exceptional to me. There is a risk that, even in the Department itself, there are still people who have not quite grasped the new situation. I hope that the Minister has time to address that.

**Annette Brooke:** I am sure that my hon. Friend will have heard me say this before, but in my constituency, a further 1,700 houses were imposed at the examination in public. They were opposed by every democratically elected person, but I am convinced that, if our Government had not taken the measure that they have taken, that extremely undemocratic decision would have been forced through. That gives the message to the Minister and everyone else that we must all take on the new values of the coalition.

**Martin Horwood:** My hon. Friend is exactly right, and I pay tribute to her tireless campaigning on the regional spatial strategy on behalf of her constituents.

The final issue is the possibility that some areas of market housing will be constrained, and we have traditionally delivered some affordable and even social housing on the back of market housing, so it is very important that the Department addresses the need especially for social housing for rent. Will the Minister examine some of the issues, including the use of income from rent more flexibly by arm's length management organisations such as Cheltenham Borough Homes, to allow the building and buying of more new council housing for rent? That is one of the things that might help to address some of the possible criticisms of the abolition of regional spatial strategies—I am anticipating somewhat the words of the Labour spokesman, the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey)—even though they were based on utterly unsustainable levels of economic growth, not on genuinely identified housing need at all.

3.35 pm

**John Healey** (Wentworth and Dearne) (Lab): I welcome you back to the Chair, Mr Benton. May I say how much I enjoyed the debates that you chaired in the previous Parliament and how much I look forward to such debates in this one? I congratulate the Minister on achieving his place on the Front Bench. I must say that I felt a little frisson as hon. Members said, "I look to the Minister for answers on these questions," or, "I look forward to the Minister's response on this," and then realised that it was not me this time but him.

I particularly congratulate the hon. Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster) on introducing the debate in a very measured and well-informed way. As he said, the answers from the Minister are more important than the questions, so I intend to give the Minister as much time as possible to answer the questions that hon. Members have asked. I have five questions for him to answer, however.

The hon. Members for Milton Keynes North and for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart) both argued, rightly, that Milton Keynes is a town that has always been committed to growth and has always seen growth as

part of its future, so the arguments that they make on behalf of their town, just like those of their predecessors—particularly the predecessor of the hon. Member for Milton Keynes South, who was a very distinguished Member of the House—carry a lot of weight.

I have been very impressed by the quality of this afternoon's debate. Most of the contributions have been measured and incisive, and there have been many of them. The hon. Member for Leeds North West (Greg Mulholland) talked about the Yorkshire and Humber regional plan. The hon. Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown) talked about the importance of building in all areas of the country, particularly if we are concerned about the opportunities for first-time buyers and young families to get a start in life in their own area. The hon. Member for West Worcestershire (Harriett Baldwin) talked about incentives, while the hon. Member for Chippenham (Duncan Hames) talked about energy efficiency and asked questions about it. The hon. Member for Milton Keynes South is concerned about design standards, which are important.

The hon. Member for Winchester (Mr Brine) talked about the problem with the Pickles letter, which is a significant aspect of the debate. The hon. Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) talked about the importance of democracy in the planning system, which is an essential feature. Even in only an intervention, the hon. Member for Peterborough (Mr Jackson) managed to make a very important point on affordable housing. The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) managed to mention most of the people on his RSS constituency mailing list.

I got the job of housing and planning Minister a year ago—that was all. I inherited the regional spatial strategies and quickly found that they had very few friends, as has been underlined clearly in the debate. In most regions, the regional spatial strategies have been agreed and are in place, and they were agreed by a combination of elected local council leaders from the region, in the region. Beyond that, what was clear to me—it is still clear now—was that our regional spatial strategies and our approach to planning were too inflexible to reflect some of the differences between regions. Our approach was too top-down, but it is clear that the new Government's approach is simply a charter for nimby resistance to new homes, which should concern us all because it could have worrying consequences. My associated concern is that it is a signal of the Government stepping back at national level from any role and responsibility in securing the new homes that are needed in all parts of the country for the future.

The consequences of the changes are already clear. It is not so much about greater local powers but fewer new homes. In many areas, that will result in the blocking rather than the building of new homes. Although the contributions to the debate have been measured, the comments of some council leaders have been clear. For instance, in response to the Government's announcement about the abolition of regional spatial strategies, the Conservative leader of Adur district council said:

"It will reduce the number of new homes significantly", which he said was to be welcomed. The National Housing Federation said that the number of new affordable homes would "fall off a cliff", while the chief executive of one of our leading house building companies described the impact of the changes as being "scary as hell".

[John Healey]

I am concerned that on this matter, as with other policy areas, we are seeing a gap between what the Government are saying and what they are doing. The new housing Minister says that he and the Government want Britain to be a nation of house builders. That is either top-of-the-range spin or grand self-deception. If that is the case, why was the one incentive system—the housing and planning delivery grant—swept aside as part of this year's £6 billion cuts? Why, as part of those cuts, was £230 million taken from the Homes and Communities Agency budget for building affordable homes, through housing associations, in several disadvantaged areas? Why is it that all the affordable housing investment programmes for which funding was agreed, set aside and put in place now on hold? Will the Minister—this is my first question—tell us when the money for those affordable housing programmes be released so that building can start again?

The hon. Member for Kettering (Mr Hollobone) spoke of the RSSs as having been abolished, but that is not the case. As the hon. Member for Kingswood (Chris Skidmore) said, until Parliament passes legislation to revoke RSSs, they will not be abolished—they will remain in place. I fear that the Pickles letter does little to help the situation. Indeed, it creates a legislative limbo in which councils, planners and the Planning Inspectorate are uncertain of their principal reference points. At a conference at which I was speaking this morning, a distinguished academic who knows a lot about the matter described the planning system—the result of two months of Government announcements—as a vacuum and in a state of chaos. That should surprise no one, because the new Secretary of State has been having a go at every part of the planning system like a bull in a china shop. My second question to the Minister is therefore: what is the legal planning status of the Pickles letter? When will the Government publish the legislation that will allow them to do what they wish?

**Martin Horwood:** Perhaps the right hon. Gentleman will tell us the exact legal status of letters issued by Ministers in the previous Government that told planning authorities and planning inspectors in the south-west to pay attention to the emerging RSS there and said that it was a material planning consideration, even though it had not been implemented?

**John Healey:** The hon. Gentleman misses the point. The framework for regional spatial strategies had been legislated for by the House and that remains the case. However, questions arise about the extraordinary letter sent by the new Secretary of State.

I turn to a point that at least two Members raised this afternoon: the desire to move from a planning-led system to an incentive-based system. There is certainly a case for incentives in the system. It can be said that the housing and planning delivery grant and the extra funding for growth areas and growth points were insufficiently sharp to do the job on their own, but they were an important part of the system and I am sorry to see this year's housing and planning grant go. However, the Government's idea of a council tax match at 100% for every new home built is an 18-carat con—just consider the money!

The idea is that that would cost £250 million in the first year. It was meant to be funded by switching the housing and planning delivery grant, but that amounted to £135 million this year and it went in the Chancellor's first swathe of cuts. There is no new money for this proposed incentive scheme. In years two, three, four, five and six—the scheme is meant to last six years—it will be top-sliced from local government grant through the formula system at a rate of about £250 million a year. A £250 million cut in the local authority grant system is the equivalent of a 1% rise in council tax. It is not only £250 million a year, however. The effect is cumulative, so the cost in the second year will be £250 million plus another £250 million. In year three it will increase again; and the total over the six years will be £5.25 billion—the equivalent of an extra £320 on the average band D property council tax.

The system will rob some councils in order to pay others. Those hon. Members whose constituencies include county council areas should remember that although county councils are not planning authorities and are not responsible for housing, they will bear the brunt of the cuts through the switch to district councils, which will get the cash. It must be obvious to anyone that if the scheme ever sees the light of day—if DCLG Ministers can persuade the Treasury to put it in place—it will lead to council tax chaos. It will blow the Chancellor's Budget promise of a council tax freeze out of the water. My fourth question to the Minister is therefore: when will the scheme be in place? My fifth question is this will there or will there not be new money for the scheme, or will it be top-sliced as in previously published plans, and taken from local government budgets?

I shall answer my sixth question myself to save the Minister the trouble. What is the new Government's policy on housing for the future, and what are they saying to those young people who want to move out of their parents' house and set up home for themselves? The answer is clear: no new homes, and a capital "NO" to new affordable homes. Since the two parties got into Government, they have been waving two fingers at those who need decent, affordable, secure homes for the future, and at those who aspire to move into and buy their own homes.

We are right at the start of this Parliament, but within three, four or five years—before its end—the consequences of the changes that we are discussing this afternoon will be serious for many young families across the country, and very clear to them when they consider how to vote at the next election.

3.48 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill):** May I say what a pleasure it is, Mr Benton, to serve under your chairmanship again? It is for the first time in this Parliament—and, literally, the first time from this angle.

The debate has been most interesting and of a high quality. I entirely agree with the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne (John Healey) in that regard. That may be almost the end of our agreement, but he was right that it was well-informed and stimulating.

Looking at the physical attendance in the Chamber, one of the planning issues could almost have been the spatial imbalance here. Such an imbalance reflects the importance of planning to all my hon. Friends'

constituents. Planning was also an important issue in the recent general election, which is why my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State, my ministerial colleagues and I make no apology for having moved swiftly to set out our intention to redeem our promise to the electorate that we would remove regional spatial strategies.

I am delighted to see the right hon. Member for Wentworth and Dearne here today, because he and I have done our best to spar in a civilised fashion over the past few years. I hope that he will not take it the wrong way when I thank him for having welcomed me to the Government side of the Chamber, and when I say that I am delighted to see him on the Opposition side; I mean it in the nicest way. He is often the most reasonable of opponents, but that does not mean that he is always right as far as these matters are concerned. Whatever the intentions of the previous Government for the regional spatial strategies, he himself concedes in moderate terms—given the normal moderation of his language, these are strong terms for him—that they had become too inflexible and too top-down. Being a less temperate person, I might put it in stronger terms. The fact is they had become a positive obstacle to good planning in this country and to the delivery of housing in the right place.

The hon. Member for Cheltenham (Martin Horwood) referred to the legal challenges that delayed the south-west regional plan, and they were not unique to that area. They came about because of the top-down structure of the regional spatial strategy, which created an almost immediate antipathy in the communities that were affected. Battle lines were drawn, and a great deal of money and effort was expended on fighting strategies rather than on adopting a bottom-up approach that might have taken communities with it. As my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North (Mark Lancaster) observed, such an approach is a key part of sustainable development. It is right that I congratulate him on securing this debate; he has done us a great service by doing so. He has raised important issues, and I will do my best to address them, as well as those raised by other hon. Members.

My hon. Friend has diligently raised the particular concerns of Milton Keynes both in this Parliament and the previous one, and his constituents have been well served by him in that regard. Moreover, I am delighted to welcome the reinforcement of my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes South (Iain Stewart), who is very experienced in such matters.

Let me deal, as best I may, with the significant points that have been raised. In the interests of time, I will not go through the preamble about the particular circumstances of the constituency of my hon. Friend the Member for Milton Keynes North and of Milton Keynes itself because he has set them out and we are in agreement about them. It is a city that is committed to growth. It has grown fast and shown diligence in recognising the pressures and the need to accommodate such growth. Its ambitions are ones that the Government wish to see fulfilled for the benefit of its residents.

**Mark Lancaster:** As we are so short of time, may I ask the Minister, on behalf of my colleagues, to write to all hon. Members with responses to any unanswered questions?

**Robert Neill:** My hon. Friend has that assurance. I have been doing my best to make notes, which is probably terrifying for my officials because there have been too

many medical men in my family and my handwriting has been influenced accordingly. None the less, I will certainly do as my hon. Friend suggests, and I will also do my best to get what I can on the record now.

Let me deal with the specific points that have been raised. We have made it clear that we will proceed to the full-scale abolition of the regional spatial strategies as soon as possible. Ultimately, there will be a need for primary legislation to sweep such matters away, which will be dealt with in a localism Bill that will be introduced to the House in this Session. However, despite the caveat raised by my hon. Friend the Member for The Cotswolds (Geoffrey Clifton-Brown), we will also explore the possibility of using secondary legislation to remove the most difficult part of the regional strategies in advance of that. We are actively discussing with officials the means by which this may be done.

The next step is to issue more detailed guidance. The Pickles letter—a letter issued by my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State—was intended very specifically to mark out to all concerned the Government's intention to move swiftly to redeem the coalition pledge, which is part of the coalition agreement. In relation to its status, we are quite satisfied with the legal advice that has been given to us that it is a material consideration and should be regarded as such, both by local planning authorities, in considering applications, and by the inspectorate. That was why we communicated the letter both to local planning authorities and the inspectorate. I am aware that there has been some attempt to dispute that, but I will simply say that lawyers disagree. However eminent the opinion of Mr Village QC, it is at odds with the opinion of those who advise us. I hope that local authorities will not place any more weight on the view of one lawyer than that of many others and that of their communities and electors as to the appropriateness of planning applications. As a material consideration, the opinion must be put into the mix. Of course all applications must be decided on their facts, and that remains the case.

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for that. I can assure him that I do not want to cause him any difficulties, but would he do whatever he can to encourage planning inspectors to get on and hear cases rather than adjourning them, so that the emerging position becomes clear?

**Robert Neill:** I understand my hon. Friend's point, and I take his question in the spirit in which it was intended. The Minister of State, Department for Communities and Local Government, my right hon. Friend the Member for Tunbridge Wells (Greg Clark) and I are in discussion with the Planning Inspectorate, and we will ensure that such a factor is taken on board. Everybody wants to move as swiftly as possible but, because the arrangements for planning regulations under the previous Government were so complex, we have something of a legal minefield to walk through to ensure that we get it right. If we make important changes, we are determined that we do not have any false starts. I hope that Members will understand our reasons for doing so.

There will be further guidance. I am sorry that I am not able to say to hon. Members that I have it here today, but when I say that my right hon. Friend will

[Robert Neill]

issue the guidance soon, I mean it. I hope that people understand that a good deal of work is being done at the moment, and that we intend to move very swiftly to set it out. I am conscious that such guidance should involve both the transitional arrangements and some of the implications that follow therefrom. We have already made it clear that the abolition of the regional strategies is emerging Government policy and, therefore, a material consideration, and that local planning authorities should not feel intimidated from getting on with adopting those parts of their local plans that are appropriate.

Moreover, we will give local authorities the opportunity to revise partially those plans to reflect the abolition of the regional strategies and the imposed targets that went with them. Sometimes it is felt that the revision of a local plan is a long-winded process and rather daunting, but let me assure Members that a focused revision of the plan that concentrates on certain aspects, such as the housing aspects that are affected by the removal of the regional strategies, need not take that degree of time. I hope that hon. Members will take back that important message to their constituencies. The revision can be done swiftly and without great expense to the local authorities. Some local authorities are already taking that on board. Those are key steps that we are keen to take at an early stage.

**Mr Joe Benton (in the Chair):** Order. That finishes the debate. We now move on to the next debate.

## Fire Stations (Warwickshire)

4 pm

**Chris White** (Warwick and Leamington) (Con): I am delighted to have this opportunity to debate fire station provision within Warwickshire. I am also delighted to have the support of my colleagues from the county. However, I am sure that we in Westminster Hall will especially appreciate the presence of the Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Jeremy Wright). Owing to the convention that Whips do not speak in Westminster Hall debates, he is prevented from participating, although his thoughts on this matter are well documented.

Warwick is passionate about its fire station, and I will let my hon. Friends from the county speak in support of their own fire stations. Recently, 12,000 of my constituents signed a petition to keep Warwick fire station—a move that garnered support from the entire community, not just for emotional reasons, although Warwick residents will be forgiven for wanting to keep their fire station, given that much of the mediaeval town was destroyed in the great fire of 1694.

Warwick is an old town that is rich in heritage, and it is the central point of an ancient county. Warwick castle is located in the very heart of the town, and I need not go into great detail about the dangers that can occur from castle fires. Alongside our local NHS hospital, we have the 500-year-old Lord Leycester hospital. Both buildings are located not more than half a mile from the present fire station.

Local residents want to go to sleep safe in the knowledge that their town is secure and that, if the worst should happen, there is a fire station nearby to deal with any emergencies. It is not too much to ask to keep that fire station; local people should not have to plead to keep it.

People in my constituency appreciate—indeed, I do, too—that things need to move on. Local residents are not opposed to change, but they just do not understand why they have to lose their fire station because of change. Frankly, they do not think that they have been given a good enough set of reasons to explain the loss of their fire station. The very first priority must surely be front-line public safety.

It would not be too much to say that people in my constituency are also frustrated by the whole process of change. A flawed consultation, costing in excess of £300,000, was carried out, but it consistently showed the local population's anger at the proposed closures. People have turned to their local town councillors and district councillors, who have supported them. They have also turned to their county councillors.

**Nadhim Zahawi** (Stratford-on-Avon) (Con): I am the Member for Stratford-on-Avon, and I will speak very specifically about the three fire stations in Alcester, Studley and Bidford. I just want to bring to hon. Members' attention—

**Mr Joe Benton (in the Chair):** Order. The hon. Gentleman cannot make a speech. You can make an intervention, with the permission of the Member who has secured the debate—I understand that to be the case. Any contribution to the debate must take the form of an intervention, not a speech.

**Nadhim Zahawi:** You put that very beautifully, Mr. Benton; you are quite right. I therefore thank my hon. Friend for allowing me to intervene on him in this debate. I shall just add that the initial consultation on this issue was deeply flawed, which I think was recognised in the end. I went to see the chief fire officer before May—I will see him again on Friday—to press the point home that the local community and the local fire officers in Bidford, Studley and Alcester have not been in any way objectionable. In fact, they have been very proactive and John Maples, my predecessor as the MP for Stratford-on-Avon, has worked very hard with them. They have put forward a very strong proposal, which I have supported throughout this process, and I just implore the councillors to look at that proposal for Bidford, Studley and Alcester fire stations to remain open, because if one looks at all the evidence that I have before me, which I am sure my hon. Friend has also seen, one sees that if those stations close the length of time that firefighters will take to get to fire hazards would be increased to what I believe would be an unacceptably long time. So I implore the councillors to listen very carefully before they make the decision to close those three fire stations.

**Chris White:** I thank my hon. Friend for his intervention. If the arguments that he is using are not enough, the proposals really fail on the common-sense test. The proposals rightly say that the range of incidents and the types of risks have changed—those things have changed—but the consultation document has not considered the fact that Warwickshire is due to experience an increase in housing and industry. As the economic recovery happens, we still need to look at how we strategically place our fire service provision.

We need a more reliable and faster fire service; but on a common-sense level, how can that be achieved with fewer firefighters and fewer fire engines? Withdrawing a third of the local fleet does not seem to be the best method to increase response times or reliability. The proposals say that we need to increase the training of firefighters, but what good will that do if there are not enough of them to go around? Getting rid of a group of highly skilled retained firefighters will not help to tackle a skills shortage.

Even more unreasonably, the proposals say that retained fire engines suffer from insufficient crewing. Obviously, therefore, the most logical response to a shortage of retained firefighters is not to get rid of retained firefighters. Who in their right mind would apply to become a retained firefighter, sacrificing their time and energy as well as taking enormous personal risks, when they can be got rid of so easily?

Tackling road incidents is the fastest growing area of work for our fire service. Forgive me if I am wrong, but surely it is obvious that responding to that growing area of work requires more fire engines, not fewer. However, having fewer fire engines is exactly what the fire service is proposing. It is seeking to reduce the number of local fire engines by 10, yet it has gone to the great length of hiring a new assistant chief fire officer, which, from my point of view, seems to be a very retrograde step.

I appreciate that our fire service is a key part of the national resilience network and that arguments have been made that a greater focus is needed on that aspect of its work.

**Dan Byles (North Warwickshire) (Con):** I am grateful to my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to make a couple of points of my own. I think that he is aware that, as an officer of the Royal Army Medical Corps, I have been personally responsible for conducting emergency medical and fire response planning and training for NATO troops in Bosnia, so the subject of this debate is one with which I am fairly familiar.

I think that we all fully understand the difficulty that Warwickshire county council finds itself in. The senior firefighter for Warwickshire has recommended these changes, and the council cannot simply dismiss them out of hand. Therefore, to consult widely on these proposals was the right thing to do—

**Mr Joe Benton (in the Chair):** Order. I just want to point out that Members can only make interventions—I do so in the nicest possible way—and that they cannot make speeches. The hon. Gentleman who secured the debate asked me if it was okay for his colleagues to intervene, not to make speeches. So, in the best possible manner, I just point that out to Members.

**Dan Byles:** Thank you, Mr Benton. I apologise. As I am obviously a new Member, perhaps I am still finding my feet a little in relation to some of these matters. I therefore just want to ask my hon. Friend whether he agrees that the county council must now demonstrate that the consultation was a genuine exercise and that local people's concerns will be listened to? During the consultation, a number of us asked the leader of the council and the chief fire officer whether public confidence in the proposals was a factor that they were taking into account, and I think that the people of Bedworth, Warwick and Warwickshire have clearly shown that they have no confidence in a number of these proposals.

**Chris White:** I am certainly happy to pass on my hon. Friend's concerns, and I am sure that we will all be working in our own way. I apologise for some of my colleagues, Mr Benton; it is a happy disaster that so many new Members have been elected in Warwickshire.

The Morphey report, published in 2007, made it clear that waste and inefficiency were present, not because of too many fire stations but because of too much bureaucracy, which is something that we all understand from many other walks of life. According to the report, the Warwickshire fire and rescue service spent more per head on non-uniformed staff than any other county fire and rescue service in the country. The difference was not small: Warwickshire spent 220% more than its nearest rival, and it has between 15% and 20% more support staff than any similar fire and rescue authority in the country.

The report not only identified waste on non-uniformed and support staff, but outlined that Warwickshire had the sixth highest corporate and democratic core costs out of 43 fire services. Those costs increased by 54% in the four years preceding the 2007 report. The report also stated that such costs accounted for about £5 million of the Warwickshire fire and rescue service's budget. A conservative saving of 10% on those costs, rather than on front-line services, would cut £500,000. I respect the work of our support and non-uniformed staff and I appreciate that all organisations in this country face rising costs, but if it comes down to a choice between

[Chris White]

saving firefighters and fire stations and spending more on back-room staff, I know which one the people of Warwick would prefer.

**Mark Pawsey (Rugby) (Con):** I compliment my hon. Friend on securing this debate and on the strong case that he is making in respect of the consultation affecting the fire service in Warwickshire. Will he join me in advancing the case for Brinklow fire station? It is a retained station north of Rugby in my constituency that serves a rural area. Significantly, it is near junction 1 of the M6. Warwickshire has many motorways, and the ability to get to a motorway fast is important. I thank my hon. Friend for giving me the opportunity to speak, and I compliment him on his remarks.

**Chris White:** I hope that the Minister will recognise that there is clear and evident support across the county for every one of our fire stations.

Our constituents have put trust and faith in us by putting us in this place. They expect their Members of Parliament to stand up for them when they feel ignored or wronged. In this debate, I am doing what I can to honour that trust. However, as I am sure we are all aware, I cannot personally overturn the decision, nor would it be right for me to do so. I do not seek to undermine the authority of the county council or confidence in our fire station, and I respect the hard work done by our councillors and the Warwickshire fire and rescue service, but in cases where the local community's wishes are absolutely and unequivocally clear, something must be done. I call on the Government from this platform to do what they can to influence the decision and to ensure that proper consultation is carried out, that the rationale for closure makes clear and absolute sense and that local residents' wishes are heard. The people of Warwickshire deserve nothing less.

4.13 pm

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill):** I congratulate my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) on securing the debate and raising what I know is an important issue for him and the other hon. Members who have spoken, as well as their constituents. The fire service is important, as it deals with people's lives, and it is therefore particularly appropriate that this debate has been so well attended by hon. Members from the county of Warwickshire. I take on board the points made by my hon. Friend, whom I listened to with care. I also take on board the points made by hon. Members in interventions, as well as those that have been made to me by the Lord Commissioner of Her Majesty's Treasury, my hon. Friend the Member for Kenilworth and Southam (Jeremy Wright), who, as a member of the Government, is not in a position to speak in this debate, but has taken the trouble to contact me on behalf of his constituents.

Against that background, I understand my hon. Friend's pride in Warwickshire's fire stations and the services that they provide. Local pride in services is one reason why we as a Government are committed to localism for the fire service as well as the rest of local government. Local providers are best placed to know how to serve

their local communities and, importantly, to know what level of service that might entail and the best means of delivering that service.

I associate myself with the support of my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington for the work of firefighters in Warwickshire, particularly the retained firefighters to whom he referred, who work hard to keep the people of their communities safe. We should be immensely proud of them. I had the pleasure to meet officials of the Retained Firefighters Union earlier today. The retained service has the full support and confidence of the Government.

The background to the proposals is based in the governance and statutory arrangements controlling the fire services in England. Fire and rescue authorities are required to produce and regularly update an integrated risk management plan, sometimes called an IRMP, which identifies and assesses a local need and sets out plans effectively to mitigate existing and potential risks to communities. The Warwickshire fire and rescue authority's plan was produced by that process.

The process epitomises localism by enabling each fire and rescue authority to decide how best to provide fire and rescue-related services. That, of course, includes prevention and protection as well as response. Resources are allocated on the basis of an evaluation of risk and where risks are greatest. The evaluation includes such strategic and operational issues as the siting, manning and equipping of fire stations and their hours of operation, and should also take into account cross-border arrangements with neighbouring authorities. Local requirements are thus determined by local people according to local circumstances.

An evaluation under that process has led to specific considerations by the Warwickshire fire and rescue authority to change the fire cover arrangements in its area in light of both the assessed risk and the availability of resources. It is fair to say, of course, that fire and rescue authorities, like all other public services, must be cognisant of constraints on budgets in the circumstances of the economic crisis inherited by this Government. Equally, of course, it is the Government's determination that priority should be given to services at the front line. It is therefore right that many of the proposals in IRMPs—this applies across the country, not just in Warwickshire—aim to increase efficiency. By so doing, fire and rescue authorities can maximise the amount of risk-reducing activity they can deliver from the resources available. That is clearly the right approach, and the aim must always be to ensure excellent service delivery.

I know that that sometimes involves difficult decisions. Having served as a member and leader of a fire authority myself, I am conscious that, in such circumstances, there are often contrary arguments that are advanced in good faith that must be weighed up. I have read Warwickshire fire and rescue authority's improvement plan proposals, which cover many areas besides fire station changes, such as the promotion of public fire safety, increased firefighter training, enhanced flood response, the introduction of a specialist road traffic collision unit, and the deployment of small fires units and target response vehicles. I note that Warwickshire contends that, overall, the plan will ensure that current fire cover is maintained across all areas and that, in some areas, it will be improved. It also contends that there will not be an adverse effect on response times.

Of course, I have heard a number of counter-arguments in today's debate that have echoed the concerns expressed locally in the past six months or so. I am also aware that the inquiry into the tragic deaths of firefighters at Atherstone on Stour remains outstanding. An argument can be advanced for bearing in mind the outcome of that inquiry before coming to any final conclusions on the shape of the service although, as I will make apparent, that decision is not for me to make as Minister; it is for the fire and rescue authority to make.

It is a requirement that the IRMP and any significant changes to it are subject to full consultation with the local community prior to agreement and implementation, and I am aware of the amount of debate that has already been generated about these proposals. At one level, that degree of interest is a good thing. One never likes to see controversy, but the process has generated a real sense of engagement in the communities concerned about the importance of the fire service in their area. As someone who believes passionately in the fire service—as I did before I became Minister—that is something I welcome. Although such a process is healthy, it is right that both sides of the debate are heard, and therefore I recognise and commend the role of my hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington in ensuring that counter-arguments are appropriately focused and conducted, and presented to the fire and rescue authority before it takes its decision.

Against that background, I come back to the crucial point that it is not the place of central Government and Ministers to intervene in the operational proposals of a local authority's IRMP or the associated balancing of competing local demands on available resources. The consideration of such proposals and the assessment of the benefits to the communities that are served are rightly the role of elected members of the authority concerned. They should make the appropriate decisions on the basis of the professional advice of the principal officers of the fire and rescue service and, as we have seen, following due consultation with the local community.

It might well be that members wish to come to a view on the material that they already have, that they will wish to consider options that are being put forward by various interested parties, or that they wish to consult across the areas of advice available to them about the options that are appropriate. I am sure that they will bear in mind the broader background to these proposals. That said, because of the statutory position and the correct political process of localism that applies here, I am sure that you, Mr Benton, and my hon. Friend will understand that I am unable to comment directly on the specific proposals that are being put forward and consulted upon by Warwickshire fire and rescue authority. The

very principle of local determination and local solutions for local circumstances means that it would not be appropriate for me to attempt to influence the decisions with which the fire and rescue authority will be faced on 20 July in the light of representations made to it.

There is still a period of time between this debate and the decision on 20 July during which representations can be made. I am sure that all hon. Members who have spoken and others who are interested will continue to take the opportunity make such representations. My hon. Friend's case was made powerfully and with admirable succinctness—such admirable succinctness that I am in the dilemma in which Ministers sometimes find themselves by wondering whether I should repeat my remarks until 4.30 pm.

**Nadhim Zahawi** *rose*—

**Maria Eagle** (Garston and Halewood) (Lab) *rose*—

**Robert Neill:** I am not sure that was a wise thing to have said because it appears to have invited interventions.

**Maria Eagle:** Speaking as a former Minister, I can advise the hon. Gentleman that he could always sit down early and give the next debate an extra five minutes.

**Robert Neill:** I am very grateful to the hon. Lady for that sage advice. I will let my hon. Friend the Member for Stratford-on-Avon (Nadhim Zahawi) have a final word and then I think we can move on.

**Nadhim Zahawi:** It is important that our voices are heard and that my hon. Friend the Minister's voice is heard. I am pleased that he has at least asked the county council to consider further consultation on the proposals so that we can get local community support. My hon. Friend the Member for Warwick and Leamington (Chris White) was absolutely right when he said that if the confidence of the local community is not carried, it would be a tragedy. That is what I suggest should be echoed back to that decision-making meeting on 20 July.

**Robert Neill:** I am sure that those taking the decisions will have heard this debate and will no doubt read the transcripts of it. As I said, it is not for me to comment on specific proposals when the decision must be taken by others, so I cannot go any further than again congratulating my hon. Friends on raising these matters. I shall therefore follow the advice of the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) and conclude.

## Building Schools for the Future (Liverpool)

4.27 pm

**Stephen Twigg** (Liverpool, West Derby) (Lab/Co-op): I welcome you to the Chair, Mr Benton. It is particularly appropriate that you are in the Chair for this important debate, because you represent my neighbouring constituency of Bootle. I also welcome the Minister to the Chamber and congratulate him on his appointment to one of the most interesting and enjoyable jobs in Government. I am delighted that all four of my colleagues from Liverpool are here for this debate because that demonstrates the incredible strength of feeling across the city on the issues that I will raise and that my colleagues will, I am sure, mention in interventions.

The focus of the debate is the importance of investment in education in Liverpool. It is important for the life chances of children and young people, for social mobility and justice, and for the future economic prospects of the city. A vibrant knowledge economy is absolutely crucial for a city such as ours, and that is especially the case if we are to meet the challenge of increasing the role of the private and voluntary sectors in the city region's economy.

I shall quote from two business leaders in the city of Liverpool. First, Chris Musson, chief executive of the Liverpool science park, said:

"The future for cities like Liverpool has got to be in higher value economic sectors. Investing in education and creating a generation of state of the art new schools is a vital element in the bigger economic picture. At Liverpool Science Park we are providing support to new knowledge-based businesses. If we, in conjunction with our partners, are to continue to grow the commercial knowledge economy it is vital that there is a qualified and capable supply of talent from which knowledge-based companies can recruit."

Another business leader, Frank McKenna, who chairs Downtown Liverpool in Business, said:

"The Building Schools for the Future programme is as important to our future economic success as the Liverpool One retail development or the Capital of Culture. Investment to transform education is essential to the development of a high-skill, high-value economy in Liverpool."

Over the past 13 years we have seen a remarkable improvement in attainment in Liverpool's secondary schools. In 1997, the city had one of the lowest attainment rates at GCSE; just 32% of 16-year-olds achieved five or more A\* to C grades. The most recent figures available show that in 2009 that attainment rate had grown from 32% to 74%, which is 8% higher than the national average. I pay tribute to the hard work of staff and students, backed by their parents, and the local authority in achieving that incredible transformation. Liverpool's Building Schools for the Future programme is designed to learn from that educational progress over the past 13 years so that we can promote excellence in all Liverpool schools.

I want to say a few words about Building Schools for the Future nationally. I had the privilege of serving for three years as a Minister in what was then the Department for Education and Skills, when my right hon. Friend the Member for South Shields (David Miliband) led the original proposals for Building Schools for the Future. We looked at decades of low investment in school buildings under Governments of both main parties, frankly, through the '70s, '80s and '90s. We looked not only at the physical fabric of schools, important though

that certainly is, but at a programme that, more importantly, would support improvement, innovation and change in all our schools. That is a massive challenge, so we had to decide where to start. We made a deliberate policy decision to give priority to those areas with the highest levels of social and economic deprivation. That is why Liverpool is one of the first beneficiaries of Building Schools for the Future, the biggest ever investment in education in the city.

There are six schemes already under way as part of a £135 million wave 2 investment, and I am pleased that three of them are in my constituency: West Derby school, including Ernest Cookson school; Broughton Hall high school; and Cardinal Heenan high school. I have had the opportunity to visit all three of them. They are already excellent schools and have hugely impressive plans. What is most striking is the ambitious education vision at the heart of their plans. I am especially pleased to have been invited to open the brand new West Derby school in September.

**Mrs Louise Ellman** (Liverpool, Riverside) (Lab/Co-op): Does my hon. Friend agree that the programme is vital for the whole of Liverpool, that schools such as Archbishop Blanch school, St Hilda's school and Shorefields school would benefit from participating in it and that it would be very cruel to crush their ambitions through any clawback on projects already in the pipeline?

**Stephen Twigg:** I thank my hon. Friend and hope that in the course of my speech all my colleagues will have the opportunity to intervene so that all the schools benefiting from Building Schools for the Future in Liverpool can be mentioned in the debate. The programme is about education transformation, led by the schools themselves; it is not some central Government initiative being handed down from on high. Many of the schools in the programme are already high achievers, but they are being constrained by their buildings.

Wave 6, the next wave of Building Schools for the Future, involves 26 Liverpool schools, with a promised investment of £350 million. The council has identified two sample schools: Archbishop Beck school, which is in the constituency of the my hon. Friend the Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotherham); and St John Bosco school. Five years ago, Archbishop Beck school was in special measures, but it has made huge progress since then and its results are now above the national average. Ofsted has judged the school to be "good, with many outstanding features". St John Bosco school, which is in Croxteth in my constituency, was last month judged by Ofsted to be "outstanding". I visited the school last month and was hugely impressed by the focus on standards, the high proportion of the girls who are going on to university in what is a very deprived community, and by the active involvement of the students themselves in the development of the Building Schools for the Future plans.

Five other schools in my constituency are in wave 6, two of which are special schools: Clifford Holroyde school, a wonderful school for children with severe behavioural difficulties; and Sandfield Park school, which has plans under Building Schools for the Future to increase the school roll from 70 to 100, which will mean fewer Liverpool children with disabilities having to leave the city for their education. De La Salle school in

Croxteth is also an outstanding school, and it is due to become an academy as part of the programme. Holly Lodge school in West Derby is a fantastic school that desperately needs that investment. It has exciting plans that it has worked on for four years, and the head teacher has told me that they will be devastated if the investment falls through. St Edward's college, a well-known, highly renowned and popular local school, is also in wave 6.

For all those schools, Building Schools for the Future brings benefits to the schools and also to the wider community, such as better sports and arts facilities—the Holly Lodge school proposal includes plans to open a local cinema, in partnership with FACT cinema in the city centre—adult learning opportunities and extended schools services. The programme will bring high-quality education to many of the communities in Liverpool that we represent, which provides the best hope for social mobility. That is an argument of social justice, but it is also an argument of hard economics. Liverpool's Building Schools for the Future proposals offer a systematic and structured new set of relationships between every secondary school and an identified business partner. That builds upon existing links between a range of Liverpool businesses, such as Jaguar, Everton football club and Merseytravel, and schools, first, to support learning and teaching in the schools and, secondly, to help shape the skills of the future work force.

**Maria Eagle** (Garston and Halewood) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate, and we all fully support what he is saying. I will not give a litany of schools in my constituency, but does he agree that in deprived communities such as Speke, which I represent, building new schools has played a key part in decreasing disadvantage and increasing attainment and that not continuing with the programme would put us at risk of becoming incapable of enabling our children to fulfil their true potential and to contribute in adult life as we would wish them to do?

**Stephen Twigg:** My hon. Friend is absolutely right. The progress I mentioned when I gave the statistics at the beginning of my speech is testament to all sorts of things, not least the hard work and professionalism of the teachers, the teaching assistants, the young people and their parents. It is also testament to the extra investment that has come into schools in Liverpool, which has provided new facilities in schools and new members of staff through the support work force. I am confident that the schools to which I have referred that are already coming through as part of Building Schools for the Future will deliver real change. We are a quarter of the way there, so it would be a great shame if the schools that are due to come in through wave 6 do not get that opportunity.

**Bill Esterson** (Sefton Central) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing the debate. In my constituency we were due to start phase 1 of Building Schools for the Future this year, but that has been put on hold until the review is carried out. He will recognise that many students from Liverpool attend schools in both our constituencies. In mine, Crosby high school and Chesterfield high school are due to be colocated, and I hope that he will join me in saying how important it is that that goes ahead, as Crosby high school is a specialist school and its children, who have special needs, will benefit from being on the same campus as a mainstream school.

**Stephen Twigg:** I certainly concur with everything that my hon. Friend says. As part of the programme, a number of the schemes—in Sefton, as well as Liverpool—seek that collocation between existing special schools and mainstream schools. That can have some important educational benefits, but also obvious social benefit for students in both sets of schools. I thank him for taking the opportunity to raise that point.

As well as the business links between the schools and particular local employers, Building Schools for the Future can also support regeneration in communities, many of which suffer from high levels of long-term unemployment. An obvious way that happens is through the programme's immediate economic impact on the construction industry. The Minister may be familiar with a report published by the UK Contractors Group last year entitled "Construction in the UK economy: The Benefits of Investment". It estimates that every £1 the Government invest in building a new school has a net cost of just 44p to them, but a wider total economic benefit of between £3.80 and £5. In this economic period, when we have come out of recession but have a fragile economic recovery, a programme that gives such a boost to the local economy and the construction industry is surely a worthwhile one with which to continue.

Liverpool estimates that Building Schools for the Future wave 6 will create at least 200 new apprenticeships for local people, and I am sure that the same will apply in Sefton and neighbouring authorities that seek to benefit from the programme. Building Schools for the Future can prepare the young people in schools today for the jobs of tomorrow and provide much needed jobs and apprenticeships today for young people and older people in our local communities.

The Government have been clear since the election that they are reviewing Building Schools for the Future—indeed, there were rumours that we could expect an imminent announcement on its future direction. I would like clarification from the Minister on, first, the time scale for the review. Clearly, the uncertainty hanging over schools—not only those in Liverpool—is itself damaging, so they would like a sense of how quickly decisions will be made. Secondly, what are the criteria against which central Government will make the decisions, and, thirdly, what opportunities will exist for MPs, local authorities and schools to make representations as part of the review? I would like to bring a delegation from Liverpool to meet the Secretary of State at his earliest convenience to make the case for Liverpool's Building Schools for the Future programme.

I know from previous encounters, when we were on opposite sides of the House to those we are on now, that the Minister is personally deeply committed to high educational standards in all schools. I hope that he will take the opportunity today, first, to congratulate the schools and students in Liverpool on their fantastic progress over the past 13 years; secondly, to recognise the considerable hard work put in by the schools and the city council to develop their Building Schools for the Future plans; and, finally, to give us some optimism that that work has not been done in vain.

**Luciana Berger** (Liverpool, Wavertree) (Lab/Co-op): I thank my hon. Friend for securing today's debate. It is a timely debate; I have a meeting on Friday in my constituency with six schools that are expecting building

[Luciana Berger]

work later this year under Building Schools for the Future wave 6. It is not only with the heads and their chairs of governors, but with members of the local business community, who, as my hon. Friend highlighted, are very supportive of the scheme. Does he believe, as I do, that every teacher deserves to teach, every student deserves to learn and every parent deserves to know that their children are being taught in an environment fit for the 21st century? It will be a travesty if all the Liverpool schools in Building Schools for the Future wave 6, including the six in my constituency, are not built later this year.

**Stephen Twigg:** My hon. Friend makes the case powerfully and eloquently on behalf of all the schools in her constituency that are part of the programme. As I said at the beginning, there is a vision here. It started with Ministers in the previous Government but was based on the evidence of schools such as the ones my hon. Friend cites, which is evidence that very poor buildings hold back schools that, in many ways were doing well and making great progress, but that could become schools that do excellently, if they had the necessary facilities and buildings.

**Steve Rotheram** (Liverpool, Walton) (Lab): I congratulate my hon. Friend on securing this debate on one of the most important issues affecting our great city; its importance is proven by the presence here today of not only the five local MPs but our near neighbours. Its importance to our city is obviously predicated on the need to continue the educational transformation within Liverpool that was outlined earlier. The programme is important because that £350 million of investment will create employment and apprenticeships.

Health and health inequalities in Liverpool have not been mentioned. My constituency, unfortunately, still has two wards that rank in the top 10 of the indices of multiple deprivation. The opportunities provided by £350 million of investment will help tackle health inequalities in my constituency.

**Stephen Twigg:** I shall conclude to give the Minister a chance to respond. I thank my hon. Friend; he makes the case powerfully, and it takes me back to where I started. When we looked at the programme nationally, we deliberately started with constituencies like his and mine because they have the levels of deprivation and inequality to which he referred.

For the life chances of children and young people in Liverpool and for the future of our city region's economy, I urge the Minister and Government to give Liverpool's Building Schools for the Future programme the green light.

4.47 pm

**The Minister of State, Department for Education (Mr Nick Gibb):** I congratulate the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby (Stephen Twigg) on his return to the House and on securing the debate. He always showed great commitment to and ambition for children and young people as an education Minister, and he is a great advocate for Building Schools for the Future. I am happy to add my congratulations to his. I congratulate

the schools throughout Liverpool that have made such great advances on their educational achievements and I also congratulate the teachers and students on what they have achieved in recent years.

It is the Government's ambition to raise the quality of education for every child. As the hon. Gentleman acknowledged, I am a passionate believer in high quality education, and so are the Government. We want to raise the standard of education in every school. Too many children still leave primary school without having achieved the basic standard in reading. We need to sharpen the curriculum, restore confidence in our exam system, ensure that young people go on to work, further or higher education with the skills and qualifications that are valued by colleges, universities and employers, and create a platform for success for the pupil. A first step toward that ambition was the introduction of the Academies Bill, which aims to give more schools the opportunity to enjoy the freedoms that academies have, so decisions about what is taught, how it is taught and how the school is run are placed back in the hands of the professionals.

As has been said, school buildings have a real place in our ambitions for school improvement. As the hon. Member for Liverpool, Riverside (Mrs Ellman) said, it is vital for all schools in Liverpool. As the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle) said, building new schools helps to tackle disadvantage and educational underachievement. As the hon. Member for Sefton Central (Bill Esterson) said, new schools can bring in things such as co-location between mainstream and special schools, and as the hon. Member for Liverpool, Wavertree (Luciana Berger) said, every child and teacher deserves to be in a building fit for education and for the 21st century. Finally, the hon. Member for Liverpool, Walton (Steve Rotheram) emphasised the importance of educational transformation and the need to tackle health inequalities. All those were important points to make in this debate, and I agree with all of them.

Teaching is probably the most important factor bearing on pupils' outcomes, but it is right to say that the environment must be conducive to and must support education as far as possible. Good buildings, classrooms and equipment are necessary for children to learn, and to make their school a place where they feel happy and secure. Schools will continue to need rebuilding and refurbishing in the future, and, with a rising birth rate, more school places will be needed, which will, of course, require capital spending.

However, we also have to acknowledge, as the Chancellor made clear in his Budget last week, that we are living in a difficult fiscal climate in which £1 of every £4 that we spend is borrowed, and, increasingly, professionals across all public services are being asked to do more with less. That is the reality of the times in which we live, but, despite the deficit that this Government have inherited and the need to make £6 billion of savings this year, we have protected front-line funding for schools, sixth forms and Sure Start, and we remain committed to investing in the schools estate to ensure that pupils are educated in buildings of a good standard where they feel safe, comfortable and ready to learn.

We need to ensure that we are securing for teachers, head teachers and the taxpayer the best possible value for money as we seek to bring expenditure under control. That will mean some tough decisions. BSF was a flagship

programme of the previous Government, who aimed to rebuild or refurbish every secondary school in the country by 2023. Where it has delivered, some impressive new buildings have been built, but that has been at great cost.

Rebuilding a school under BSF is three times more expensive than building a commercial building, and twice as expensive as building a school in, say, Ireland. The programme simply has not delivered as it should have. Of 3,500 secondary schools, only 5% have been rebuilt or refurbished, or received BSF funding for information and communications technology. That is just 178 schools—astonishingly few, considering how much has been spent.

The programme never really got off on the right foot. In February 2004, the Department's goal was to build 200 schools by 2008, but, of those 200, only 42 were completed by the end of that year. Ambitions for the programme started out as unrealistic and then became unfeasible. Last year's National Audit Office report on BSF said that for the programme to realise the ambition of rebuilding or refurbishing every secondary school, "250 schools will need to be built a year and the number of schools in procurement and construction at any one time will need to double"

from the next year. That clearly is not sustainable, particularly in the current climate.

The NAO report also documented the tremendous waste that has become synonymous with BSF. The budget bulged from £45 billion to £55 billion, and the time scale increased from 10 years to a projected 18 years. Of the £250 million spent before building began, £60 million was spent on consulting or advisory costs, supporting layer upon layer of process. There are eight official stages to the BSF process, but each one contains its own substrata of complexity. The second stage, strategic planning, has a further nine stages that lead to the completion of a strategy for change. Process upon process, cost upon cost—BSF and its administration and procurement processing have not represented good value for money. We support capital investment, but we need to ensure that procurement minimises administration and consultants' costs.

**Bill Esterson:** I want to be clear about what the Minister is saying. I take on board his point about getting procurement right, but is he saying that he will commit to the BSF programme once he is satisfied that the procurement is right?

**Mr Gibb:** The hon. Gentleman will just have to wait until I finish my comments.

It should also be borne in mind that, in the previous Government's final Budget, it was clear that if Labour won the general election, they would cut capital spending across Departments by more than 50% over the following three years. Some of those cuts inevitably would have fallen on schools. Indeed, the right hon. Member for Morley and Outwood (Ed Balls), who is now the shadow Secretary of State for Education, admitted in the House that school capital spending was not protected under Labour's plans.

As the hon. Member for Liverpool, West Derby said, Liverpool was one of the first local authorities to enter the BSF programme: it has one school open and another

34 in the programme. We are acutely aware that a great number of parents, pupils and school staff are affected by decisions about school building projects, and we have no wish to keep anyone—not even the hon. Gentleman—waiting longer than is absolutely necessary. The wave 2 projects in his constituency are already under construction. As such, it is unlikely that any changes in the BSF programme would impact on projects that are so far advanced.

I hope that that will go some way to reassure the hon. Gentleman about the projects in his constituency, but we cannot yet confirm the future of individual projects. I am afraid that I cannot offer him or any other hon. Member present today any further reassurance, but I would be happy to keep in touch with all those who have taken part in the debate.

**Maria Eagle** *rose*—

**Stephen Twigg** *rose*—

**Mr Gibb:** I will happily give way to the hon. Lady and then to the hon. Gentleman.

**Maria Eagle:** I am grateful to the Minister. We heard from the Leader of the House last week that there might be a statement this week about BSF—he said so clearly. Are we still to get that statement this week, or has it slipped back until next week?

**Mr Gibb:** I can assure the hon. Lady that there will be an announcement shortly.

**Stephen Twigg:** I mentioned this in my speech—I realise that the Minister has a short period in which to respond. Would the Secretary of State be willing to meet a small delegation from Liverpool that would include the leader of the council, Councillor Joe Anderson, and the cabinet member for education, Councillor Jane Corbett?

**Mr Gibb:** I can certainly offer the hon. Gentleman a meeting with Lord Hill. I dare not speak on behalf of the Secretary of State, but I know that my noble Friend Lord Hill would be happy to meet him and a delegation from Liverpool to discuss the details of BSF in Liverpool. All hon. Members present would be welcome at that meeting.

We are committed to raising standards in all schools, right across the education sector. In doing so, we will focus on raising outcomes for all pupils, on reducing bureaucracy and on restoring our education system to being one of the best in the world. Capital investment remains important to our programme of school reform, but it must be efficient and cost-effective, and it must reflect the best possible value for money so that children benefit from the best possible standard of education and teaching.

*Question put and agreed to.*

4.58 pm

*Sitting adjourned.*



# Written Ministerial Statements

Wednesday 30 June 2010

## BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

### Trawlermen Compensation Scheme

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills (Mr Edward Davey):** The Government have today published a statement on the operation of the former Icelandic water trawlermen compensation scheme. Copies have been placed in the Libraries of both Houses and on the Department for Business, Innovation and Skills' website:

<http://www.bis.gov.uk/policies/employment-matters/strategies/trawlermen>.

The Government received around 3,400 applications under the new scheme. To date around £3.7 million has been paid or is being paid, to just over 600 successful claimants. We are currently considering how best to take forward around 100 cases where claimants have been unable to provide copies of their fishing records. Around 400 appeals have been received to date, of which around 200 have been processed.

We believe that the new scheme delivers the Government's objective of compensating former trawlermen for the loss of their livelihoods following the cod war treaties of the 1970s, and that we have met in full the recommendations made by the parliamentary ombudsman in her 2007 report. Total payments of around £60 million have now been made to trawlermen under this and the two previous compensation schemes, and we believe this issue has now been brought to a successful close.

## TREASURY

### United Kingdom Debt Management Office

**The Economic Secretary to the Treasury (Justine Greening):** The United Kingdom Debt Management Office (DMO) has today published its business plan for the year 2010-11. Copies have been deposited in the Libraries of both Houses and are available on the DMO's website, [www.dmo.gov.uk](http://www.dmo.gov.uk).

## COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

### Local Government (Doncaster)

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government (Robert Neill):** On 2 June my right hon. Friend the Secretary of State,

announced to the House a package of intensive measures which he was proposing to turn around the governance of Doncaster metropolitan borough council after 15 years of poor governance and dysfunctional politics. He gave the authority until 23 June to make any representations on the draft direction he was proposing.

Having now given careful consideration to the representations received, we note that the authority accepts intervention is appropriate, and we recognise the commitment shown from the mayor, members and officers which has begun to address some of the outstanding issues.

I confirm we remain satisfied that there is a strong case for intervention at Doncaster metropolitan borough council, and accordingly, I have issued a direction under section 15 of the Local Government Act 1999 specifying the form of intervention, together with an explanatory memorandum.

The direction requires the authority to take specific actions, specify certain functions will be exercised by the Secretary of State and specify that certain other functions will be exercised by commissioners appointed by the Secretary of State.

As empowered by the direction we have from 1 July 2010 appointed Rob Vincent to be the chief executive at Doncaster metropolitan borough council. He is an experienced and well respected chief executive, currently at Kirklees council, who will be at Doncaster for a period of 18 months. He will also make recommends to me by 31 October 2010 as to the appointment of a monitoring officer and chief finance officer, which the direction empowers us to make.

We have also as specified in the direction appointed three commissioners—Sir John Harman, Jessica Crowe, and Julie Kenny. They will be responsible for any matter referred to them by statutory officers due to concerns about the authority's approach. They will also be responsible for senior officer appointments, discipline and dismissal. I am delighted that each has agreed to make their expertise available to the authority to draw on and assist them in their recovery.

The direction also requires the authority to co-operate with a recovery board comprising the commissioners, chief executive, children's board chair and five other experts who we will be appointing to provide external support and challenge to the authority and monitor and report on the progress of recovery.

I believe the intervention package we have now put in place will secure the progress that Doncaster has already begun to make, and enable necessary further significant improvements to be made. We are very grateful to the Local Government Association and others within the local government sector who have helped in the development of this intervention package, and to Jo Miller, deputy chief executive at the Local Government Association, who stepped in and provided stability as the acting chief executive at the authority during transition.

The mayor, members and officers at Doncaster, with the support this intervention package gives, now have the opportunity to address, and once and for all resolve, the long standing problems at that council so that it can provide the services and local leadership the people of Doncaster have the right to expect.

Copies of the direction and explanatory memorandum have been placed in the Library of the House.

## DEFENCE

## Defence Support Group

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence (Peter Luff):** The following key targets have been agreed with the chief executives of the Defence Support Group (DSG) for the financial year 2010-11. They are designed to drive continued improvements in the agency's performance and are as follows:

## DEFENCE SUPPORT GROUP (DSG)

*KT1: Quality*

Deliver an improved quality performance by achieving fewer than three attributable major customer concerns within DSG's air business and implementing a new system to record "major" customer concerns for the land business and set a baseline against which future years' targets can be set.

*KT2: Financial Performance*

To achieve at least a 3.5% return on capital employed.

*KT3: Efficiency*

To develop a phased DSG capacity and capability optimisation plan.

*KT4: Delivery*

To meet delivery targets as agreed with the customer:

- (a) *Air Business*—to achieve 95% of customer programmes;
- (b) *Land Business*—to meet customer agreed targets for delivery schedules on critical programme lines (94% September 2010, 94% December 2010 and 97% March 2011) and land load tasks (92% of urgent specified tasks, 85% of routine tasks).

## MET OFFICE

The Ministry of Defence plans shortly to release information on Met Office financial year 2010-11.

## JUSTICE

## Family Justice Review

**The Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Justice (Mr Jonathan Djanogly):** My hon. Friend the Under-Secretary of State for Education, the Minister with responsibility for children and families, the hon. Member for East Worthing and Shoreham (Tim Loughton) and I wish to make the following statement to the House about our plans for a comprehensive review of the family justice system.

My hon. Friend and I have asked David Norgrove to build on his preliminary work in this area to undertake a comprehensive review of the family justice system. This review will examine both public and private law cases. In public law this means looking at how the courts, with other agencies, manage cases involving children and the public care system. In private law this means looking at contact and residence disputes between family members and will include considering how to increase the use of mediation when couples break up, and how best to provide greater access rights to non-resident parents and grandparents.

The review will also examine the processes involved in granting divorces and awarding ancillary relief, but will not extend to the law as it relates to the grounds for divorce or the amounts of ancillary relief that should be awarded.

The terms of reference have set this out in more detail and a copy has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

The panel is today launching their call for evidence. The panel wishes to hear from children, families, professionals and representative groups involved in the family justice system. A series of questions have been posed to frame responses; a copy of these questions has been placed in the Libraries of both Houses.

# Petitions

Wednesday 30 June 2010

## OBSERVATIONS

### ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

#### Energy Costs (Highlands and Islands)

*The Petition of concerned energy users in the Highlands and Islands,*

Declares that the below Petitioners are concerned about the energy costs faced by households without access to the gas main, and the large rise in numbers facing acute fuel poverty this winter.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to target emergency financial help at those who rely on heating oil, LPG or solid fuel to match the support currently provided through the six biggest gas and electricity providers.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Mr Charles Kennedy, Official Report, 10 March 2010; Vol. 507, c. 400.]

[P000752]

*The Petition of concerned energy users in the Highlands and Islands,*

Declares that the below Petitioners are concerned about the energy costs faced by households without access to the gas main, and the large rise in numbers facing acute fuel poverty this winter.

The Petitioners therefore request that the House of Commons urges the Government to target emergency financial help at those who rely on heating oil, LPG or solid fuel to match the support currently provided through the six biggest gas and electricity providers.

And the Petitioners remain, etc.—[Presented by Danny Alexander, Official Report, 10 March 2010; Vol. 507, c. 400.]

[P000753]

*Observations from the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change:*

The Government have sympathy with the difficulties faced by off-grid energy consumers, which is why we are committed to seek to extend protection and support to off-grid energy consumers. This will need to be achieved in a way that is affordable in the current financial climate.

Around 13% of households in England, 19% in Wales, and 12% in Scotland do not have access to the gas network, these customers rely on fuels such as mains electricity, heating oil and Liquefied Petroleum Gas (LPG) to heat their homes. Higher heating costs means that off-gas households have a higher propensity to be fuel poor, latest statistics suggesting that around 23% of off-gas grid households are fuel poor compared with around 12% of households that have a gas connection.

The recent rise in the price of heating oil and LPG around the world is a cause for concern for many customers off the gas grid. This year we have witnessed an increase in the price of heating oil, both wholesale

and retail. The evidence we have shows that recent rises in heating oil prices have been broadly in line with rises in the cost of crude oil, from which it is obtained. There have recently been changes to address issues in the LPG market. As a result of concerns about competition in the market for domestic bulk LPG, the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) made a market investigation reference to the Competition Commission (CC) in July 2004. In June 2006, the CC published a report which said that difficulties in switching supplier have inhibited competition. The CC has subsequently devised a package of remedies and has imposed them through two Orders on the industry. The changes were intended to make it easier to switch supplier, and to address the issue of price transparency, as LPG suppliers are required by Orders to provide price quotes on their web sites and by telephone to consumers. The two Orders implementing these remedies have now come into force, and the OFT is monitoring their effectiveness.

There are currently various other ways in which support has been provided to vulnerable consumers and those not connected to the gas grid. The current voluntary agreement with the big six energy suppliers, under which they provide discounted tariffs, known as social tariffs, means that vulnerable customers who are eligible for these tariffs and who may also be off the gas grid, can receive help with their bills from their electricity supplier. Extending the voluntary agreement to the LPG, heating oil and solid fuel markets could be potentially damaging in the light of current market conditions. It would require distributors to price their fuel at well below cost for eligible customers, and the cost of the tariff may need to be subsidised by other consumers paying already high prices. There could also be unintended consequences, for example companies withdrawing from the market to concentrate on other areas such as jet fuel supply. This risks reducing competition and could lead to higher prices for consumers. Ofgem have made some progress in their endeavours to connect vulnerable households to the gas network. Through the pricing round that they regulate, Ofgem have encouraged the large Gas Distribution Networks (GDNs) to connect deprived communities to the network. All four GDNs have now set up partnership agreements with agencies that help deliver energy efficiency programmes. This will allow the network to be extended to households in fuel poverty and homes within the priority group for the Carbon Emissions Reduction Target (CERT) provided they are within a gas network owners licence area. This includes the Highlands, but unfortunately not the islands as they are not within a gas network area. In total up to 20,000 households could be connected between now and 2013 via this scheme. In addition to gas connection these partnership arrangements will provide help and financial support for central heating and other energy efficiency measures.

These are important steps but the Government recognise that more needs to be done. Going forward we will be considering a number of different ways to help people off the gas grid, particularly those who are fuel poor. Options to be explored include the further roll out of household energy efficiency measures and/or proposals to promote renewable heating.

I am grateful to the petitioners for raising the issue of the costs faced by consumers off the gas network, they may rest assured that the Government share their concerns and are determined to ensure all energy consumers get a fair deal.

### Wind Farms (Mid Wales)

*The Humble Petition of Robert A Robinson,*

Sheweth,

that the Communities of Mid Wales (in particular Welshpool, Newtown, Guilsfield and Montgomery) are deeply concerned about the effect of the transportation of materials for the building of wind farms in Mid Wales and in particular the effects on the towns mentioned over a sustained period.

Wherefore your Petitioners pray that your Honourable House will call upon the Government to ensure that a public inquiry into this matter is held before any wind farm development is approved or allowed to take place.

And your Petitioners, as in duty bound, will ever pray, &c.—[Presented by Lembit Öpik, *Official Report*, 23 March 2010; Vol. 508, c. 217.]

[P000774]

*Observations from the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change:*

The Government recognise the importance of increasing the development of renewable sources of energy. At the same time it remains crucial that the impacts from such developments are assessed fully.

Where an application for consent to construct and operate a wind farm has been made under s36 of the Electricity Act 1989, a public inquiry into the application is mandatory if the relevant planning authority (Powys County Council in this case) objects. Even if the relevant planning authority does not object, Ministers have the discretionary power to call for a public inquiry if they consider it appropriate in the light of objections received.

When a public inquiry is held, a statement of the matters, which seem to Ministers to be relevant to their consideration of the application, is issued in advance. These matters could include transportation impacts in connection with the construction of the wind farm. The views of those objecting would be taken into account, together with all other relevant factors, in identifying these matters.

Even if a public inquiry is not held, objectors' views are of course still taken into account in reaching a decision on any application.

I am aware that Powys County Council, the Welsh Assembly Government, Mid Wales Trunk Road Agency and the developers concerned are considering transport issues raised by wind farm applications in Mid Wales.

Applications for wind farms made under the Town and Country Planning Act 1990 will be considered by the relevant local planning authority. The local planning authority would similarly consider transportation issues in their assessment of such applications.

As the consideration of transport issues, including cumulative impacts, is part of the normal planning application process for each wind farm, and the legislation provides various opportunities for public inquiries to take place as part of that process where appropriate, I do not believe that it is necessary to hold a separate inquiry across a number of applications solely into transportation issues as requested in the petition. This view is taken purely in response to the petition and does not represent any form of decision in relation to any of the relevant applications (either as regards the holding of public inquiries into them as part of the planning application process or any other matters raised by the applications).

# Written Answers to Questions

Wednesday 30 June 2010

## ENERGY AND CLIMATE CHANGE

### Energy and Green Economy Bill

**John Healey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Energy and Climate Change how many of his Department's officials are working on preparations for the Energy and Green Economy Bill. [5025]

**Gregory Barker:** The core Bill Team currently comprises three officials, with two more recruited and due to join in the summer. In addition there are numerous officials throughout policy and legal directorates contributing to the development of possible content.

## HOME DEPARTMENT

### Dungavel House Immigration Removal Centre

**Mr Bain:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) how many (a) adults and (b) children have been transferred from Dungavel detention centre to Yarl's Wood since the ending of child detention at Dungavel was announced; [4179]

(2) how many (a) adults and (b) children have been held at Dungavel detention centre since it was announced that child detention at Dungavel would cease; and what the average length of stay for each has been. [4180]

**Damian Green:** This Government are committed to ending the detention of children for immigration purposes while ensuring those who do not have a right to remain in the UK, continue to leave. As part of that commitment, I announced on 19 May 2010 that all families with children would no longer be held overnight at Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre in Scotland. I am also leading a review to find alternatives to detention for families with children which I expect to be completed within weeks.

On 19 May a mother and child were transferred to Yarl's Wood from Dungavel House. No families with children have been detained at Dungavel from that time to the present.

Eight single adults have transferred to Yarl's Wood from Dungavel between 19 and 31 May, the latest date for which data are available.

Dungavel Immigration Removal Centre provides accommodation for 211 single adults. At 31 May, there were 208 adults detained at the centre. The length of immigration detention is as follows:

Number of detainees	Length of detention
35	Up to 7 days
44	Between 8 and 30 days

Number of detainees	Length of detention
41	Between 31 and 60 days
45	Between 61 and 120 days
19	Between 121 and 180 days
24	For more than 181 days

These data are taken from local management information. They are provisional, subject to change and have not been subject to the detailed checks that apply for National Statistics publications.

### Entry Clearances: Overseas Students

**Mr Lammy:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department how many applications for student visas were refused in the academic year (a) 2009-10, (b) 2008-09 and (c) 2007-08. [4594]

**Damian Green:** The number of applications for student visas that were refused in the financial years 2009-10, 2008-09 and 2007-08 are given in the following table. I have given data for the financial years as most student visa applicants apply in the summer months, before the start of the academic year.

Financial year	Student visa applications <sup>1</sup>	
	Refused	
2007/08	92,859	
2008/09	96,850	
2009/10	94,774	

<sup>1</sup> Excludes dependents and student visitors.

Note:

The data in this table are based on management information and as such have not been quality assured. They are provisional and subject to change.

### Identity Cards

**Andrew Gwynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what purposes the £450,000 revenue raised by the identity card scheme has been allocated to date. [4672]

**Damian Green:** The Identity and Passport Service received total income of £196,000 from the issue of identity cards in the financial year 2009-10. All identity card fee income has been allocated against the cost of producing the cards.

The publication of the coalition agreement on 20 May 2010 and subsequent announcement from the Home Secretary on 27 May 2010, has resulted in a decision to scrap identity cards.

### Immigrants: English Language

**Mr Bain:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department who will be responsible for the administration of the proposed English language tests for new migrants. [4181]

**Damian Green:** On 9 June, my right hon. Friend the Home Secretary announced a new language requirement for those seeking entry to the UK as the spouse or civil partner, fiancée or proposed civil partner, unmarried partner or same sex partner of a British citizen or someone who is present and settled in the UK.

From autumn 2010, applicants will need to provide evidence that they have passed an acceptable English test at level A1 of the Common European Framework of Reference with one of the UK Border Agency's approved test providers. The UK Border Agency will publish details of acceptable tests and approved test providers at the earliest opportunity.

#### Marriage: Homosexuality

**Chris Bryant:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department pursuant to the answer of 22 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 148-9W, on marriage: homosexuality, whether civil wedding and partnership ceremonies conducted on (a) religious and (b) civil premises are now able to include religious readings, music and symbols. [4829]

**Lynne Featherstone:** The answer given on 22 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 148-9W, explained that civil partnership and civil marriage registrations are entirely secular in nature and prohibited from taking place on religious premises or containing any religious language.

An amendment made in the House of Lords to the Equality Act 2010 removed the express prohibition on civil partnership registrations taking place on religious premises. In response to this amendment, the Government committed to talking to those with a key interest in the issue of civil partnerships on what the next stage should be for civil partnerships. This will include consideration of whether civil partnerships should be allowed to include religious readings, music and symbols. This commitment was made through the document, *Working for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender Equality*, published on 16 June 2010. There are currently no plans to allow religious readings, music and symbols during the registration of civil marriages.

#### Passports: Application

**Peter Bottomley:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department for what reason the passport with serial number 704503426 was purported to have been impounded; for what reason it was clipped; from whom her Department received the report that it had been lost or stolen; what checks her Department has made with the New Zealand authorities on the matter; whether that passport is issuable; and when a decision on passport application 2148107176 will be made. [4780]

**Damian Green:** Passport No 704503426 was impounded because it was recorded as lost on the Identity and Passport Service's lost and stolen passport database. Passports that have been recorded as lost or stolen that are subsequently recovered by the Identity and Passport Service (IPS) are normally destroyed, not clipped. The

loss of a passport was reported by an individual with exactly the same name and date of birth as the holder of passport No 704503426. Therefore, the passport was recorded as lost in error. IPS has had no contact with the New Zealand authorities on this matter and has no information about the passport application referred to.

#### Passports: Biometrics

**Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for the Home Department (1) whether all UK passports are to contain biometric facial recognition scanned from applicants' photographs; [4525]

(2) if she will make provision for individuals with national identity cards to have their biometric data transferred to their passport before the National Identity Register is erased. [4526]

**Damian Green:** Since 2006 the Identity and Passport Service has issued all passports in the form of an e-passport with a secure chip containing the information shown on the passport data page and a biometric facial image based on the photograph submitted with the application.

Once legislation is in place, all the information provided for the issue of identity cards and held on the National Identity Register will be destroyed and no information will be transferred to the passport database. Passport applicants will therefore need to continue to submit a recent photograph with the passport application.

## CULTURE, MEDIA AND SPORT

### Departmental NDPBs

**Mr Bradshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport which of his Department's non-departmental public bodies will reduce their budgets by 3%; by how much the funding allocated to each such organisation is to be reduced in 2010-11; how much funding each such body received in the last three financial years; and how much funding each such organisation will receive in 2010-11. [3559]

**Mr Jeremy Hunt:** The majority of the Department's NDPBs will cut their budgets by 3%—the following table provides details of all these reductions. The table also shows the revised budgets for 2010-11. These are the budgets for net expenditure related to the financial year 2010-11, including depreciation charges, but excluding expenditure financed by in-year income other than grant in aid. Grant in aid outturn is shown for 2007-08, 2008-09 and provisional outturn for 2009-10. Due to changes made as part of the Alignment Project, figures for 2010-11 are prepared on a different basis and are therefore not directly comparable with previous years.

£000

Body	Reduction	Grant in aid outturn <sup>1</sup>			
		Plans 2010-11	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10
British Museum	-1,832	59,251	44,893	50,943	48,348
Natural History Museum	-1,833	59,272	45,165	52,887	51,186
Imperial War Museum	-964	31,185	22,177	23,888	24,163
National Gallery	-912	29,489	25,597	26,369	27,287

Body	Reduction	£000			
		Plans 2010-11	Grant in aid outturn <sup>1</sup>		2009-10
		2007-08	2008-09		
National Maritime Museum	-678	21,912	18,491	19,750	19,240
National Museums Liverpool	-817	26,428	22,326	22,488	23,463
National Portrait Gallery	-265	8,577	7,038	7,693	7,744
National Museum of Science and Industry	-1,476	47,713	38,484	39,158	40,608
Tate Gallery	-2,164	69,979	45,929	61,385	55,987
Victoria and Albert Museum	-1,628	52,627	42,262	44,860	44,761
Wallace Collection	-161	5,197	4,156	4,228	4,301
Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester	-194	6,231	4,171	4,788	4,987
Sir John Soane's Museum	-37	1,199	1,339	1,339	1,181
Horniman Museum	-153	4,931	4,350	4,757	4,566
Geffrye Museum	-55	1,774	1,956	1,748	1,791
Royal Armouries	-319	10,329	8,917	8,264	8,474
British Library	-3,976	128,546	106,480	106,947	109,464
Public Lending Right	-230	7,463	7,488	7,388	7,582
Museums, Libraries and Archives Council	-408	13,024	14,743	16,271	4,015
Sport England	-4,265	137,549	113,296	130,163	134,422
United Kingdom Sports Council	-1,705	55,196	67,305	72,201	65,376
United Kingdom Anti Doping	-193	6,247	—	—	—
Football Licensing Authority	-38	1,235	1,261	1,231	1,261
English Heritage	-4,241	136,027	136,636	129,538	131,072
Churches Conservation Trust	-95	3,023	3,062	3,162	3,162
Comm. for Architecture and the Built Environment <sup>1</sup>	-601	19,439	4,690	19,790	13,463
Royal Household	-502	16,222	17,378	16,107	16,107
VisitBritain	-1,252	40,497	50,650	49,900	45,800
UK Film Council	-1,303	42,130	25,110	30,064	37,034
Gambling Commission	-19	614	3,039	608	545

<sup>1</sup> These figures exclude the non cash items (depreciation, cost of capital charge and provisions).

### Gambling: Licensing

**Mr Lammy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport pursuant to the answer of 22 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 107W, on betting shops: licensing, how many decisions by local authorities in London to reject gambling premises licence applications have been overturned by local magistrates. [4793]

**John Penrose:** Unlike decisions to grant or refuse a premises licence, there is no requirement in the Gambling Act for either local authorities or magistrates to notify the Gambling Commission of appeals (whether granted or refused). As a result the Department does not hold the information requested and nor does the Gambling Commission.

### Public Expenditure: Iraq

**Mr Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport what the budget is of each current project in Iraq funded by his Department; and if he will make a statement. [4781]

**Mr Vaizey:** This Department does not directly fund any project in Iraq. However, the British Library and the British Museum are providing valuable support for the preservation of the Iraqi cultural heritage through their work in Baghdad and Basra.

### S4C: Finance

**John Mann:** To ask the Secretary of State for Culture, Olympics, Media and Sport pursuant to the answers of 8 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 106W and 21 June

2010, *Official Report*, column 18W, on S4C: finance, how much funding his Department allocated to S4C in each of the last 10 years; and what the average daily viewing figures for that channel were in each such year. [4558]

**Mr Jeremy Hunt:** The funding provided by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport to S4C over the last 10 years is shown in the following table:

	£000
2000-01	75,126
2001-02	76,817
2002-03	80,217
2003-04	85,217
2004-05	92,217
2005-06	92,217
2006-07	92,217
2007-08	92,817
2008-09	98,440
2009-10	101,369

<sup>1</sup> Provisional outturn.

The average weekly reach to S4C since 2000 is shown in the following table:

	Percentage	Thousand
2000	58	1,432
2001	51	1,254
2002	48	1,216
2003	44	1,142
2004	41	1,040
2005	36	918

	Percentage	Thousand
2006	34	865
2007	29	731
2008	26	665
2009	21	549

Data for the period prior to 2002 was based on a different BARB (Broadcasters' Audience Research Board) viewer panel and therefore it is difficult to make comparisons between recent years and the preceding period. In 2002, problems with the new panel led to a disproportionate and significant shortfall in the sample size of Welsh speakers, which affected S4C's data for the year.

## WALES

### National Assembly for Wales: Powers

**Jonathan Edwards:** To ask the Secretary of State for Wales if she will publish the advice she has received in relation to the wording of the forthcoming referendum on primary law-making powers for the National Assembly for Wales. [4789]

**Mrs Gillan:** On 23 June 2010 I referred the proposed referendum question and the preceding statement to the Electoral Commission for assessment. The wording of the question was considered and provided to me by the Wales Office Project Board which includes representatives of the Welsh Assembly Government, the Welsh Language Board and the Assembly Commission.

It would not be appropriate for me to publish advice I have received. Given that the question has been referred to the Electoral Commission, it is now right and proper that the Electoral Commission have the 10 weeks they require to carry out their assessment before producing their report. When I lay the referendum Order, I will also lay a copy of the Electoral Commission Report before both Houses.

## WORK AND PENSIONS

### Housing Benefit

**Helen Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the Financial Statement of 22 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 166-80, (1) what estimate he has made of the number of (a) pensioners, (b) those of working age in work, (c) those of working age out of work, (d) social sector tenants and (e) private sector tenants in receipt of housing benefit who will not receive the benefit as a result of the proposed reforms to the benefit in (i) 2011-12, (ii) 2012-13, (iii) 2013-14 and (iv) 2014-15; [4608]

(2) what estimate he has made of the number of people likely to be affected by the proposed reform of housing benefit where (a) local housing allowance is set at the 30th percentile of local rents, (b) previous freezes on uprating are reversed and the link with prices and deductions for non-dependents is maintained, (c) working age entitlements are limited to reflect the size of the family for those on the social rented sector, (d) housing benefit is linked to consumer price indexation rather than to local housing allowance, (e) the level of housing benefit awarded is reduced to 90% after 12 months of

claiming jobseeker's allowance and (f) a maximum limit for local housing allowance is introduced for each property size in each year from 2011-12 to 2014-15; [4693]

(3) what estimate he has made of the likely change in the number of private homes available for rent to local authority tenants as a result of recent reforms to housing benefit in each year from 2011-12 to 2014-15; [4695]

(4) what estimate he has made of the number of local authority tenants in receipt of housing benefit whose level of housing benefit is likely to decrease in each year from 2011-12 to 2014-15; how much on average will be lost per week; and what assessment he has made of the likely effect on (a) local authorities and (b) the construction of new local authority housing; [4696]

(5) with reference to Budget 2010, HC 61, what estimate he has made of the number of (a) pensioners, (b) those of working age (i) in work and (ii) out of work, (c) local authority tenants and (d) private sector tenants in receipt of housing benefit who will receive less housing benefit in (A) cash and (B) real terms in each year from 2011-12 to 2014-15; and how much on average will be foregone per week in each such category. [4697]

**Steve Webb:** The Department for Work and Pensions undertakes an assessment of the impact on specific groups as part of the policy development process. We will publish formal impact assessments in due course.

**Helen Goodman:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions if he will publish the most recent full dataset of rents used to calculate local housing allowance for each broad rental market area. [4813]

**Mr Gauke:** I have been asked to reply.

The datasets comprise in excess of 450,000 items and could be published only at disproportionate cost. However, from next month, July 2010, the Valuation Office Agency will be publishing graphs on their website which will show the lowest, highest and median rents as well as the total number of rents held for each category in each broad rental market area (BRMA).

### Pension Credit: Stirling

**Mrs McGuire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions how many people in Stirling constituency claim pension credit. [4117]

**Steve Webb:** The information requested is in the following table.

<i>Recipients of pension credit in the Stirling constituency</i>	
<i>As at November 2009</i>	<i>Number</i>
Individual beneficiaries	4,250
Household recipients	3,550

#### *Notes:*

- Case load figures are rounded to the nearest 10.
- Household recipients are those people who claim pension credit either for themselves or on behalf of themselves and a partner. Beneficiaries are the number of claimants in addition to the number of partners for whom they are claiming.
- Parliamentary constituencies and local authorities are assigned by matching postcodes against the relevant ONS postcode directory.
- This information is published on our website at: <http://research.dwp.gov.uk/asd/tabtool.asp> and on the Nomis website at: [www.nomisweb.co.uk](http://www.nomisweb.co.uk)

#### *Source:*

DWP Information Directorate Work and Pensions Longitudinal Study 100% data.

### Poverty: Children

**Lilian Greenwood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 15-17WS, on the local government savings package, if he will (a) undertake and (b) publish an assessment of the effects of the in-year reductions for grant funding for local authorities on measures to address child poverty in Nottingham. [4310]

**Maria Miller:** The Secretary of State for Local Government and Communities set out the reasons and basis for reductions to local government grants in his written ministerial statement of 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 15-17WS. Details of the revenue and capital grants that are to be reduced were placed in the Library of the House on the same day. The Government do not intend to undertake and publish assessments of the effects of these reductions on individual policy areas; it is for local authorities to decide where their opportunities for efficiencies lie across the totality of their responsibilities. The Government have provided councils with extra flexibility to support them in concentrating on local priorities and protecting essential frontline services.

The Government are committed to tackling the root causes of poverty and to ending child poverty by 2020. The Child Poverty Act 2010 requires local authorities and their partners to prepare local child poverty needs assessments and strategies. This should encourage local authorities and their partners to prioritise the resources they collectively have at their disposal for reducing and mitigating the effects of child poverty in their area.

### Social Security Benefits: Disability

**Gordon Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (1) what consultation was undertaken before limiting eligibility to the Independent Living Fund for new applicants to those in employment for more than 16 hours per week; [2092]

(2) what annual reduction in expenditure is expected to arise from the Independent Living Fund as a result of restricting new applications to those working in excess of 16 hours. [2099]

**Maria Miller:** The Independent Living Fund is a discretionary fund administered by a non-departmental public body and is subject to the usual strict budgetary limits.

The decision to limit eligibility for new applications to those in employment for more than 16 hours per week was taken under the previous Government. No formal consultation occurred before this decision was made, but prioritising this group was in line with the Independent Living Fund's Trust Deed.

The Independent Living Fund was allocated £348 million for the year 2010-11. Its budget increased by 3% this year despite the wider fiscal pressures. There has not been a reduction in their annual projected expenditure.

### JUSTICE

#### Courts: Closures

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what estimate has been made of the financial impact on (a) members of the public, (b) members of the legal profession and (c) the police in attending courts following the closure of local courts. [4771]

**Mr Djanogly:** An initial impact assessment has been produced for the consultations on proposals for provision of court services across Her Majesty's Courts Service (HMCS) estate. The consultation papers and the initial impact assessment can be found on the Ministry of Justice website at:

<http://www.justice.gov.uk/consultations/consultations.htm>

The initial impact assessment states there may be a travel cost impact on users of magistrates and county courts and that fewer courts could increase journey times and costs for court users such as victims, witnesses, general public, businesses, solicitors, barristers, police and NOMS—both probation services and prisoner transfers. However, consolidation of the court estate both in terms of function as well as location could mean that some court users will make fewer trips to court, e.g. CPS officers and solicitors may have to travel to fewer courts, and so lessening the overall impact. Fewer courts may also reduce the need for duty solicitors, decreasing costs incurred by the Legal Services Commission.

The impacts, costs and benefits of court closures will be considered more fully during the consultation phase and a full impact assessment will be produced alongside the consultation responses.

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what arrangements will be made for payment of travel expenses for people who have to travel further to court after the closure of local courts. [4772]

**Mr Djanogly:** Public consultations on the delivery of courts services were announced on 23 June. No decisions on the closure of courts will be made until after the consultation period has ended and the responses considered in full. As such, no discussion has taken place about the arrangements for payment of travel expenses for people who may have to travel further to their local court. However, those attending court who are entitled to a travelling allowance or the payment of their travelling expenses will continue to be reimbursed as they are currently.

The impact of court closures on travel times and travel costs is a key area on which we are keen to gain the public's views. Responses to the consultations will help shape more detailed discussion after the consultation phase on if and how current arrangements should be altered.

#### Magistrates Courts

**Andrew Gwynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what recent assessment he has made of the extent of spare capacity in the magistrates court system. [4661]

**Mr Djanogly:** Utilisation rates currently average 64% across the magistrates courts. Courtroom utilisation is the time a courtroom is used, against the hours that a courtroom is available for use. The Government's aim is to increase utilisation of courtroom time to at least 80%.

#### Magistrates Courts: Greater Manchester

**Andrew Gwynne:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice what estimate he has made of the number of cases likely to be transferred to (a) Tameside magistrates court, (b) Stockport magistrates court and (c) Manchester magistrates court following the proposed closure of other magistrates' courts in the Greater Manchester area. [4660]

**Mr Djanogly:** In the Greater Manchester area, my Department is consulting on the closure of Rochdale magistrates court and Salford magistrates court. The Lord Chancellor will take all views expressed during the consultation process into account before making any decision.

No estimate has been made of the number of cases likely to transfer to each of these courts in the question. Should there be a decision to close Rochdale or Salford magistrates courts their work will move to other courts in the Greater Manchester area.

The volume of cases heard in 2009-10 in the Rochdale, Middleton and Heywood local justice area was 12,927. The volume of cases heard in 2009-10 in the City of Salford local justice area was 12,711.

Decisions on case transfer will not be made until after the Lord Chancellor makes decisions on which courts ought to be closed.

#### Prison Sentences

**Ian Swales:** To ask the Secretary of State for Justice how many of those sentenced to prison for a term of six months served (a) six months, (b) three months or less, (c) six weeks or less and (d) none of that sentence in each of the last five years. [4675]

**Mr Blunt:** Prisoners who are sentenced to six months normally serve three months in prison. Adult prisoners sentenced to less than 12 months are not subject to supervision by the probation service on release from custody. However, they are 'at risk' of return to custody by the courts, to serve the unexpired portion of the sentence, if they commit an imprisonable offence before the expiry date of the original sentence. Young offenders (those under the age of 22 released from a term of detention in a YOI) are subject to a minimum of three months supervision. Juveniles prisoners sentenced to a detention and training order are supervised as part of the conditions of these sentences. These arrangements for release at the half-way point of sentence were introduced by the Criminal Justice Act 1991.

The actual amount of time served in prison, following sentence, will depend on a number of factors, including time spent as a remand prisoner or credit for time spent on tagged bail if directed by the court, any added days and release on either home detention curfew or end of custody licence.

For those prisoners discharged in 2004 to 2008 having been sentenced to six months, the amount of time served including remand is shown in the following table.

	6 weeks or less	Over 6 weeks and up to 3 months	Over 3 months and less than 6 months	6 months	Total
2004	110	6,200	600	10	6,900
2005	60	5,500	600	10	6,100
2006	50	4,900	600	10	5,500
2007	70	5,000	600	10	5,700
2008	60	5,000	590	20	5,700

#### Notes:

1. Numbers below 1,000 have been rounded to the nearest 10. Numbers over 1,000 have been rounded to the nearest 100.
2. Data for 2009 are due to be published in July 2010 and therefore are not yet available.
3. These figures have been drawn from administrative IT systems which, as with any large scale recording system, are subject to possible errors with data entry and processing.

#### TRANSPORT

##### Bus Services: Newcastle upon Tyne

**Catherine McKinnell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment has been made of the likely effects of proposed reductions in the transport budget on the quality of bus services in Newcastle-upon-Tyne North. [3605]

**Norman Baker:** It is for local authorities to decide where their priorities and opportunities for efficiencies lie across the totality of their responsibilities, in order to protect front line services. The fact that certain grants have been chosen for reduction over others does not indicate that Government are imposing a national view on the relative importance of different areas. Nor do the Government expect there to be a direct correlation between grant reductions and local authority budget changes.

##### Electric Vehicles

**Zac Goldsmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport pursuant to the answer of 17 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 560W, on electric vehicles, if he will bring forward proposals for a national charging network for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles. [4621]

**Norman Baker:** The mandating of a national charging network for electric and plug-in hybrid vehicles remains a coalition commitment. We are carefully considering a range of delivery options, but decisions have yet to be taken.

##### Mersey Gateway Project

**Derek Twigg:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what estimate he has made of the cost to the public purse consequent on the time taken to make a decision on approval of funding for the Mersey Gateway project. [4385]

**Norman Baker:** No estimate has been made. As with other such schemes, the Government can give no assurances that it can fund this scheme until the spending review is concluded.

### Motorcycles: Driving Tests

**Mr Mark Williams:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how many motorcycle test examiners were available to carry out module 1 of the motorcycle test in (a) Wales, (b) England and (c) Scotland on the most recent date for which figures are available. [3880]

**Mike Penning:** On 21 June 2010, 162 examiners were available to conduct module 1 practical motorcycling tests:

- (a) 14 in Wales,
- (b) 124 in England and
- (c) 24 in Scotland.

The data comprise the number of examiners available to deliver module 1 practical motorcycling tests and were not on leave or absent through sickness on 21 June 2010. These examiners were also available to conduct module 2 practical motorcycling tests as well as other categories of test.

Examiners are not confined by national boundaries and are deployed to best meet local demand for tests.

### Motorways: Speed Limits

**Mrs Moon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport if he will end the operation of average speed camera readings on stretches of motorway where a 50 mph limit is in place on weekends and bank holidays when no work is taking place. [2526]

**Mike Penning** [*holding answer 17 June 2010*]: Reduced speed limits are used for the protection of road users and road workers. Where possible, speed restrictions are lifted when the risks to road users and road workers have been reduced.

The Highways Agency reviews the number and scale of road works, including the use of temporary reduced speed limits, at bank holidays to see how many can be reduced or removed temporarily.

Where narrowed lanes or contra flow systems have to remain in place, even when work is not being carried out, it may not be safe to remove the temporary speed limit. The Highways Agency is investigating the possible use of moveable barriers to address this problem.

### Railways: Freight

**Mr Leech:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport what assessment his Department has made of the effect on the economy of transporting one tonne of freight by rail instead of by road. [4431]

**Mike Penning:** The Department for Transport has not made a general estimate of the economic effect of a tonne of freight being taken by rail instead of by road because in the majority of cases industry choose the most efficient mode, thereby balancing the amount the carriage of the freight is worth with the cost of moving it by particular modes.

Where the Department intervenes in mode-choice, grants are given in order to account for impacts that do not necessarily figure in industry decision making. One of these impacts is road congestion and its associated economic impact, which can be reduced by taking freight by rail instead of by road. The costs of congestion vary by where on the road network a heavy goods vehicle (HGV) travels and detailed estimates of these costs for articulated HGVs were published in April 2009. Tables 4 and 7 in the report 'Mode Shift Benefit Values: Technical Report' show estimates for different types of road and in different areas. The analysis found that on average the cost of congestion is 52p per mile for an articulated HGV. The document is available on the internet at the following address:

<http://www.dft.gov.uk/adobepdf/165226/443908/msbtechpaper.pdf>

### Roads: Repairs and Maintenance

**Mr Iain Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Transport how much funding his Department plans to make available for the repair and maintenance of potholes in roads for which it is responsible in 2010-11. [509]

**Norman Baker:** Local roads in England are managed by local highway authorities. Funding is provided by central Government to local highway authorities to support investment in their roads. Local highways authorities have been advised of their allocations for 2010-11 from the £84 million provided to assist them repair potholes they consider were caused by severe weather this winter. On receipt, by the Department, of confirmation from an authority that they accept the terms and conditions of the grant, the authority will be entitled to their full allocation.

For the trunk road network in England, managed by the Highways Agency, no special funding has been provided for the repair of potholes as the costs for repairing potholes tends to be relatively small compared to the overall allocated maintenance budget. If potholes have safety implications, they are repaired promptly as part of the Highways Agency's routine and winter maintenance programme.

## DEFENCE

### 16 Air Assault Brigade: Pay

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many and what proportion of members of 16 Air Assault Brigade will have their pay frozen as a result of the decision to freeze the wages of public sector workers; [4572]

(2) how many and what proportion of members of the armed forces will have their pay frozen as a result of the decision to freeze the wages of public sector workers. [4577]

**Mr Robathan:** It is not possible to calculate accurately the numbers affected by the pay freeze in April 2011 due to factors such as promotion, recruitment, retirement etc. However, it is estimated that about three quarters or some 140,000 service personnel are on salaries above

£21,000 and so would be subject to the public sector pay freeze next year. Most service personnel whether in receipt of a pay rise or not, will continue to receive annual increments on the anniversary of their seniority in rank and so will still get an increase in pay at some point. In addition, those personnel deployed on operations will continue to benefit from a range of additional allowances, for example the operational allowance, which was recently doubled, as well as the wider operational welfare package.

It is not possible to predict with any accuracy the proportion of particular Brigades that will be affected by the pay freeze in April 2011. If a similar pay freeze had come into effect in April 2010 we estimate between 70-75% of the 16 Air Assault Brigade would have been affected.

#### Afghanistan: Peacekeeping Operations

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many times an International Security Assistance Force helicopter in Afghanistan has been struck by insurgent fire in 2010. [3768]

**Nick Harvey:** I am withholding the information requested as its disclosure would, or would be likely to prejudice the capability, effectiveness and security of the armed forces.

**Mr Kevan Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence pursuant to the answer of 22 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 119W, on Afghanistan: peacekeeping operations, what the percentage increase was in (a) new helicopters, (b) armoured vehicles and (c) protected vehicles delivered to Afghanistan in each of the last five years. [4708]

**Nick Harvey [holding answer 28 June 2010]:** I am withholding the information requested as its disclosure would prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of the armed forces. I refer the hon. Member to the answer the Defence Secretary gave him on 22 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 119W.

We are continuously delivering improvements to our fleet of helicopters protected and armoured vehicles in Afghanistan to ensure that they meet operational requirements.

#### Ammunition

**Mark Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence whether the fissile material in each of the United Kingdom's 65 non-operational nuclear warheads has been removed from the weapons and stored separately. [4904]

**Peter Luff:** The warheads in question are necessary to sustain the operationally available stockpile. They are held to support routine logistic, maintenance and warhead assurance activities and therefore they retain their fissile material.

#### Armed Forces: Germany

**Ian Mearns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what recent discussions he has had with the Chief of the General Staff on restationing of British troops based in Germany. [4005]

**Nick Harvey [holding answer 24 June 2010]:** The Secretary of State for Defence regularly discusses a range of issues with the chiefs of staff.

The Ministry of Defence is examining its requirement for all overseas basing as part of the Strategic Defence and Security Review. However, this study has not yet reported to the Secretary of State.

#### Armed Forces: Horses

**David Wright:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence (1) how many horses owned by the armed forces were sold upon their retirement in the last five years; and how much income was generated from such sales; [3584]

(2) how many horses have been retired from the armed forces in each of the last five years. [3587]

**Nick Harvey:** The numbers of horses retired from the armed forces in the last five calendar years, the number subsequently sold or gifted and the income generated from those sold are shown in the following table.

	<i>Number retired</i>	<i>Number sold or gifted</i>	<i>Income (£)</i>
2005	58	37	13,400
2006	41	28	10,150
2007	51	26	9,350
2008	71	51	29,000
2009	55	4	27,517

Horses that have served for long periods will, wherever possible, be sent to a home that has been found suitable following inspection. Horses that have failed training will usually be sold.

#### Armoured Fighting Vehicles

**Philip Davies:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how many Pinzgauer Vector vehicles are deployed for use by British forces in Afghanistan. [4256]

**Peter Luff:** I am withholding the information requested as its disclosure could prejudice the capability, effectiveness or security of the armed forces.

#### Astute Class Submarines

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence for what reasons there have been changes to the previously announced timescale for the Astute-class submarine programme. [4598]

**Peter Luff:** There are two main reasons for the changes that have been made to timetable for the delivery of the Astute class submarines. First, delays to boat one have been caused by technical issues, which are not uncommon on first of class vessels. These have been exacerbated by the need to re-establish the UK's nuclear submarine design, build, testing and commissioning capability following a ten year gap since the delivery of the last submarine and 17 years since the last first of class, HMS VANGUARD. The second reason was a conscious decision of the previous Government to slow down the production of boats two to seven in response to in-year budgetary pressures.

**Angus Robertson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what change there has been in the budget allocated to the Astute-class submarine programme since its inception. [4669]

**Peter Luff:** The National Audit Office's Major Projects Report (MPR) 2009, HC 85-1, 2009-10, dated 15 December 2009 records that the procurement cost was originally approved in 1997 at £2,578 million for three boats, Batch 1. The report also records that the equivalent cost has, since 1997, increased by £1,355 million, to £3,933 million.

MPR 2009 also records that the boat four procurement cost was approved in 2007 at £1,610 million, and that this has since reduced by £21 million to £1,589 million.

There are no equivalent approved procurement costs for boats five to seven, so it is not possible to make any cost comparisons.

Similar cost estimates are being developed to inform MPR 2010.

### Defence Equipment

**David Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department has paid for the eight Chinook Mk3s ordered since 1997; what steps his Department is taking to ensure that orders for military equipment are delivered on time and on budget; and if he will make a statement. [4201]

**Peter Luff:** Since 1997, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) has paid £389.4 million for the eight Chinook Mk3 helicopters. The payments include the original procurement cost and expenditure to make the helicopters suitable for operational deployment.

Defence acquisition continues to be faced with the significant challenge of procuring and supporting some of the most complex engineering available, in some of the harshest global environments. While performance in defence acquisition has improved, we accept that there is more to do. The Department has an ongoing acquisition reform agenda. The reforms are designed to ensure it remains strategically-aligned, affordable and achievable, including by improving internal skills, management and decision-making.

### Iraq

**Mr Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what projects in Iraq are being funded by his Department; what the budget of each such project is; and if he will make a statement. [4015]

**Nick Harvey:** The tri-departmental conflict pool's middle east programme is jointly managed by Ministry of Defence (MOD), Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and the Department for International Development, and has an allocation of £6.8 million to support projects in Iraq in the current financial year. The objective of the middle east north Africa conflict pool is to support the development of the effective and accountable public institutions to protect citizens and deliver services in Iraq. The solely MOD element of these projects amounts to £342,000 and has been allocated in support of the

MOD-sponsored Iraqi officer training programme, which is developing the capability and capacity of the Iraqi security forces.

### Land Mines

**Caroline Flint:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what steps his Department is taking to ensure that British troops have the most advanced equipment to detect land mines. [4527]

**Peter Luff:** The Ministry of Defence (MOD) attaches the highest priority to this work. A range of equipment, is in service to counter, and neutralise, the threat of land mines and the MOD's ongoing research programme is continually looking at all aspects of the ways in which we deal with the land mine threats. For operational reasons, it would be inappropriate to be more specific.

### Turkey: Tornado Aircraft

**Mark Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence what the military objectives are of the British Tornado aircraft stationed at Incirlik. [4906]

**Nick Harvey:** No RAF Tornado or any other British military aircraft types are stationed at the Turkish Air Force Base at Incirlik. A small detachment of RAF Tornado GR1 aircraft was maintained at Incirlik between 1995-99. The detachment was operating in direct support to Operation WARDEN/NORTHERN WATCH, enforcing no-fly zones over Iraq.

### UK Trade and Investment Defence and Security Organisation

**Jeremy Corbyn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Defence how much his Department was reimbursed by the UK Trade and Investment Defence and Security Organisation under the Service Level Agreement in (a) 2008-09 and (b) 2009-10. [4556]

**Peter Luff [holding answer 28 June 2010]:** The costs the Ministry of Defence transferred to UKTI in 2008-09 was approximately £8,231,000 and in 2009-10 approximately £4,304,000.

The reduction largely reflects the transferring of staff and contracts to UKTI and the move out of St Georges Court rather than a overall reduction in activity.

## ENVIRONMENT, FOOD AND RURAL AFFAIRS

### Agriculture: Regulation

**Caroline Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what methodology the task force on farming regulation will use to assess the environmental impact of the use of chemicals in farming under the current regulatory structure; and if she will make a statement. [4748]

**Mr Paice:** The methodology of the task force on farming regulation will be left to the discretion of its chairman, Richard Macdonald. We expect to announce the task force's members and its terms of reference' in the very near future.

**Caroline Lucas:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs who will have responsibility for the subject of environmental protection on the task force on farming regulation; and if she will make a statement. [4749]

**Mr Paice:** We are currently approaching prospective members to form the task force on farming regulation. Full membership will be announced in the near future. The group will consist of individuals invited for their personal experience and not as representatives of specific sectors. However it will be important to have a good balance of interests and expertise among the members, including working farmers.

We will shortly publish the terms of reference of the group but it will clearly state that simplification of regulation will not involve any reduction in standards.

#### Agriculture: Subsidies

**Tim Farron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how many single payment scheme cheques issued by the Rural Payments Agency were for amounts less than (a) £60, (b) £40, (c) £10, (d) £1 and (e) £0.50 in 2009. [4928]

**Mr Paice:** The number of 2009 single payment scheme payments issued by the Rural Payments Agency for the bands and scheme year specified in the question are shown in the following table:

<i>Band</i>	<i>Number of payments made</i>
£40.01 to £60.00	77
£20.01 to £40.00	23
£10.01 to £20.00	5
£1.01 to £10.00	2
£0.51 to £1.00	0
£0.01 to £0.50	4

Single Payment Scheme payments are made directly into bank accounts.

**Tim Farron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much her Department has spent on administering non-compliance penalties under the single payment scheme in each of the last five years. [4929]

**Mr Paice:** It is not possible to identify separately the costs of administering non-compliance costs from overall administrative costs.

Penalties, reductions and exclusions may be applied to single payment scheme applications for a number of reasons if an application is found to be non-compliant.

#### Bovine Tuberculosis: Disease Control

**Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs if she will publish her Department's assessment of the scientific evidence which was used to decide on a targeted cull of badgers. [4743]

**Mr Paice:** We are currently looking at all the key relevant evidence, including published scientific evidence from the Randomised Badger Culling Trial (RBCT) and subsequent post-trial analyses, to draw up proposals which we will publish for consultation.

**Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what the estimated cost will be to her Department of carrying out a targeted cull of badgers. [4744]

**Mr Paice:** The coalition has committed that, as part of a package of measures, we will introduce a carefully-managed and science-led policy of badger control in areas with high and persistent levels of bovine TB.

We need to consider all the issues carefully, including the scientific evidence, to work out the detail of the package to ensure we get it right. We will be looking at vaccine and culling options as part of that package.

We will set out our proposals in due course, including the estimated costs.

**Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate has been made of the area of the country in which (a) badger culling measures and (b) other measures would be necessary in order to carry out the science-led approval to bovine tuberculosis control as set out in the Coalition Agreement; in which areas each type of measures would take place; and if she will make a statement. [4842]

**Mr Paice:** The coalition Government have committed to introduce a carefully managed and science-led policy of badger control in areas with high and persistent levels of bovine tuberculosis, as part of a package of measures on bovine TB. We are currently looking at options including culling and vaccination, and which areas of the country might be affected, and will set out our proposals in due course.

**Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what estimate she has made of the cost to her Department of implementing the science-led approach to the control of bovine tuberculosis in each of the next five years. [4869]

**Mr Paice:** DEFRA-funded expenditure on bovine tuberculosis in England was £63 million in 2009-10. We are currently looking at options to introduce a carefully-managed and science-led policy of badger control in areas with high and persistent levels of bovine TB, and it is not yet possible to provide cost estimates. More generally, it is difficult to forecast TB expenditure accurately because compensation and testing, which account for the largest proportion of annual expenditure on TB, are linked to market values for cattle and to disease levels.

#### Bovine Tuberculosis: Vaccination

**Hilary Benn:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what her plans are for the six badger vaccination demonstration projects approved by the previous Government. [4745]

**Mr Paice:** On 25 June it was announced that the Badger Vaccine Deployment Project (BVDP) has been reviewed and for the time being will proceed only in one area (Gloucestershire, near Stroud), in order to help maintain capacity at the Food and Environment Research Agency to train lay vaccinators. Badger sett surveys will also be completed in the Gloucestershire area near

Cheltenham since this was already well under way. The areas in Staffordshire, Herefordshire/Worcestershire and Devon where the BVDP was due to take place will not now be trapped and vaccinated as part of the project.

### Departmental Mobile Phones

**Shabana Mahmood:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs pursuant to the answer to the hon. Member for West Bromwich East of 9 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 148W, on departmental mobile phones, what the (a) purchase cost of the handset, (b) network provider, (c) type of tariff and (d) name of the supplier is of the BlackBerry device issued to each Minister in her Department. [3994]

**Richard Benyon** [*holding answer 24 June 2010*]: DEFRA purchases BlackBerrys from Vodafone through a procurement contract, which also covers the provision of the network services. Under this contract, DEFRA has built up a credit bank; all the ministerial BlackBerrys were obtained through these means at no extra cost to the Department. The BlackBerry tariff is the UK Standard tariff (plus voice calls) of £17 plus VAT per month.

### Flood Control

**Tim Farron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding her Department has allocated for flood defence projects in each of the next five financial years. [4875]

**Richard Benyon:** Plans for investment in flood defences by flood and coastal erosion risk management operating authorities in 2011-12, and subsequent years, will be subject to the forthcoming spending review, concluding in the autumn.

### Flood Control: Aylesford

**Tracey Crouch:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what progress her Department has made in introducing flood alleviation measures for Aylesford. [4512]

**Richard Benyon:** The Environment Agency's preferred flood alleviation option is to intercept flood water upstream of the village and divert it into a nearby quarry via a 250m long culvert. This is due to be completed in 2011-12.

The Environment Agency is now undertaking the outline design and preparing a funding bid which will be considered against other schemes as part of the National Investment programme in October 2010.

### Flood Control: Chatham

**Tracey Crouch:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs how much her Department has spent on flood protection measures in Chatham and Aylesford constituency in each year since 1997. [4514]

**Richard Benyon:** The Environment Agency allocates funding to stretches of river and areas at risk of flooding rather than to parliamentary constituencies.

The Environment Agency completed the Aylesford Tidal Medway Bank Slip in 2006 at a cost of £75,000, refurbished the Aylesford Pumping Station in 2008 at a cost of £25,000 and replaced the Lower Medway Tributaries Weedscreen in 2009 at a cost of £25,000.

The Environment Agency also has an annual programme of works for the River Medway Catchment.

### Flood Control: Kent

**Tracey Crouch:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what funding her Department has allocated to flood defence projects in Kent in (a) 2010-11 and (b) each of the next three financial years. [4511]

**Richard Benyon:** The Environment Agency's indicative programme of works in the Kent and East Sussex area for the next three years is as follows:

	£
2011-12 Indicative programme	28,752,000
2012-13 Indicative programme	15,357,000
2013-14 Indicative programme	27,805,000

The figures shown are from the Environment Agency's ten year medium-term plan.

These figures are indicative. Funding for future years is subject to the outcome of the Comprehensive Spending Review each autumn, and priorities at the time.

### Sustainable Development

**Zac Goldsmith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what position the EU plans to take at the Rio+20 UN Conference on Sustainable Development. [4625]

**Mr Paice:** The EU adopted Council conclusions on the 2012 United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development on 11 June. The conclusions set out political support for the conference, endorse the two agreed themes, 'green economy in the context of sustainable development and poverty eradication' and 'institutional framework for sustainable development', and welcome the organisational structure to support the preparatory process. The EU is strongly committed to playing an active and constructive role and will be developing more detailed positions in the run up to the second preparatory committee meeting, due to take place next February.

### Timber

**Tim Farron:** To ask the Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs what recent discussions she has had with her EU counterparts on measures to prevent the illegal logging of timber. [4876]

**Mr Paice:** The UK is a strong supporter of EU legislation to eliminate the flow of illegal timber onto the market—commonly called the Due Diligence Regulation. The EU is close to agreement on a strong regulation that will include a prohibition to prevent illegal timber from entering the EU market. We are working with all EU member states, the Commission,

and the European Parliament to finalise this agreement. The Secretary of State recently discussed the draft regulation with Germany, Portugal and Denmark.

## CABINET OFFICE

### Departmental Official Cars

**Mr Watson:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office how many (a) civil servants and (b) special advisers in (i) his Department, (ii) the Prime Minister's Office, (iii) the Deputy Prime Minister's office and (iv) the office of the Leader of the House are entitled to the use of (A) a car with a dedicated driver, (B) a car from the Government car pool and (C) a taxi ordered through a departmental account. [3192]

**Mr Maude:** No civil servants or special advisers in this Department have a dedicated Government car or driver.

As was the case under the previous Administration, civil servants, including special advisers, may use a taxi or car from the Government car pool in properly defined circumstances.

### Written Questions: Government Responses

**Mr Watson:** To ask the Minister for the Cabinet Office when he plans to answer (a) question (i) 130, on departmental manpower, (ii) 27, on travel guidance for Government departments and (iii) 287, on departmental official vehicles, tabled on 25 May 2010 and (b) question 595, on the Coalition Press Office, tabled on 26 May 2010. [3846]

**Mr Maude:** I refer the hon. Member to my answers of 17 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 520W, on the coalition press office (595); 22 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 177W, on departmental manpower (130) and 28 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 446W, on departmental official vehicles (287).

The question on travel guidance was transferred to HM Treasury on 28 May 2010.

## DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER

### Chevening

**Mr Watson:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister how many rooms at Chevening have been allocated for his use; and what allocation of staff has been made to support him when in residence. [597]

**The Deputy Prime Minister:** I have been nominated as the occupant of Chevening.

### Lobbying

**Lisa Nandy:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister pursuant to his answer of 15 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 321W, on lobbying, what external organisations he plans to consult on the statutory register of lobbyists other than the UK Public Affairs Council. [5236]

**Mr Harper:** We will consult with those organisations that have an appropriate interest in this area before introducing a statutory register of lobbyists.

## Monarchy: Succession

**Mr Bain:** To ask the Deputy Prime Minister if he will bring forward proposals to change the law to enable Roman Catholics or those married to Roman Catholics to succeed to the throne. [5060]

**Mr Harper:** There are no current plans to amend the laws on succession.

## BUSINESS, INNOVATION AND SKILLS

### Business: Government Assistance

**Mrs McGuire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many businesses in Stirling constituency have taken up the Working Capital scheme since its inception. [4072]

**Mr Prisk:** The Working Capital Scheme (WCS) was launched last year to provide guarantees for banks: individual businesses were not eligible to apply for these guarantees. No further guarantees will be available under the WCS although existing guarantees will be honoured.

### East of England Development Agency

**Robert Halfon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assets were owned by the East of England Development Agency in each year since its inception; and what the monetary value was of each of those assets in each of those years. [4815]

**Mr Prisk:** The East of England Development Agency (EEDA) owned assets for the purposes of investment, development and operation to the value of:

	<i>Investment asset<sup>1</sup></i>	<i>Development asset<sup>2</sup></i>	<i>Operational asset<sup>3</sup></i>
1999-2000	3,193	1,178	822
2000-01	4,535	2,681	919
2001-02	6,009	9,207	830
2002-03	7,811	19,223	734
2003-04	6,065	22,496	931
2004-05	3,347	28,980	1,094
2005-06	3,123	27,501	1,362
2006-07	3,102	19,765	1,261
2007-08	2,738	19,765	1,967
2008-09	2,535	11,219	1,937
2009-10	223	11,315	2,216

<sup>1</sup> An Investment Asset is defined as a property acquired for the purpose of producing income for its owner. In practice, EEDA acts as an interim owner of assets until a development company or equivalent is in a position to purchase the asset. Investment assets are sold on at market value.

<sup>2</sup> A Development Asset is defined as land inherited or acquired for the purpose of developing following clearance, decontamination and securing planning permissions. Under the Royal Institute of Chartered Surveyors valuation standards (Red Book rules), RDA land is valued at proposed end use which may result in a different valuation from current market value without restrictions.

<sup>3</sup> Operational assets include the following categories;

Furniture and Equipment

IT Hardware

IT Software (operational software)

Software Licences

Websites which will have an economic monetary benefit in the future.

**Robert Halfon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how much the East of England Development Agency has spent on (a) administration and (b) projects in each year since it was established. [4870]

**Mr Prisk:** The information requested is available in the annual report and accounts published by EEDA and deposited annually in the Libraries of the House. The report and accounts for the year ending 31 March 2010 will be deposited in the Libraries of the House before the summer recess.

#### Manufacturing Industries: Motor Vehicles

**Mrs McGuire:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills how many cars were purchased under the scrappage scheme in Stirling constituency during the scheme's operation. [4071]

**Mr Prisk:** Using data based on the locations of dealerships and data for scrappage transactions which have been completed and vehicles delivered, there have been 1,513 completed scrappage transactions in Stirling constituency. Due to the nature of the scheme, we will not have final data on completed scrappage transactions until approximately the beginning of September this year.

#### Public Finance

**Gordon Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what assessment he has made of the capacity of the private sector to absorb redundancies in the public sector arising from reductions in departmental expenditure limits. [4703]

**Danny Alexander:** I have been asked to reply.

Public sector organisations will need to reform to live within the tighter spending envelope necessary to tackle the deficit. It will be for public sector employers to determine the exact workforce implications in line with their overall budget reductions—which will be determined by the Spending Review.

The Office for Budget Responsibility (OBR) has published its independent assessment of economic prospects taking into account all measures in the Budget (Budget 2010, HC 61). The OBR forecasts that employment will rise from 2011 onwards, reaching 30.1 million (1.1 million above its 2009 level) by 2015.

#### Regional Development Agencies: Pay

**Robert Halfon:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what the gross salary and pensions benefits was of the (a) chief executive, (b) deputy chief executive and (c) other executive directors of each regional development agency in each year since their inception; and if he will make a statement. [4871]

**Mr Prisk:** The information requested is available in the annual reports and accounts published by the individual RDAs and deposited annually in the House of Commons Library. The reports and accounts for the year ending 31 March 2010 will be deposited in the Library before the summer recess.

#### Simon Hughes

**Mr Lammy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Business, Innovation and Skills what discussions Ministers in his Department have had with the hon. Member for Bermondsey and Old Southwark on student finance. [4368]

**Mr Willetts:** MPs frequently meet BIS Ministers to be briefed on policy issues on which this Department leads.

#### HEALTH

##### Cervical Cancer: Screening

**Malcolm Bruce:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what plans he has for the future of cervical cancer screening in the NHS; and if he will make a statement. [4926]

**Mr Burstow:** The independent Advisory Committee on Cervical Screening (ACCS) advises on the development of the cervical screening service in England, monitors its effectiveness and efficiency and advises on research within the provision of the service.

The December 2010 meeting of the ACCS will discuss the future strategic direction of the programme based on recent and imminent research findings into new screening technologies and methodologies. The discussion will involve human papillomavirus (HPV) triage for women with mild or borderline screening results, HPV testing as primary screening, and automated reading of cervical samples. The discussion will also include the impact of HPV vaccination on the programme, as the young women vaccinated in the early waves of the vaccination programme approach the age at which they will be invited for cervical screening.

##### Dementia: Health Services

**Tracey Crouch:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what progress has been made in recruiting dementia champions in each primary care trust. [4739]

**Mr Burstow:** The National Dementia Strategy calls for the appointment of dementia leads in general hospitals and in care homes. The National Audit of dementia services, due to report in October, will demonstrate progress on the appointment of leads in general hospitals. The Government have also appointed national dementia champions for the national health service (Sir Ian Carruthers) the independent sector (Martin Green) and for social care (Jenny Owen). Together with the National Clinical Director for Dementia, Professor Alistair Burns, they will be conducting regional roadshows throughout the summer of 2010 to encourage implementation of the strategy.

##### Departmental Legislation

**Mr Amess:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether his Department has created new files on (a) the Abortion Act 1967, (b) the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 and (c) the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 since July 2009; and if he will make a statement. [4304]

**Anne Milton:** The Department has created new files on the Abortion Act 1967, the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 1990 and the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Act 2008 as the need has arisen.

### Departmental Pay

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was paid in bonuses to civil servants in his Department in 2009-10. [2190]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Non-consolidated performance payments are an integral part of the Department's reward strategy for all its staff. They have to be re-earned each year and do not add to future pay bill costs. These payments are used to reward outstanding performance and behaviours in delivering the Department's agenda.

£2,499,004 was paid in non-consolidated performance payments to civil servants in the Department in the financial year 2009-10.

### Departmental VAT

**Bob Russell:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the change in the level of value added tax his Department will be required to pay in the financial year (a) 2010-11 and (b) 2011-12. [4570]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Departmental budgets are set on a tax inclusive basis and allow for the recovery of value added tax on certain contracted out services.

In support of the Government's plans to save £6.2 billion in 2010-11, the Department is planning for a reduction in expenditure with third parties in 2010-11 compared to 2009-10 levels. Therefore, at this stage in the year we are unable to provide a reliable estimate of the change in the level of value added tax payments for the last quarter of 2010-11.

Budgets for the financial year 2011-12 have not yet been set and as such it is not possible to estimate the impact of tax changes.

### Drugs: Finance

**Mr Sanders:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health whether he plans to implement any of the recommendations in respect of the pharmacy sector and pharmaceutical wholesalers in the McKinsey Report on NHS efficiency savings. [4613]

**Mr Simon Burns:** We have no plans to make changes affecting the pharmacy and pharmaceutical wholesaler sectors based on the recommendations in the McKinsey report. We intend to build on the current contractual arrangements for community pharmacy, incentivising and supporting high quality and efficient services and optimising patients' use of their medicines to gain better value.

**Mr Sanders:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the effect on the NHS budget of changes in discounts to pharmacists, hospitals and dispensing doctors by pharmaceutical wholesalers since 1996; and if he will make a statement. [4701]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The amount of retained medicine margin generated by community pharmacy contractors through discounts and identified through medicine margin surveys is shown in the following table. Medicine margin surveys were introduced as part of the community pharmacy contractual framework in April 2005. Information relating to hospital pharmacies and dispensing doctors is not collected.

	<i>Retained medicine margin (£ million)</i>
2005-06	800
2006-07	1,161
2007-08	874
2008-09	770
Total	3,605

Source:

Department of Health Medicine Margin Survey

### Homeopathy

**Jim Dowd:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health when he plans to respond to the Fourth Report of the Science and Technology Committee of Session 2009-10, HC 45, on Evidence check 2: Homeopathy. [4185]

**Anne Milton:** Following the general election, it is important that new ministers give careful consideration to the report and its recommendations. I have therefore written to the chair of the new Science and Technology Committee requesting an extension until the summer recess.

### Hospital Beds

**David Morris:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what steps are being taken to ensure that elderly people are moved from hospitals to residential care in a timely fashion in order to avoid delayed discharges in the NHS. [4200]

**Mr Burstow:** Councils and their national health service partners have already made significant progress in reducing delays in discharge from acute hospital beds, including where patients are being discharged to residential care. We are committed to making the NHS work better by extending best practice on improving discharge from hospital.

In the Revision to the Operating Framework for the NHS in England 2010-11 we have signalled that, for 2011-12, we are planning changes to the tariff to cover reablement and post-discharge support, including social care.

### Hospitals: Greater London

**Glenda Jackson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of average waiting times from referral for elective surgery at (a) the Royal Free hospital, (b) Whittington hospital, (c) University College London hospital and (d) St Mary's hospital, Paddington in the latest period for which figures are available; and if he will make a statement [4809]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Information is not collected in the format requested.

Information is held at the level of trusts and information is not available for specific hospital sites. The following table sets out the median waiting times for Referral to Treatment (in weeks) for Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust, The Whittington Hospital NHS Trust, University College London Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust in 2008-09 (latest data available).

	<i>Admitted patients</i>	<i>Non-admitted patients</i>
Royal Free Hampstead NHS Trust	5.8	3.6
The Whittington Hospital NHS Trust	9.7	4.9
University College London NHS Foundation Trust	6.2	5.0
Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust	6.4	3.9

*Notes:*

1. Figures reflect average waiting times for patients treated during the month.
2. Waiting time is from referral to first definitive treatment.
3. Admitted figures are on an adjusted basis, i.e. excluding periods of delay introduced as a result of patients turning down offers of admissions made with reasonable notice.
4. The latest published Referral to Treatment data is for April 2010.

*Source:*

Department Monthly Referral to Treatment Return

### Macular Degeneration: Health Services

**Graham Stringer:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what estimate he has made of the (a) incidence of and (b) cost to the public purse of treating age-related macular degeneration in the latest period for which figures are available. [4263]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The Department does not collect data on the number of people with age-related macular degeneration. The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence estimated in August 2008 as part of their appraisal of ranibizumab and pegaptanib that there are about 26,000 new cases of wet age-related macular degeneration in the United Kingdom each year. The Hospital Episode Statistics produced by the NHS Information Centre for health and social care shows that there were 34,203 finished admission episodes in 2008-09 where the primary diagnosis was "degeneration of macula and posterior pole". Counts of finished admission episodes are not the same as counts of patients, as a single patient may be admitted more than once in a single year.

Financial data on the costs of treatment of age-related macular degeneration are not collected centrally.

### Muscular Dystrophy

**Paul Maynard:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health (1) if his Department will seek to meet the recently published international standards of care for Duchenne muscular dystrophy; [4317]

(2) if his Department will publish a national strategy for the care of Duchenne muscular dystrophy patients; [4319]

(3) what services are available for young people with Duchenne muscular dystrophy during their transition from paediatric to adult services. [4320]

**Mr Burstow:** It is the responsibility of health and care professionals, working in conjunction with patients and their families, to arrange the most appropriate health and social care for those living with Duchenne muscular dystrophy. The National Service Framework for long-term conditions (the NSF) provides an overview of how this care should be provided. The eleven quality requirements of the NSF are compatible with more condition specific standards of care, such as the international TREAT-NMD recommendations for Duchenne muscular dystrophy.

We have no plans to publish a national strategy for the care of people with Duchenne muscular dystrophy. The NSF's quality requirements apply equally to Duchenne muscular dystrophy as they do for any other neuromuscular condition. The NSF covers all aspects of care from assessment, through diagnosis, information/education, treatment and support, to end of life decisions and palliative care.

Those living with Duchenne muscular dystrophy should continue to be able to access the full range of health and social care services during the transition from paediatric to adulthood. It is the responsibility of local health bodies and health professionals to ensure transition to adult services does not result in a deterioration in available services.

### NHS

**Andrew George:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what timetable he has set for (a) the publication of the Health White Paper and the related introduction of associated legislative proposals and (b) the introduction of the proposed independent NHS Board. [4866]

**Mr Simon Burns:** The "Coalition: our programme for government" document confirms this Government's intention to establish an independent NHS Board to allocate resources and provide commissioning guidelines. The Queen's Speech also confirmed that there would be a Health Bill in this parliamentary Session. We will bring forward more detailed proposals in due course.

### NHS: ICT

**Mike Weatherley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much the NHS spent on information technology in 2009. [4412]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Information technology (IT) expenditure reported by the national health service in the 2008-09 financial year amounted to £1,624 million, broken down as follows:

	<i>£ million</i>
Strategic health authorities	27
Primary care trusts	682
NHS trusts	915

These figures comprise revenue expenditure (£1,363 million) reported through an annual national survey of IT investment, and capital expenditure (£261 million), including software licences, identified in NHS Accounts and reported by foundation trusts. They do not include expenditure by special health authorities or central expenditure funded by the Department.

The National programme for IT expenditure on behalf of the NHS for the 2008-09 financial year amounted to £1,063 million comprising revenue expenditure (£528 million) and capital expenditure (£535 million) of which includes non information management and technology associated costs.

Note:

Figures rounded to the nearest whole £ million

**Mike Weatherley:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent on NHS IT projects undertaken by companies with headquarters outside the UK in 2009. [4792]

**Mr Simon Burns:** Comprehensive information about information technology (IT) procurements by national health service organisations is not held centrally and could be obtained only at disproportionate cost.

The spend by the Department for the National programme for IT in the 2009-10 financial year is given in the following table.

*Table: Spend on projects undertaken by companies with headquarters outside the UK*

	£
Accenture	10.04
Atos	33.75
Atos Consulting Ltd	1.36
Atos Origin IT Services UK Ltd	2.80
Cable and Wireless UK	23.50
CSC	213.00
CSC Computer Science	0.23
Fujitsu	37.26
Fujitsu Services	0.40
Total	322.36

Note:

These figures are inclusive of VAT and rounded to the nearest £ million.

#### NHS: Translation Services

**Mr Graham Stuart:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health how much was spent by the NHS on translation services in (a) 2008-09 and (b) 2009-10; when his Department last reviewed its level of expenditure on such services; and if he will make a statement. [4841]

**Mr Burstow:** National health service bodies are not required to report their planned or actual spending on interpretation and translation services to the Department. When planning such services, NHS bodies should take due account of their legal duties, the composition of the communities they serve, and the needs and circumstances of their patients, service users and local populations.

#### Respite Care

**Helen Jones:** To ask the Secretary of State for Health what funding his Department allocated to each primary care trust for carer's breaks in each of the last four years; what records his Department maintains of the ways in which primary care trusts deploy such funding; and if he will make a statement. [3471]

**Mr Burstow:** The previous Government made £150 million available within primary care trust (PCT) allocations (£50 million in 2009-10 and £100 million in 2010-11) to enable them to provide breaks for carers. Although this

was new money, it was not ring-fenced and no mechanisms were put in place to ensure that the money was spent on carers. The £150 million formed part of PCTs' overall total allocations and PCTs were not provided individual sums for breaks.

The NHS Operating Framework for 2010-11 distinguishes the national 'must dos' from those areas where local organisations should set their priorities based on local needs. Supporting carers has been an area identified for PCTs to choose to prioritise for local action and agree funding with local partner organisations. As such, the Department maintains no central records of how much each PCT spends on supporting carers.

## EDUCATION

### Departmental Mobile Phones

**Mr Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education which Ministers in his Department have been issued with (a) a BlackBerry, (b) an iPhone, (c) another make of mobile telephone and (d) a personal digital assistant supplied by the Department. [1433]

**Tim Loughton:** All five Ministers at this Department have been issued with one BlackBerry each. No iPhones, mobile phones or personal digital assistants have been issued to Ministers.

### Departmental Official Cars

**Mr Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many (a) civil servants and (b) special advisers in his Department are entitled to the use of (i) a car with a dedicated driver, (ii) a car from the Government car pool and (iii) a taxi ordered through a departmental account. [3207]

**Tim Loughton:** There are no civil servants or special advisers entitled to the use of (a) a car with a dedicated driver or (b) a car from the Government car pool.

Civil servants and special advisers are discouraged from using a taxi unless there are special circumstances. These are:

When there is no public transport available, especially when travelling early in the morning or late at night before public transport starts or is running regularly.

When he/she has a temporary or permanent disability.

When he/she has heavy luggage to carry.

When it is more important that he/she saves official time.

When he/she is in an unfamiliar town and is uncertain of public transport.

When he/she is concerned for his/her physical safety.

### Special Educational Needs

**Stella Creasy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education how many and what proportion of students at (a) academy and (b) non-academy schools in each education authority had a statement of special educational needs in the academic year 2009-10. [4788]

**Sarah Teather** [holding answer 29 June 2010]: The information requested is shown in the following table.

*Academies and LA maintained secondary schools<sup>1</sup>: Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs<sup>2</sup> January 2010 (final)  
Government Office Region and local authority area in England*

	Academies			LA maintained secondary		
	Pupils with statements	Pupils on roll	Percentage of pupils with statements	Pupils with statements	Pupils on roll	Percentage of pupils with statements
<i>England<sup>3</sup></i>	4,210	193,280	2.2	59,390	3,055,420	1.9
<i>North East<sup>3</sup></i>	320	11,120	2.9	2,980	156,870	1.9
Darlington	<sup>4</sup> —	574	<sup>4</sup> —	88	5,314	1.7
Durham	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	502	30,467	1.6
Gateshead	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	233	11,376	2.0
Hartlepool	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	121	6,234	1.9
Middlesbrough	94	3,328	2.8	121	4,941	2.4
Newcastle upon Tyne	11	1,165	0.9	227	14,813	1.5
North Tyneside	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	290	13,202	2.2
Northumberland	161	3,637	4.4	641	25,628	2.5
Redcar and Cleveland	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	162	9,366	1.7
South Tyneside	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	136	9,066	1.5
Stockton-on-Tees	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	209	11,340	1.8
Sunderland	54	2,412	2.2	245	15,125	1.6
<i>North West<sup>3</sup></i>	470	23,160	2.0	8,400	410,820	2.0
Blackburn with Darwen	15	771	1.9	229	8,685	2.6
Blackpool	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	83	7,897	1.1
Bolton	16	1,681	1.0	351	17,229	2.0
Bury	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	334	11,117	3.0
Cheshire East	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	532	22,337	2.4
Cheshire West and Chester	53	1,224	4.3	439	20,432	2.1
Cumbria	128	4,673	2.7	665	28,903	2.3
Halton	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	150	7,536	2.0
Knowsley	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	162	7,497	2.2
Lancashire	65	2,003	3.2	1,577	67,321	2.3
Liverpool	10	2,747	0.4	243	28,019	0.9
Manchester	83	4,394	1.9	493	19,006	2.6
Oldham	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	227	15,918	1.4
Rochdale	20	600	3.3	296	12,095	2.4
Salford	18	1,163	1.5	108	9,783	1.1
Sefton	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	205	19,176	1.1
St. Helens	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	107	10,661	1.0
Stockport	22	711	3.1	401	13,954	2.9
Tameside	36	2,446	1.5	162	11,861	1.4
Trafford	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	289	16,562	1.7
Warrington	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	439	13,318	3.3
Wigan	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	431	19,114	2.3
Wirral	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	477	22,400	2.1
<i>Yorkshire and The Humber<sup>3</sup></i>	400	21,950	1.8	5,400	309,230	1.7
Barnsley	18	532	3.4	287	12,388	2.3
Bradford	79	4,068	1.9	447	29,884	1.5
Calderdale	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	391	15,391	2.5
Doncaster	40	3,136	1.3	236	17,357	1.4
East Riding of Yorkshire	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	442	22,630	2.0
Kingston Upon Hull, City of	38	1,864	2.0	184	11,832	1.6
Kirklees	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	506	25,872	2.0
Leeds	24	2,932	0.8	593	42,800	1.4
North East Lincolnshire	81	2,582	3.1	211	7,009	3.0
North Lincolnshire	24	597	4.0	308	9,335	3.3
North Yorkshire	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	524	40,249	1.3
Rotherham	15	1,218	1.2	294	18,156	1.6
Sheffield	39	2,849	1.4	443	27,543	1.6
Wakefield	39	2,168	1.8	397	18,851	2.1
York	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	141	9,931	1.4

*Academies and LA maintained secondary schools<sup>1</sup>: Number of pupils with statements of special educational needs<sup>2</sup> January 2010 (final)  
Government Office Region and local authority area in England*

	Academies			LA maintained secondary		
	<i>Pupils with statements</i>	<i>Pupils on roll</i>	<i>Percentage of pupils with statements</i>	<i>Pupils with statements</i>	<i>Pupils on roll</i>	<i>Percentage of pupils with statements</i>
<i>East Midlands<sup>3</sup></i>	490	20,790	2.4	4,830	271,770	1.8
Derby	11	1,097	1.0	192	15,165	1.3
Derbyshire	5—	5—	5—	1,013	48,390	2.1
Leicester	22	776	2.8	288	17,157	1.7
Leicestershire	5—	5—	5—	1,033	45,506	2.3
Lincolnshire	242	6,857	3.5	982	41,393	2.4
Northamptonshire	200	6,088	3.3	987	41,700	2.4
Nottingham	12	5,220	0.2	50	9,513	0.5
Nottinghamshire	4—	747	4—	202	50,574	0.4
Rutland	5—	5—	5—	78	2,372	3.3
<i>West Midlands<sup>3</sup></i>	350	20,600	1.7	6,980	338,580	2.1
Birmingham	53	2,816	1.9	1,400	66,266	2.1
Coventry	9	710	1.3	299	19,168	1.6
Dudley	5—	5—	5—	416	19,694	2.1
Herefordshire	23	1,021	2.3	185	9,037	2.0
Sandwell	74	6,059	1.2	282	14,267	2.0
Shropshire	5—	5—	5—	539	16,832	3.2
Solihull	58	3,781	1.5	294	13,239	2.2
Staffordshire	5—	5—	5—	964	56,279	1.7
Stoke-on-Trent	5—	5—	5—	377	13,105	2.9
Telford and Wrekin	45	1,572	2.9	237	8,965	2.6
Walsall	37	3,248	1.1	283	17,473	1.6
Warwickshire	5—	5—	5—	630	33,602	1.9
Wolverhampton	42	736	5.7	327	14,562	2.2
Worcestershire	11	661	1.7	747	36,094	2.1
<i>East of England<sup>3</sup></i>	480	16,390	3.0	7,760	370,570	2.1
Bedford	5—	5—	5—	294	14,872	2.0
Central Bedfordshire	8	525	1.5	437	21,560	2.0
Cambridgeshire	5—	5—	5—	850	32,373	2.6
Essex	197	7,145	2.8	1,716	81,883	2.1
Hertfordshire	21	1,613	1.3	888	78,714	1.1
Luton	22	1,721	1.3	221	10,573	2.1
Norfolk	68	1,128	6.0	1,529	48,372	3.2
Peterborough	114	2,832	4.0	280	10,345	2.7
Southend-on-Sea	5—	5—	5—	183	13,000	1.4
Suffolk	5—	5—	5—	1,138	51,422	2.2
Thurrock	54	1,427	3.8	227	7,453	3.0
<i>London<sup>3</sup></i>	980	43,620	2.2	8,880	406,510	2.2
<i>Inner London<sup>3</sup></i>	600	23,290	2.6	3,010	117,040	2.6
Camden	5—	5—	5—	317	9,892	3.2
City of London	5—	5—	5—	5—	5—	5—
Hackney	131	2,525	5.2	147	6,026	2.4
Hammersmith and Fulham	13	892	1.5	136	6,159	2.2
Haringey	14	1,043	1.3	385	12,162	3.2
Islington	47	1,500	3.1	107	6,413	1.7
Kensington and Chelsea	7	162	4.3	78	3,434	2.3
Lambeth	42	1,281	3.3	271	8,466	3.2
Lewisham	82	3,786	2.2	259	10,279	2.5
Newham	5—	5—	5—	233	17,970	1.3
Southwark	165	7,373	2.2	173	5,734	3.0
Tower Hamlets	5—	5—	5—	500	14,783	3.4
Wandsworth	25	1,107	2.3	241	10,387	2.3
Westminster	69	3,623	1.9	159	5,335	3.0

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	<i>Pupils with statements</i>	<i>Pupils on roll</i>	<i>Percentage of pupils with statements</i>	<i>Pupils with statements</i>	<i>Pupils on roll</i>	<i>Percentage of pupils with statements</i>
<i>Outer London<sup>3</sup></i>	390	20,330	1.9	5,870	289,470	2.0
Barking and Dagenham	5—	5—	5—	303	13,013	2.3
Barnet	48	1,718	2.8	434	19,798	2.2
Bexley	57	2,596	2.2	343	17,347	2.0
Brent	57	2,732	2.1	346	15,241	2.3
Bromley	5—	5—	5—	527	22,638	2.3
Croydon	54	5,088	1.1	219	15,024	1.5
Ealing	22	1,450	1.5	304	16,415	1.9
Enfield	35	1,696	2.1	356	20,539	1.7
Greenwich	36	790	4.6	467	13,639	3.4
Harrow	5—	5—	5—	190	9,967	1.9
Havering	5—	5—	5—	263	16,655	1.6
Hillingdon	28	1,754	1.6	256	16,780	1.5
Hounslow	5—	5—	5—	246	16,561	1.5
Kingston upon Thames	5—	5—	5—	160	9,960	1.6
Merton	38	1,665	2.3	165	6,888	2.4
Redbridge	5—	5—	5—	400	21,624	1.8
Richmond upon Thames	5—	5—	5—	255	6,649	3.8
Sutton	5—	5—	5—	311	16,775	1.9
Waltham Forest	11	839	1.3	329	13,960	2.4
<i>South East<sup>3</sup></i>	470	24,700	1.9	8,430	480,230	1.8
Bracknell Forest	5—	5—	5—	161	6,330	2.5
Brighton and Hove	5—	5—	5—	251	12,160	2.1
Buckinghamshire	11	726	1.5	544	33,998	1.6
East Sussex	5—	5—	5—	571	27,418	2.1
Hampshire	5—	5—	5—	857	69,678	1.2
Isle of Wight	5—	5—	5—	215	11,436	1.9
Kent	241	10,785	2.2	1,346	88,544	1.5
Medway	26	1,346	1.9	343	17,946	1.9
Milton Keynes	24	1,167	2.1	275	15,507	1.8
Oxfordshire	33	1,588	2.1	660	34,197	1.9
Portsmouth	9	361	2.5	156	8,595	1.8
Reading	27	897	3.0	117	5,448	2.1
Slough	20	1,090	1.8	134	8,868	1.5
Southampton	13	1,650	0.8	72	8,664	0.8
Surrey	5—	5—	5—	1,198	59,584	2.0
West Berkshire	5—	5—	5—	290	12,067	2.4
West Sussex	69	5,092	1.4	737	39,495	1.9
Windsor and Maidenhead	5—	5—	5—	265	10,123	2.6
Wokingham	5—	5—	5—	237	10,170	2.3
<i>South West<sup>3</sup></i>	250	10,960	2.3	5,740	310,840	1.8
Bath and North East Somerset	5—	5—	5—	186	12,518	1.5
Bournemouth	5—	5—	5—	121	9,742	1.2
Bristol, City of	132	5,411	2.4	303	11,668	2.6
Cornwall	5—	5—	5—	818	31,859	2.6
Devon	5—	5—	5—	1,115	42,628	2.6
Dorset	5—	5—	5—	463	29,697	1.6
Gloucestershire	5—	5—	5—	608	39,710	1.5
Isles of Scilly	5—	5—	5—	5—	5—	5—
North Somerset	5—	5—	5—	134	12,749	1.1
Plymouth	5—	5—	5—	406	17,894	2.3
Poole	5—	5—	5—	99	8,296	1.2
Somerset	5—	5—	5—	279	31,245	0.9
South Gloucestershire	57	3,501	1.6	283	14,875	1.9
Swindon	47	1,421	3.3	220	10,967	2.0

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	Academies			LA maintained secondary		
	Pupils with statements	Pupils on roll	Percentage of pupils with statements	Pupils with statements	Pupils on roll	Percentage of pupils with statements
Torbay	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	<sup>5</sup> —	226	8,582	2.6
Wiltshire	12	625	1.9	475	28,412	1.7

<sup>1</sup> Includes middle schools as deemed but excludes city technology colleges.

<sup>2</sup> Excludes dual registrations.

<sup>3</sup> National and regional totals have been rounded to the nearest 10. There may be discrepancies between totals and the sum of constituent parts.

<sup>4</sup> Fewer than five pupils.

<sup>5</sup> No schools of this type.

Source:

School Census

### Young People: Voluntary Organisations

**Lisa Nandy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Education what changes he has made to the Youth Sector Development Fund; what his policy is on the future role of the Fund; and if he will make a statement. [4081]

**Tim Loughton:** The Youth Sector Development Fund (YSDF) seeks to build the capacity and sustainability of Civil Society organisations delivering services to young people. 43 organisations currently receive YSDF support under the terms of grant agreements that expire in March 2011.

Plans to extend the programme in 2010-11 have not been carried forward and the savings that resulted formed part of the £6.2 billion savings announced on 24 May 2010.

Future policy on YSDF will be determined in due course as part of the forthcoming spending review.

### NORTHERN IRELAND

#### Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland

12. **Ms Ritchie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what plans he has for the introduction of a Bill of Rights for Northern Ireland. [4218]

**Mr Swire:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer I gave earlier to the hon. Member for Garston and Halewood (Maria Eagle).

#### Local Government

**Andrea Leadsom:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the First Minister on the effects of proposals for reorganisation of local government in Northern Ireland. [4216]

**Mr Swire:** Following confirmation from the Executive that the reorganisation of local government in 2011 will not now go ahead, I have written to the First and deputy First Ministers to express my disappointment at this outcome and to confirm that elections will now be held to the existing 26 councils next year.

#### Northern Ireland Assembly

**David Cairns:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what discussions he has had with the Ulster Unionist Party on the forthcoming elections to the Northern Ireland Assembly; and if he will make a statement. [4217]

**Mr Paterson:** As Secretary of State I have had discussions with all Northern Ireland political parties on a range of issues relevant to the ongoing political process.

#### Parliamentary Constituency Boundaries

**Siobhain McDonagh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland what recent representations he has received on changes to parliamentary constituency boundaries in Northern Ireland; and if he will make a statement. [4213]

**Mr Paterson:** The Government have announced that legislation will be introduced to provide for the creation of fewer and more equal sized constituencies. Further details will be announced in due course, and Parliament will have the opportunity to debate the provisions in full. No representations have been received regarding changes to parliamentary constituency boundaries in Northern Ireland.

### TREASURY

#### Child Tax Credit: Stirling

**Mrs McGuire:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many people in Stirling constituency claim child tax credit. [4116]

**Mr Gauke:** The latest information on the number of families with children who receive Child and Working Tax Credits, by each parliamentary constituency, is available in the HMRC snapshot publication "Child and Working Tax Credits Statistics. Geographical Analyses. April 2010", available at:

<http://www.hmrc.gov.uk/stats/personal-tax-credits/cwtc-geog-apr2010.pdf>

#### EU Grants and Loans

**Andrew George:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will take steps to ensure that sufficient UK match funding will be available to enable (a) the delivery of the EU convergence programme and (b) draw down of budgeted EU structural funding. [4419]

**Justine Greening:** The emergency Budget set the overall path for the public finances to 2015-16. Departmental allocations will be set at the spending review, after which we will be in a position to make spending decisions

including for match funding for EU Structural Funds. The spending review will be published on 20 October and will cover the four-year period from April 2011 to March 2015.

#### Government Departments: Procurement

**Dr Pugh:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will consider the merits of extending the role of the Office of Government Commerce in (a) the provision of contract management advice to government departments and (b) monitoring the performance of major suppliers under such contracts. [4339]

**Mr Maude:** I have been asked to reply.

The recently announced Efficiency Reform Group (ERG), which includes the Office of Government Commerce, will provide a stronger central focus on achieving efficiency savings, including through better contract management and monitoring the performance of suppliers.

#### Ministerial Statements

**John Healey:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what procedures apply to the length of time between a Minister in his Department making a Statement to the House and publication of that Statement on his Department's website; and when the Statement made on (a) 17 June 2010 and (b) 22 June 2010 will be published on the website. [4445]

**Justine Greening:** HM Treasury publishes Treasury Ministers' oral statements as soon as possible. Oral statements for the dates referred to were published on the Treasury website on the day they were made.

#### Personal Income

**Liz Kendall:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer (1) if he will publish estimates of the likely effect of direct tax, indirect tax and benefit and tax credit changes announced in Budget 2010 as an absolute amount by income decile by 2012-13, excluding both the effect of the 50 per cent. additional income tax rate and the effect of the increase in employee national insurance contributions introduced in April 2010; [4642]

(2) with reference to chart A1 of Budget 2010, whether his Department's analysis of the effect of direct tax, indirect tax and benefit and tax credit changes by income decile includes (a) the 50 per cent. additional rate of income tax and (b) the increase in employee national insurance contributions introduced in April 2010. [4643]

**Mr Gauke:** Analysis has been published in the Red Book showing the impact of measures to be in place in 2012-13 compared with those in place today. The Government believe that as they have chosen to retain some of the policies they have inherited while reversing other decisions that this is the most appropriate way to present the impact of June 2010 Budget decisions.

The policies that were introduced in April 2010, for example the 50% additional rate of income tax, are already included in the baseline and so they will have no impact when compared with April 2012.

A full list of policies included in the analysis is included on pages 11-12 of the Data Sources document published alongside the June 2010 Budget, available at: [http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/junebudget\\_costings.pdf](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/d/junebudget_costings.pdf)

#### Pregnant Women: Grants

**Caroline Flint:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many women in each (a) constituency and (b) local authority received the Health in Pregnancy grant in each year since its inception. [4832]

**Justine Greening:** I refer the hon. Member to the answer given to the hon. Member for Rutherglen and Hamilton West (Tom Greatrex) on 29 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 502W.

#### Revenue and Customs: Great Yarmouth

**Brandon Lewis:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will review the decision of HM Revenue and Customs to relocate jobs held by staff at Havenbridge House in Great Yarmouth to Norwich for the purpose of retaining those jobs in Great Yarmouth. [4716]

**Mr Gauke:** The decision in December 2008 to close the HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC) office in Great Yarmouth was made after extensive consultation and detailed feasibility work under the previous Government. There are no plans to revisit the decision and the office is expected to close for business during 2010-11. HMRC is committed to providing face to face advice for customers in Great Yarmouth at or near the existing location for those customers who need it.

#### Sheffield Forgemasters: Finance

**Mr Betts:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer if he will estimate the amount of revenue accruing to the Exchequer that would have been paid in tax by employees in jobs created by the installation of a new press at Sheffield Forgemasters funded by the proposed £80 million Government loan; and if he will make a statement. [4498]

**Mr Gauke:** In order to estimate additional taxation revenue created by the projects, it would be necessary to consider net jobs created by the projects. This would take displacement of employment and taxation revenue from elsewhere into account.

Officials from the Department for Business are working with Sheffield Forgemasters to explore the possibility of raising private funding for this worthwhile project that does not make the existing shareholders worse off.

#### Strategy Insurance Ltd

**Mr Thomas:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many complaints (a) the Financial Services Authority and (b) the Financial Ombudsman Service has received on the activities of Strategy Insurance Limited in each of the last 10 years; and if he will publish (i) details of each investigation and (ii) their conclusions. [3866]

**Mr Hoban** [*holding answer 22 June 2010*]: The Financial Services Authority (FSA) is the independent regulator for the financial services industry in the UK and the Financial Ombudsman Service (FOS) is an independent body resolving financial services disputes.

I understand that Strategy Insurance Limited is not authorised by the FSA and is not covered by the FOS's compulsory or voluntary jurisdiction.

#### Tax Allowances: Video Games

**Mr Watson:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has to introduce a tax relief scheme for the video games industry. [3536]

**Mr Gauke:** The Chancellor of the Exchequer announced in the Budget statement that the Government will not introduce a tax relief for the UK video games industry.

The Budget announced a package of reforms to business taxation, reducing rates of corporation tax for all companies. Companies in all sectors will benefit from these changes, including those in the video games industry.

#### Taxation: Business

**Mrs McGuire:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer how many businesses in Stirling constituency had used the Time to Pay programme operated by HM Revenue and Customs on the most recent date for which figures are available. [4070]

**Mr Gauke:** HMRC collates information on the number and value of Time to Pay arrangements granted through the Business Payment Support Service (BPSS). Data on the number of businesses using the service are not readily available at constituency level. At any point in time a business may have more than one arrangement covering its different tax liabilities. A business may be granted a number of successive arrangements.

Between 24 November 2008 and 20 June 2010, 510 arrangements spreading payments covering tax debts worth £7.4 million have been granted to businesses within the constituency of Stirling following contact with the BPSS.

#### VAT: Churches

**Jim Dowd:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what plans he has for the future of the Listed Places of Worship scheme. [4254]

**John Penrose:** I have been asked to reply.

The Listed Places of Worship (LPW) scheme, which makes grants equivalent to the VAT incurred in making repairs to listed buildings in use as places of worship, is expected to make grants of around £15 million UK-wide in 2010-11. I acknowledge the scheme's significant role in helping to keep our listed ecclesiastical buildings in a good state of repair. A decision on the scheme's future beyond the end of 2010-11 can only be made as part of the 2010 spending review, and will be publicised as soon as is possible.

#### Welfare Tax Credits

**Andrew Gwynne:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the administrative cost of processing the proposed changes to the level of earnings disregard for tax credits. [4657]

**Mr Gauke:** The preliminary estimate of the administrative costs of introducing the reduction in the earnings disregard is estimated to be in the range of £1 million to £3 million per year.

This achieves an Exchequer saving in the costs of paying tax credits rising to £420 million in 2014-15, as set out in line 43 of Table 2.1 in Budget 2010, HC 61, 22 June 2010.

**Andrew Gwynne:** To ask the Chancellor of the Exchequer what estimate he has made of the number of persons likely to be affected by the proposal to changes to the level of earnings disregard for tax credits. [4658]

**Justine Greening:** The disregard for income rises will be reduced from £25,000 to £10,000 in 2011-12, and then to £5,000 in 2013-14.

Based on information on finalised 2008-09 tax credit awards and the number of income changes reported in that year, it is estimated that around 155,000 families will have an income rise of more than £10,000, and 275,000 families will have an income rise between £5,000 to £10,000.

#### COMMUNITIES AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT

##### Consultants

**John Healey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what recent meetings Ministers in his Department have had with representatives of the think tanks (a) Localis and (b) Policy Exchange. [4441]

**Grant Shapps:** Since the Coalition Government was formed, no CLG Minister has met with representatives of either (a) Localis or (b) Policy Exchange.

##### Departmental Public Expenditure

**Gordon Banks:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government how many officials in his Department are working on renegotiating contracts for the supply of goods and services to the Department as a result of recently announced reductions in public spending; what savings are expected to accrue to his Department from such renegotiations; how much expenditure his Department will incur on such renegotiations; and when such renegotiations will be completed. [3655]

**Robert Neill:** There is a core of procurement staff (23) within the Department's corporate procurement division (CPD) plus a total of 17 further staff with delegated authority in communications and research areas who will involve numerous stakeholders within different business units to undertake the negotiations and make decisions. The Department's target for savings

in 2010-11 is £50 million. As existing officials are primarily involved in renegotiation no additional expenditure is expected. Negotiations are currently taking place and are expected to be concluded by the end of the current financial year.

#### Estate Agents

**John Healey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what recent meetings Ministers in his Department have had with representatives of the estate agency industry. [4444]

**Grant Shapps:** Since the Coalition Government was formed, no CLG Minister has met with representatives of the estate agency industry.

#### Housing Benefit: Homelessness

**John Healey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what discussions he has had with the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions on the effect of proposed changes to the payment of housing benefit on (a) levels of homelessness and (b) demand for affordable housing in each of the next five years. [4551]

**Grant Shapps:** Ministers from this Department regularly meet with their colleagues in other Departments including those at the Department for Work and Pensions to discuss cross cutting issues.

**Mr Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government with reference to the June 2010 Budget, what his most recent estimate is of the effect on the level of homelessness of the proposed changes to housing benefit; and what estimate he has made of the likely cost to the public purse. [4679]

**Grant Shapps:** The Department for Work and Pensions undertakes an assessment of the impact on specific groups as part of the policy development process. DWP will publish formal impact assessments in due course.

#### Housing: Finance

**John Healey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the Financial Statement of 22 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 116-30, how much of the future funding agreed before 24 May 2010 he now plans to allocate to expenditure on housing. [4531]

**Grant Shapps:** We are clear that having reviewed the overall financial position, the previous Government have left a large funding black hole in their plans for social housing. This Government, as part of their plans to tackle this funding black hole, have chosen to recycle £170 million of the £6.2 billion of efficiency savings announced last month into social housing.

The Emergency Budget on 22 June set out further measures to deal with the budget deficit and give confidence to the economy. With regards to housing budgets we are continuing to review the position with HM Treasury and will be reaching a conclusion soon.

#### Local Government Finance

**Mr Raab:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government when he expects the local government finance review to (a) commence and (b) conclude. [4896]

**Robert Neill:** I refer my hon. Friend to the answer I gave to the hon. Member for Nottingham East (Chris Leslie) on 8 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 132W.

#### Local Government Finance: Stockton

**Alex Cunningham:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government pursuant to the written ministerial statement of 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 15-17WS, on the local government savings package, what assessment he has made of the likely effects on the provision of services in Stockton of changes to his Department's funding allocation in 2010-11. [4578]

**Robert Neill:** We have asked local authorities to make a contribution of £1.166 billion to the £6.2 billion of cross-Government savings in 2010-11 to enable the Government to take immediate action to start to tackle the fiscal deficit. Of this, £358.5 million will come from my Department's budget and £175.0 million will come from the budget which my Department holds on behalf of Government as a whole.

The reduction in grants for individual local authorities for which final allocations had been announced is set out in the document made available to the House at the time of the written ministerial statement of 10 June 2010, *Official Report*, columns 15-17WS.

Local authorities are free to make their own decisions about where savings are found. We have ensured that councils have the flexibility to take decisions locally on how to deliver the savings needed without impacting on essential frontline services.

#### Non-domestic Rates: Garages and Petrol Stations

**Geoffrey Clifton-Brown:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what recent assessment has been made of the appropriateness of the methodology for calculating business rates for petrol stations. [4299]

**Mr Gauke:** I have been asked to reply.

The Valuation Office Agency (VOA) keeps all its rating methodologies under constant review to ensure they provide accurate valuations.

Following meetings with representatives of the petrol station industry, in which new information was provided, adjustments have been made to some of the figures used within the methodology for valuing petrol stations for non-domestic rating purposes. As a result the VOA will shortly be issuing revised valuations.

#### Social Rented Housing: Rents

**John Healey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government whether he plans to ease restrictions on rent rises for (a) local authorities and (b) housing associations. [4442]

**Grant Shapps:** There are no current plans to ease restrictions on rent rises.

#### Urban Areas: Sustainable Development

**John Healey:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government what financial and other support his Department has provided to local authorities that have bid successfully for the establishment of an eco-town or eco-development in their area in the last 12 months. [4443]

**Grant Shapps:** Local authorities at the locations with potential to have an eco-town have received the 2009-10 funding announced in the Department's press release of 8 February 2010:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/+http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/1459501>

A copy of the press release is available in the Library of the House.

Over the last year the Department has also worked with other government Departments to identify support from their programmes for these local authorities.

#### Wind Power: Planning Permission

**Eric Ollerenshaw:** To ask the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government if he will bring forward proposals for a minimum required distance from residential dwellings in respect of the construction of wind farms. [5009]

**Robert Neill:** Current planning policy does not include an exclusion zone between wind turbines and housing. Rather, each wind farm proposal is assessed on a case by case basis according to its impacts. Looking ahead, we will radically reform the planning system to give neighbourhoods far more ability to determine the shape of the places in which their inhabitants live. In the Coalition Agreement we also said that we will publish and present to Parliament a simple and consolidated national planning framework covering all forms of development. We will make an announcement shortly on how we propose to take forward the national planning framework and the implications for specific areas of planning policy.

### FOREIGN AND COMMONWEALTH OFFICE

#### British Overseas Territories

**Dr Pugh:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs if he will consider the merits of ending subsidies paid to (a) Bermuda and (b) the Virgin Islands for (i) the regulation of civil aviation and (ii) other services. [4348]

**Mr Bellingham:** There are no direct subsidies paid to either Bermuda or the British Virgin Islands (BVI) in respect of the regulation of civil aviation services. The Department for Transport funds Air Safety Support International (ASSI), a subsidiary of the Civil Aviation Authority, which is responsible for ensuring that the UK's obligations under the Convention on International Civil Aviation are met in the Overseas Territories. ASSI also regulates aviation activity in the British Virgin Islands under a contract with the BVI Government.

The Department for Transport is currently reviewing the scope for obtaining funding for ASSI from the Overseas Territories.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office funds no ongoing or open-ended services in either territory. However, through the Overseas Territories Programme Fund (OTPF), it funds specific projects to support the delivery of the Government's objectives in all the Overseas Territories. In many cases these are also co-funded by the receiving territory. Ministers are reviewing expenditure under the OTPF.

#### Departmental Manpower

**Stewart Hosie:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many (a) special advisers and (b) press officers are employed by his Department; and at what Civil Service pay grade in each such case. [1249]

**Alistair Burt:** I refer the hon. Member to the list of Special Adviser appointments published by the Prime Minister on 10 June, *Official Report*, columns 33-34W.

The Foreign and Commonwealth Office Press office in London is currently staffed by 22 press officers of the following grades: 1 x SMS, 7 x Band D, 9 x B and C, and 5 x B and B. In addition there are support staff who do not work as press officers.

#### Departmental Official Cars

**Mr Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how many (a) civil servants and (b) special advisers in his Department are entitled to the use of (i) a car with a dedicated driver, (ii) a car from the Government car pool and (iii) a taxi ordered through a departmental account. [3203]

**Alistair Burt:** No Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) officials or special advisers in the UK have a dedicated car or driver. Heads of Mission overseas are allocated a car for their official use. They have first call on the vehicle for official purposes but they are made available for other official business as required. The security situation in some countries may occasionally necessitate the use of dedicated vehicles for staff.

FCO Services, an executive agency of the FCO operating independently as a trading fund, operates a small pool of vehicles and security cleared drivers used mainly for transportation of diplomatic bags and other classified material. Certain senior officials (including the Permanent Under-Secretary) are able to draw on this pool for official and operationally necessary travel, on a pay-per-use basis with bookings made in advance. Use of the FCO Services car pool is subject to operational need and governed by strict internal guidelines.

FCO staff travel by the most efficient means of transport, bearing in mind the operational requirement and the need to secure value for money for the public purse. Public transport is used whenever possible and staff avoid using taxis on official business unless it is absolutely necessary.

Staff should not normally use a taxi at public expense between home and office—nor between airports and central London—except for journeys during the hours when public transport is not running. If it is absolutely

necessary for staff to work after 9 pm or before 7 am, they may consider taking a taxi from their destination station to their home address or vice versa.

### Departmental Pay

**Tom Brake:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much was paid in bonuses to civil servants in his Department in 2009-10. [2179]

**Alistair Burt:** The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) paid a total of £7,457,502 in non-consolidated, variable, performance related pay in 2009-10. This represents 2.6% of the total pay bill for UK based staff.

£1,052,271 was paid to staff employed by FCO Services, a trading fund of the FCO, and £61,029 to staff employed by Wilton Park, an executive agency of the FCO.

A close and effective link between pay and performance is a key element of the pay arrangements for the civil service. For the senior civil service (SCS), for whom pay is managed by the Cabinet Office and which is based on recommendations by the Senior Salaries Review Body, performance incentives are paid primarily as non-consolidated performance payments.

Non-consolidated, variable, performance related payments help drive continuing high performance as they must be re-earned each year. Performance is measured through the annual appraisal process which is designed specifically to help staff develop their potential and make the fullest contribution towards the achievement of FCO objectives.

**Mr Watson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs pursuant to the answer of 7 June 2010, *Official Report*, column 22-3W, on departmental manpower, what the salary range is of staff employed at each grade in the private office of each Minister in his Department. [3242]

**Alistair Burt:** The salary ranges of staff in the ministerial private offices are:

	£
A1	16,135-17,166
A2	18,525-21,696
B3	21,432-27,385
C4	26,102-32,509
D6	43,084-55,782
D7	54,340-67,861
SMS2	82,900-162,500

### Departmental Private Education

**Mr Hanson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs how much was spent by his Department on private or independent school education of children of serving staff in each of the last five years. [1625]

**Alistair Burt:** It is a condition of their employment that members of the Diplomatic Service (DS) must be prepared to serve anywhere in the world at any time during their career, sometimes at very short notice. Those with children have a legal obligation as parents to ensure that their children receive a full-time education

from the age of five years. Members of the Diplomatic Service pay UK tax wherever they work and are entitled to have their children educated at public expense. Most parents prefer to take their children with them on posting, but in some countries we do not permit staff to take their children either for health or security reasons. In others, local schools of an acceptable standard are not available. Continuity of education is also an important factor, particularly at secondary level.

Children's education should not be disadvantaged by the fact that their parents are in the Diplomatic Service. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) helps staff meet their potentially conflicting obligations by providing financial support for their children's education in the UK where staff choose this, or are obliged to do so given local conditions in the country to which they are posted. We expect children who accompany their parents on postings overseas to use free state schooling if it is available locally and suitable. If suitable English-language schooling is not available free of charge locally, but is available at fee-charging schools, we refund fees to enable children to receive the education they would be entitled to in the UK. This provision applies to all our diverse DS staff posted overseas, including junior support staff and single parents.

Over the last five years the Department has paid for between 1,500 and 2,000 children of British diplomats to receive the education to which they are entitled, either in the UK or at local schools overseas. Expenditure in the UK has decreased in real terms as fewer families now choose boarding school but costs of schools overseas have increased as sterling has weakened. The costs are as follows:-

<i>Education in the UK</i>		(£)
2009-10		9,399,215
2008-09		9,381,705
2007-08		8,951,104
2006-07		9,242,316
2005-06		9,361,407
<i>Education at local schools overseas</i>		(£)
2009-10		11,535,667
2008-09		8,622,749
2007-08		7,157,772
2006-07		7,160,449
2005-06		6,696,235

### India: Human Trafficking

**Jeremy Lefroy:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what recent discussions he has had with the government of India on human trafficking. [4918]

**Alistair Burt:** We have not had any discussions with the Indian Government on the issue of human trafficking. However, through the European Commission, the EU has run three projects during the period 2000-10 on human trafficking in India, focussing on both inter-state trafficking in India and regional trafficking in South Asia.

### Iraq

**Mr Anderson:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what projects in Iraq are being funded by his Department; what the budget is of each; and if he will make a statement. [4016]

**Alistair Burt:** The tri-departmental conflict pool's middle east programme, which is jointly managed by the Ministry of Defence, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) and the Department for International Development, has an allocation of £6.8 million to support projects in Iraq in the current financial year. The objective of the middle east conflict pool is to support the development of effective and accountable public institutions to protect citizens and deliver services in Iraq. All three Departments deliver projects funded by the conflict pool. Projects to be delivered by the FCO in 2010-11 are:

<i>Name</i>	<i>Allocation (£)</i>
Provision of justice and forensic advisers to support the Iraqi criminal justice system in its efforts to increase the use of forensic evidence and reduce reliance on confessions. (April 2010-March 2011)	1,639,489
Provision of secondees to the EU Integrated Rule of Law mission to Iraq (EUJUST LEX), which trains police, judiciary and penitentiary officers through workshops and secondments, with an emphasis on human rights. (April 2010-March 2011)	365,000
Supporting the Iraqi Parliament in the creation of scrutiny committees, which will lead to more thorough and rigorous scrutiny of the executive. (April 2010-March 2011)	356,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,360,489</b>

In addition to conflict pool funded projects, the FCO also has an allocation of £147,555 for 2010-11 to deliver targeted projects aimed at enhancing bilateral relations with Iraq. Previous projects include training for journalists, a human rights public awareness campaign and an electoral awareness project.

### Middle East: Weapons of Mass Destruction

**Mark Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what his policy is on the creation of a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone. [4902]

**Alistair Burt:** The agreement at the Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference to hold a regional conference in 2012 on a Middle East Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone was an important step forward. It will allow all states in the region to play a role in the process. We are committed to working constructively with all states in the region to ensure the conference is a success.

### Nuclear Disarmament: Treaties

**Mark Lazarowicz:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs what steps the Government is taking to encourage the drawing up of an international treaty to terminate the production of fissile material; and how many staff in his Department are assigned to work on that proposed treaty. [4790]

**Alistair Burt:** The UK continues to support and push for the immediate start of negotiations on a Fissile Material Cut-Off Treaty (FMCT) in the Conference on Disarmament. We are working with international partners to find a way forward and welcome proposals for the UN Secretary-General to convene a high level meeting in September 2010 in support of the work on the Conference on Disarmament.

My nuclear team works on FMCT, as well as colleagues from the Ministry of Defence and the Department of Energy and Climate Change.

### Sri Lanka: Human Rights

**Mr Andrew Smith:** To ask the Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs whether he plans to make representations to the Government of Sri Lanka on access to that country by the panel on human rights appointed by the UN. [4920]

**Alistair Burt:** We welcome the Secretary-General's announcement of a panel of experts to advise on best practices for investigations into the alleged violations of international human rights and humanitarian law.

We welcome the establishment of the Government of Sri Lanka's "Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission". It is important that this process be transparent and credible, and that it has the confidence of the people of Sri Lanka. The UN is well placed to assist the Government of Sri Lanka on such matters. We encourage it to consider drawing on the UN's knowledge to enhance its own domestic process.

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